

Neighbours actor allegedly removed from set after complaints of racism by Indigenous actor Shareena Clanton

The cult soap's first foray into casting a recurring Indigenous female character has become mired in allegations of on-set racism



Melbourne actor Shareena Clanton, who recently completed filming for TV series *Neighbours*, describes the set as a 'toxic' environment and has gone public with allegations of racism and misogyny.

Kelly Burke

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Racial slurs during filming of the TV series *Neighbours* became so egregious earlier this year, one actor had to be removed from the set for a week and ordered to undergo cultural sensitivity training, one of the enduring soap's guest stars alleges.

First Nations actor Shareena Clanton, who worked on the set in January and February in 2021, said human resources staff employed by the show's creator, Fremantle, resorted to establishing makeshift segregated green room spaces to keep the peace between cast members and crew, after the alleged offending actor repeatedly used the "n" word in her presence.

Speaking exclusively to Guardian Australia after going public with allegations of racism and misogyny on the show's set, Clanton, a Melbourne-based actor of

Wangatha, Yamatji, Noongar and Gidja descent, described it as a “toxic” environment, with an “unhealthy level of silent complicity” from fellow actors and management.

“There was a lot of commentary that was highly inflammatory, sexist, misogynistic, crass and crude – the kind of comments that if I were to make in any other workspace would absolutely [result in] instant dismissal,” she said.

“But somehow people just continued to get a gentle word spoken to them, or have a polite side word between [the alleged perpetrator] and the person who was offended by what was being said.”

Clanton alleges that when she protested to the cast member about the alleged use of the “n” word, another colleague stood up for them, arguing that the word was common usage in popular culture.

“A staff member then turned to me and told me that I needed to take it somewhere else, because I was making other people uncomfortable,” she said.

Clanton said only after the actor repeated the racist term in a subsequent incident was the actor in question was spoken to, removed temporarily from the set and ordered to attend cultural training.

It is not clear whether this training was provided in-house by Fremantle, Channel 10 or by an outside body. The Guardian has sought clarification from Fremantle.

Best known for her ongoing role in another Fremantle television series, Wentworth, Clanton told the Guardian she knew her decision to call out the behaviour on the Neighbours set was likely to have a negative impact on her future career prospects.



Shareena Clanton during a protest organised by Aboriginal rights activists on Australia Day in Melbourne in 2017.

“But I think for me, it is not unreasonable to speak about these individual experiences, because they form part of a collective of toxic work environments,” she said.

“It’s no longer [about] protecting individuals or a workplace environment or a production house that has various levels of complicity and [continues to allow] unhealthy, toxic workplace conduct that would just not be tolerated anywhere outside the film industry.”

Prior to speaking to the Guardian, Clanton posted a withering account of her experiences on Neighbours on Instagram, concluding that she would never work on the show again.

In addition to the allegations of an actor using the “n” word, Clanton alleges another colleague repeatedly used the phrase “cum slut” when describing a character she was working on for another show.

In a separate incident, Clanton alleges a white actor called a fellow actor of colour a “lil’ monkey” and Clanton said she attempted to explain to the actor why the term was so offensive.

“I’ve been called an ape and a monkey all my life by white Australia,” she told the Guardian.

“And then I took it up with HR and they said ‘I’m not sure what else I can do from here.’”

Clanton also said she had to partially pay out of her own salary for the cost of having Wurundjeri elder Auntie Diane Kerr on set for several months to ensure the production observed appropriate cultural safety protocols while working on country.

The Guardian has requested a response from Fremantle. In a statement issued to Australian Associated Press late on Tuesday, the production house said Neighbours, now into its 35th year, “strives to be a platform for diversity and inclusion on-screen and off-screen”.

“Our quest is always to continue to grow and develop in this area and we acknowledge that this is an evolving process,” the statement said.

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

“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.”

On Tuesday night, fellow First Nations actor Meyne Wyatt posted on Twitter claiming that he too had been the victim of racism while working on the Neighbours set between 2014 and 2016.

“It is disappointing but not at all surprising to hear that five years later racism continues to be present in that workplace,” he posted.

Other Australian actors who have come out in support of Clanton on social media include Sharon Johal, who recently concluded a four-year stint as Dipi Rebecchi in *Neighbours*, Belinda Bromilow (*The Great* and *Packed to the Rafters*) and Clanton's *Wentworth* co-star Zoe Terakes.

The actor has also withstood a barrage of criticism for speaking out on social media, with accusations of being a "whiner", being the recipient of tokenistic casting, and racist comments about hiring actors of colour.

In response, Clanton responded on her Instagram page on Wednesday: "I have no qualms critiquing such power structures. What do I have to gain here by speaking truth to one of the most powerful and multi-million dollar global production houses like Fremantle Media? I'm the one at risk of being blacklisted."

In the Instagram post, she said she had evidence and documentation to back up her claims.

"There are many horror stories from other First Nations people and under-represented communities about what they experience on set and in the story rooms," she wrote. "Believe them."