

Neighbours racism claim: Indigenous actor Shareena Clanton says set was ‘unsafe’

By Karl Quinn
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Indigenous actor Shareena Clanton has accused long-running soap Neighbours of being a “culturally unsafe place” where the N-word and other racially charged terms were bandied around in the name of humour.



Shareena Clanton has said the set of Ten’s long-running soap is a ‘culturally unsafe’ place.

Ms Clanton, whose heritage includes Wongatha/Yamatji and Noongar/Gitja on her mother’s side and Etowah Cherokee, Blackfoot and African American on her father’s side, said that calling out the language and behaviour she encountered on the show “often left me ostracised and further marginalised”.

In an Instagram post published on Tuesday morning, Ms Clanton said she was struggling to write anything positive about “the months I endured on *Neighbours* after multiple racist traumas” caused by working on “this highly problematic show”. She added that it had been “lonely, triggering and traumatising to work in such a culturally unsafe space”. Ms Clanton played Sheila Canning in a six-week guest role.

The alleged incidents she enumerated included: a senior member of production laughing at the terms “cum” and “slut”; a senior staff member laughing while using the term “slave driver” in reference to himself; a white actor calling an actor of colour a “lil’ monkey”.

Ms Clanton also said the N-word was used on two occasions, on-set and in the green room; a white actor openly laughed at the use of the N-word and that when questioned about the incident, told HR that Ms Clanton had “misconstrued” the situation, and that she had laughed at “something else”.

In a subsequent response to a comment, Ms Clanton added that she had contributed substantially to a “change the date” storyline for a recent episode of Ten’s weeknight drama, but had not received a writing credit.

She accused the show’s producers, Fremantle Australia, of “virtue signalling without action” and said “the entire production needs a complete shift in cultural education”.

Ms Clanton said she had taken her complaints to Fremantle’s management and HR department.

In response, she said, they have “done little”, though she did note that the “individual who said the N-word” had been stood down for a week to consider their behaviour, and had been ordered into four sessions of compulsory workplace training.

Ms Clanton said she was speaking out “so that my community and wider audiences are aware of how toxic that workplace is and has become”.

She added, “I’ll never work for this show again”.

Fremantle responded to the claims with a statement that said *Neighbours* tried to be “a platform for diversity and inclusion” both on and off the screen.

“Shareena’s involvement in the creative process and on set was invaluable and hugely educational and will benefit the series moving forward,” the statement said.

“There have been significant and lengthy discussions with Shareena during her time on *Neighbours* and we will continue to work with all cast and crew to ensure *Neighbours* continues to be a fully inclusive environment.”

The pressure on Fremantle grew late on Tuesday, however, as actor Meyne Wyatt shared his experience on the show.

From 2014-16, Mr Wyatt was the first regular cast member on *Neighbours* from an Indigenous background. Posting on Instagram on Tuesday evening, he wrote that during this time “I encountered racism on set”.

“It involved the C-word and I called that shit out and it didn’t happen around me again. Though I did walk in on this incident in particular, so I have no doubt things were being said behind my back.”



Actor Meyne Wyatt.

He added that the homophobia he encountered on set “was f---ing rampant” and “made for a very unsafe environment for anyone in the LGBTQIA+ community”.

Also weighing in was independent producer Dan Bennett, a former drama executive at Network Ten, in which capacity he was responsible (with former head of drama Sue Masters) for *Neighbours*.

On Twitter, Mr Bennett initially defended the show and those who make it, writing that “the current producers are caring, inclusive people who will be working endlessly hard to make [sure] things are as comfortable as possible for EVERYONE who works on their show”.

He added “this is not something that would have been condoned from the top – and when they get to the bottom of it, I have no doubt the appropriate heads will roll and protocols will be tightened”.

However, he later wrote that he had been flooded with direct messages throughout the day in the wake of Ms Clanton’s post. As a result, he wrote, he would like to “take some time to revise my message”.