

## **Eddie McGuire says ‘we’re not a racist club’ after report finds ‘structural racism’ at Collingwood**

*The Greens senator for Victoria, Lidia Thorpe, has called on the AFL club to ‘grow a spine’ and sack the president*



*Collingwood president Eddie McGuire. The AFL club undertook a review that has found a culture of ‘systemic racism’, leading to calls for McGuire’s head.*

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Collingwood president Eddie McGuire says he will stay on to “drive-through” change after the release of a scathing report which found the AFL club had a culture of “structural racism” under his leadership.

McGuire said the report’s release was a “historic and proud day for the club”.

“There are plenty of things we look back on now and wish we could have done better – at the time we did them as well as we thought we could,” he told reporters on Monday.

McGuire disputed the report’s key finding of systemic racism at the club.

“There was not systemic racism as such, we just didn’t have the processes in place as we look back now to do the job we would like to have done,” he said. “We’re not a mean-spirited club. We’re not a racist club.”

Earlier, the Greens senator for Victoria, Lidia Thorpe, said Collingwood should “grow a spine” and demand McGuire’s resignation. The president should apologise publicly and unreservedly to those impacted by structural racism at the club, she said.

“As the head of the club, Eddie not only oversaw these issues – he’s been part of the problem,” she said.

“We won’t forget how he treated Adam Goodes. We won’t forget how he treated Hérítier Lumumba. Hérítier Lumumba was right to call out these issues, and he paid a huge price for it. Today, he’s been vindicated.”

McGuire said the report showed the club was willing to accept it had made mistakes and was striving to be better.

“This is not criticism, it’s a review,” he said. “If we were found wanting in the past, it wasn’t because of intention. It might have been because of application or the systemic issues we have in a football club. It is not BHP, it’s a footy club.

“What’s happened on my watch is this: we’ve built a fantastic club, we have commissioned this report, we have built all sorts of mechanisms to get involved in the community ... we look back now and say, in 2021, what is it we need to do?”

However, the independent report, sparked by Lumumba’s allegations, said Collingwood has a problem with structural racism that its senior leadership must address, and it should publicly make amends to those who had paid a “very high public price” for speaking out about it.

The report, called *Do Better*, said making amends could include “reparations, compensation, public apology, and commitments to reform”.

The AFL said it would review the report’s findings and consider what now needs to be done in its role as the sport’s governing body.

“The mistakes of the past show that racism in any form or on any level is a serious issue and should not be interpreted in any other way,” AFL chief executive Gillon McLachlan said.

“This report is an important step in the change Collingwood is implementing and demonstrates the seriousness in which the club takes the issue.”

The report was commissioned by the board in June 2020 and it has been in front of them since at least 17 December. Produced by University of Technology Sydney’s Distinguished Prof Larissa Behrendt, it recommends the club establish a truth-telling process around its past record and establish an expert group on anti-racism to guide it, including a robust racism complaints-handling process.

The report did not directly address the past behaviour of outgoing president McGuire but said club leadership had often acted in a way that was contrary to its values.

“Too often the reaction was defensive rather than proactive and this aggravated, rather than mitigated, the impact of that racism on the people who experienced it.

“All of this comes back to the leadership of the Collingwood Football Club – particularly its board – and the need for it to set the vision and values of the club and to drive structural change,” the report said.

Thorpe said she had been a Collingwood supporter all her life, but rescinded her membership when Lumumba's claims were made public.

"I could not continue my support for a club that is racially vilifying not only their players but the community that they're also meant to represent. I'm part of that community. I've been part of that community all my life. It's disappointing that it's got to this point, but Eddie has an opportunity to turn this around, if he wants to be part of that truth telling," she said.

In December, McGuire announced he would step down at the end of next season after 23 years at the helm.

He will leave with a lengthy rap sheet of scandal to his name, including an entry from 2013 when he likened Goodes to King Kong just days after the Sydney Swans' Indigenous great had been racially abused by a Collingwood supporter.

McGuire apologised but refused to step down over the issue. "People don't resign for a slip of the tongue," he said. He claimed the remarks were made as he was "zoned out".

"It's all about today and tomorrow from here," McGuire said, of the report.

However, the report said: "The Collingwood Football Club will be a better organisation if it can come to terms with its past rather than put it to one side and pretend it can move forward without looking back. Otherwise, the past will continue to throw a shadow over the Club."

"It is sometimes easier to say that things will be different going forward than to look back at the mistakes of the past. But real change cannot occur without addressing the issues that have been raised in the past and remain unresolved," Behrendt wrote.

There were loud calls for McGuire to resign in 2013 after he suggested Sydney's Indigenous star Adam Goodes be used to promote the musical King Kong. The comments came just days after Goodes was racially abused by a Collingwood fan at a match. McGuire later apologised and blamed prescription drugs for the offensive remark.