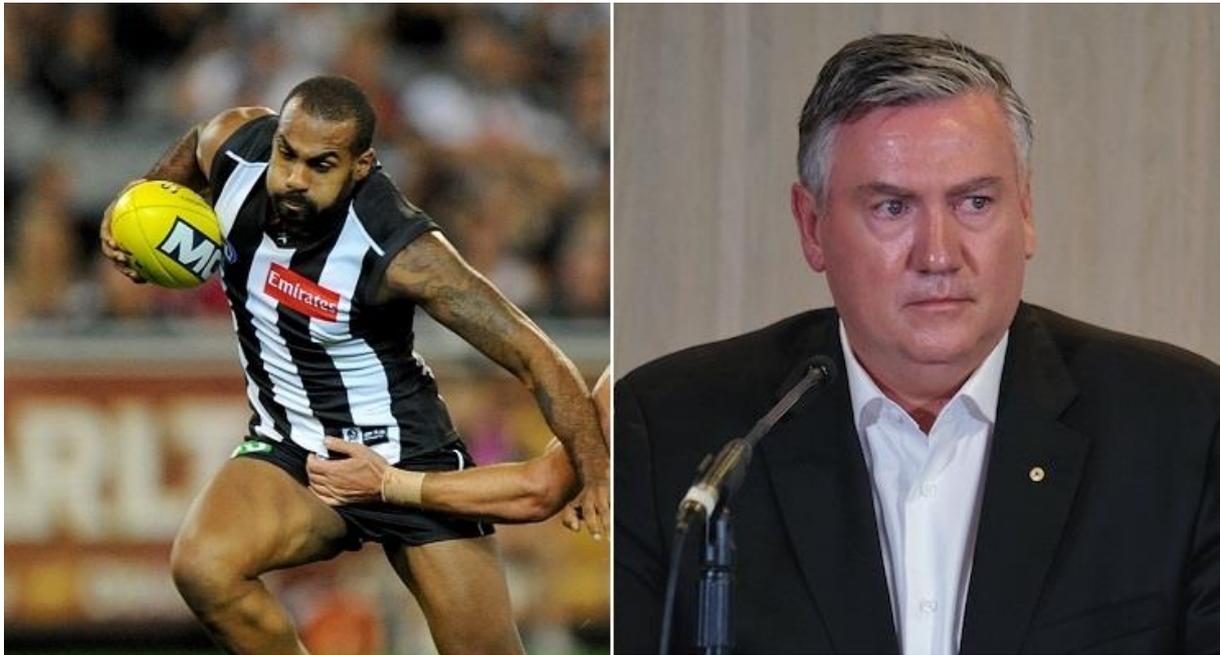


# Racism is black and white. Collingwood is finally held to account, but will it act?

Collingwood has a choice to make. Either it can live with racism in the club, or it cannot.



In 1995, Michael Long was playing for Essendon against Collingwood. His opponent, Damian Monkhorst, was heard to shout at him to “get off me, you little black cunt”.

Long complained. And, after two weeks of defensive posturing from the entire AFL organism, Monkhorst apologised.

Collingwood’s then-president Alan McAlister denied that his club had any problem with racism. McAlister had distinguished himself two years earlier when Nicky Winmar, playing against Collingwood, [famously lifted his shirt to the Magpies’ faithful](#) who had been throwing racist abuse at him all game, and pointed to his black skin with pride. McAlister’s public response was that Aboriginal players were welcome at Collingwood “as long as they conduct themselves like white people”.

After the Long incident, when Collingwood next played Essendon, the Magpies’ official cheer squad produced a giant banner for the players to run through. On it was a red and black baby’s dummy and the words “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me”.

The message was clear.

And yesterday’s report into Collingwood’s racism “problem”, by Professors Larissa Behrendt and Lindon Coombes and commissioned by the club itself, is equally clear: “While claims of racism have been made across the AFL, there is something distinct and egregious about Collingwood’s history.” They go on, in detail, to substantiate that point.

Collingwood's current president, Eddie McGuire, responded to the report with a line right up there with Rupert Murdoch's ["most humble moment" bullshit](#): "this is a historic and proud day [for the club]".

This was the opener before an hour of familiar, weak equivocations.

"There have been issues throughout history," he argued. "Not only at football clubs, but everywhere. We can argue semantics, but the tone of where we want to get to is how we go forward ... rather than argue the toss on individual issues."

Semantics. Like this, perhaps: "It was not systemic racism, as such, we just didn't have the processes to deal with it."

Yes well, that is systemic racism, Eddie — as the review explicitly concluded.

McGuire has solid form on race, including [his hilarious joke](#) in the midst of the Adam Goodes racism furore when he suggested on radio that Goodes should be used to promote *King Kong*. He was equally hilarious back in 2011 when discussing the GWS Giants, whose players, he said, would soon "be sick of living up in the land of the falafel in western Sydney".

McGuire is not, of course, racist. Nobody in Australia ever is.

The Behrendt/Coombes report makes 18 recommendations for Collingwood to begin to address the "gap between what [it] says it stands for and what it does". They cover everything from values, education and a commitment to "truth-telling" about the past, to protection of whistleblowers, diversity in employment and recruitment and community leadership.

However only one of the recommendations really matters, in that nothing else will matter if it is ignored. It is that Collingwood "undertake a board audit to ensure its membership, through their behaviour and beliefs, reflects its goals of diversity and individually embrace the values of the club, including the principles of anti-racism and inclusion".

In short: the fish rots from the head. The openly racist McAlister was president of Collingwood from 1986 to 1995. McGuire has been there since 1998. He's stepping down at the end of 2021.

McGuire's tone-deaf public response to the report is by itself ample reason for his retirement to be brought forward. But what if he had said all the right things? (The word "sorry" was notably absent from yesterday's press conference).

It shouldn't make any difference, if Collingwood is serious about the report. It found that the club is culturally bankrupt and incapable in its present form of dismantling its systemic racism.

As Behrendt and Coombes exposed, the racism drips from the clubhouse walls. It can only be eroded with a deep, scouring clean. As former player [Heritier Lumumba's experience](#) at the club demonstrated, racism lives within the players, coaches, management, fans and history. Collingwood is not alone in this way, but you'd struggle to find worse in Australian professional sport.

The racists won't suddenly become not racist. Collingwood, like any organisation when confronted with its ugly truth, has a choice to make. Either it can live with the racists in the club, or it cannot. Either it's okay, or it's not.

And it starts with the board. At risk are premierships, sponsorships, fan bases, careers and the status quo of structural, hereditary privilege.

I wouldn't be betting on Collingwood doing what it must if it wishes, in McGuire's words, "to ensure Collingwood is a safe and welcoming environment for all people". But it can if it chooses. And that choice is black and white.

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