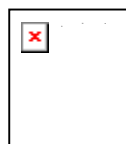


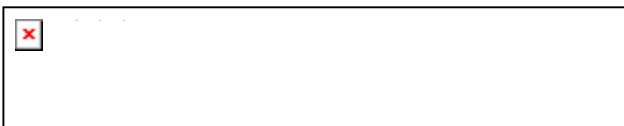
From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 6:16 PM
To: Jonathon Moran S 47F
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: ABC response

Hi Jonathon. Here is an on the record response, attributable to an ABC spokesperson. Thanks.



Sally Jackson
 Communications Lead, ABC NEWS

P S 11C(1) E jackson.sally@abc.net.au
 M S 11C(1) T @Sally_Jackson



From: Moran, Jonathon S 47F
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 4:01 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject:

Hi Nick,

As discussed, I have interviewed the former Special Forces officer who was the commander in charge of November Platoon mentioned in a story by Mark Willacy, Alexandra Blucher and Dan Oakes last week.

In the story, an American Marine named Josh alleges Australian forces murdered an Afghan prisoner because they could not fit him on the helicopter.

Can you provide any clarity on this. My source, who has agreed to be named publicly, claims this incident did not occur. He also claims the Marine could not have heard a round firing based on his position in the helicopter as well as the height of the helicopter.

The ABC stands by the story.

The ABC is aware former Commando Heston Russell has disputed the allegation in the report. However, we have no information he was there at the time.

As we have reported, the US Marine heard the shot over the radio communications in which he and his Marine crew on the Huey UH-1Y helicopter were included. They also heard the conversations between the US pilots and the Australians on the ground before and after the shot. Prior to this the Huey crew was providing close aerial gun support to the Australians and saw prisoners being rounded up and bound.

Can you provide any comment on the following:

* Did the ABC independently verify that Josh was a member of the US Marine Corps?

Yes. We know his real name, when he enlisted and when he served with HMLA-469 at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province. He has provided details of his service record and decorations for combat flights. We have also seen a US news story in which he featured as well as a radio interview he gave from Afghanistan. We conducted two on record interviews with him and corresponded with him for two months before running the story.

* Did the ABC ask for the ADFs input on this story and if so, what information was provided?

Yes. The ADF said it was inappropriate to comment while IGADF inquiry is underway. This was included in all stories.

* Were any official reports or documents provided into the alleged incident claimed to have occurred?

The ABC understands there are no official reports or documents.

Many thanks,

Jonathon

--

From: Mark Willacy
Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 11:32 AM
To: Sally Jackson; Jo Puccini; s 47E(c)
Subject: RE: ABC STATEMENT RE SAS WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS

In terms of an answer to their question...we approached Defence about the allegations and they said it was inappropriate to comment while the IGADF was conducting its inquiry. The ABC spoke to two members of Two Commando who were on that deployment. Their views, and quotes, are in our online story.

From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 10:30 AM
To: Mark Willacy <Willacy.Mark@abc.net.au>; Jo Puccini <Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>; s 47E(c)
Subject: FW: ABC STATEMENT RE SAS WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS

Just fyi that Sky News is running with this too.

From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 11:18 AM
To: s 47F
Cc: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject: RE: ABC STATEMENT RE SAS WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS

<http://about.abc.net.au/correcting-the-record/response-to-jonathon-moran-and-news-corporation/>

From: s 47F
Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 11:16 AM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: ABC STATEMENT RE SAS WAR CRIME ALLEGATIONS

Morning,

Just chasing statement regarding the claims aired by ABC re allegations Australian SAS killed Afghan prisoner because there wasn't enough space on US extraction helicopter.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-21/soldiers-killed-man-who-could-not-fit-on-aircraft-says-us-marine/12782756>

Sky News has spoken to SAS commando who denies allegations that this took place and critical that media have been airing stories with no ability for SAS to defend themselves.

Are you able to send me a statement?

Kind regards,

s 47F

Political Reporter, Sky News

s 47F

From: Zac McLean s 47F
Sent: Tuesday, 2 November 2021 4:48 PM
To: Sally Jackson
Subject: Re: Statement Request - Ben Fordham 2GB

Hey Sally,

Thanks for sending this through.

We understand you don't want to jeopardise confidential sources and we would never ask you to reveal any sources.

In response to your concerns about getting a fair say - the whole intent of an interview request is to give you a fair say.

If the national broadcaster is going to air a significant allegation against Australian troops then the ABC should also be willing to back that up and explain why their story is credible.

If the allegation from the unnamed American flight crew member is legitimate - then it's a serious and indefensible crime. The onus should be on the media organisation broadcasting that message to back that claim up.

We can only go off what we're being told by multiple members of November Platoon. We'd like to hear the ABC's side of the story to give our listeners the best chance to get the truth. We assume the ABC would share that mutual desire.

If the ABC stands by the story - you should be able to put someone forward to explain to Ben why that is the case, without revealing sources.

You would of course get a fair hearing - that what we are trying to achieve.

Thanks

On Tue, 2 Nov 2021 at 13:40, Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au> wrote:

Hi again Zac. We've decided we can't put anyone on the program, for the reason outlined below. But here's an additional statement from the ABC for you to use. Cheers.

Statement from the ABC

As we've said, a complaint has been received by the ABC and is being looked at. It isn't appropriate to provide a running public commentary on that.

Commenting on our war crimes stories outside our careful reporting has the potential to jeopardise confidential sources – people who themselves were or are members of the military – and adversely impact a sensitive and important OSI investigation.

The journalism done by Mark Willacy to expose alleged war crimes is of the highest rigour and integrity and the ABC stands behind it.

Ben Fordham said this morning: "We should leave it up to the investigators." Some of the allegations currently being investigated would not even be known to investigators were it not for Mark Willacy's reporting.

His work has also been recognised by his peers, including with Australian journalism's highest honour, the Gold Walkley. As the Walkley Foundation said: "Attempts to report on allegations of war crimes encounter extreme obstacles, yet Mark Willacy and the ABC (Investigations) team's unflinching investigations continue to expose suspected cover-ups and deep cultural problems within Australia's special forces."

These stories are confronting and difficult to hear, but Australians have a right to know what is being done in our name.



Sally Jackson
Communications Lead, ABC NEWS

P s 11C(1) E jackson.sally@abc.net.au
M s 11C(1) T @Sally_Jackson



From: Zac McLean S 47F
Sent: Tuesday, 2 November 2021 9:42 AM
To: Sally Jackson <jackson.sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Re: Statement Request - Ben Fordham 2GB

Thanks Sally,

Would anyone from the ABC - like Mark Willacy or head of department, or anyone higher up - be willing to come on and talk about this story?

We are getting a lot of pushback from veterans who say this story isn't true: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-21/soldiers-killed-man-who-could-not-fit-on-aircraft-says-us-marine/12782756>

We spoke to Peter Dutton about it this morning: <https://www.2gb.com/cough-it-up-defence-minister-wants-abc-to-prove-damaging-claims/>

If the ABC still backs the story, it would be good to have someone come on and explain why.

Thanks

Zac McLean

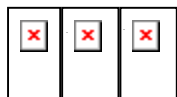
Executive Producer - Ben Fordham Live



T s 11C(1) **M** s 47F

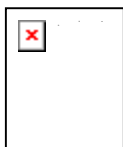
A Ground Floor, Building/C, [33-35 Saunders St, Pyrmont NSW 2009](#)

E s 47F



On Fri, 29 Oct 2021 at 11:18, Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au> wrote:

Hi Zac. The ABC has received a complaint and is investigating it. The response, provided a year ago, is here: <http://about.abc.net.au/correcting-the-record/response-to-jonathon-moran-and-news-corporation/>



Sally Jackson
Communications Lead, ABC NEWS

P s 11C(1) E jackson.sally@abc.net.au
M s 11C(1) T @Sally_Jackson



From: Zac McLean s 47F
Sent: Friday, 29 October 2021 8:27 AM
To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>; Peter Munro <Munro.Peter@abc.net.au>; ABC Publicity <abcpublicity@abc.net.au>
Subject: Statement Request - Ben Fordham 2GB

Hello,

Can the ABC please send Ben Fordham Live a statement in response to this letter on behalf of November Platoon?

<https://veteranweb.asn.au/news/letter-to-the-abc/>

Will the ABC be issuing an apology to the members of November Platoon?

Will the ABC be issuing a correction?

Does the ABC still stand by their story from October, 2020 - which alleges November Platoon executed an Afghan prisoner because they could not fit on a US helicopter?

What measures has the ABC undertaken to verify this story - apart from the account of an unnamed US soldier who did not see the alleged incident?

Thank you.

Zac McLean

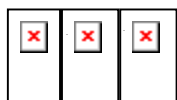
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Zac McLean

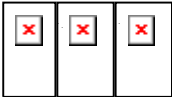
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From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Thursday, 4 November 2021 10:07 AM
To: s 47E(c)
Subject: Re: Accomplishments & Priorities - and also Board TPs - by 5pm today pls THANKS!

From me s 47E(c)

News TP:

Program Material



This week:

- Issues: Statement supporting Mark Willacy's reporting on alleged war crimes

s 22



s 22



From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Thursday, 18 November 2021 3:35 PM
To: s 47E(c)
Cc: Nick Leys; s 47E(c)
Subject: Re: Accomplishments & Priorities - and also Board TPs - by 5pm today pls THANKS!

From mel

s 22

This week:

s 22

- Responses on Heston Russell complaint re Mark Willacy

s 22

s 22

s 22

From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Thursday, 18 November 2021 2:43 PM
To: s 47F
Subject: Re: query

Hi Charles. For your background, the basis of these questions is wrong, Heston Russell's complaint has not been rejected. Also he did not write "again" to complain; he was asked for more information given he didn't submit any complaint for almost a full year after the story was published.

On the record response from an ABC spokesperson:

As I understand the ABC responded to him last week rejecting any basis for a review of the story, ostensibly because it falls outside the six-week window for complaints but allowing him to pursue other avenues for his grievance.

Response: This is incorrect. A complaint regarding this story (["US marine says Australian special forces soldiers made 'deliberate decision to break the rules of war'"](#)) is being investigated by the Audience & Consumer Affairs unit. A&CA initially sought further information as the usual window to consider editorial complaints is within six weeks of publication and this complaint was received almost a year after the story was published in October 2020

But I'm wondering (1) about it being from just that single source (although I'm presuming that to be the case since only one voice is talking directly on it) and whether comment should have been sought from others?

Response: Your presumption is incorrect. The story was the result of extensive work over two months, including multiple interviews with our key source, who stands by his account. Other commandos are quoted in the story. An ADF spokesperson is quoted in the story.

Obviously, we do not reveal confidential sources or comment in detail on our war crimes stories outside our careful reporting, as that has the potential to jeopardise confidential sources – people who themselves were or are members of the military – and adversely impact a sensitive and important OSI investigation.

Mark Willacy has committed more than two years to comprehensively researching and investigating stories about allegations of serious misconduct by Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan, including the newsworthy findings of the Brereton Report, which found evidence of 39 unlawful killings of prisoners and civilians by, or at the instruction of, members of the Australian Special Forces, most notably the SAS.

Mark Willacy is one of Australia's best and most highly-awarded journalists and he is doing his job of reporting to the Australian public on matters of public interest. The issues raised in his reporting are highly newsworthy and represent matters of public interest worthy of examination. How Australian forces conduct themselves in our name overseas is of concern to all Australians.

His reporting has been based on concerns raised from within the ranks of the elite unit by serving and former members, SAS operators, support staff and intelligence officers.

Stories he has produced have been followed up by the Brereton Inquiry and sparked a war crimes investigation by the AFP. At all times the Department of Defence has been provided with an opportunity to respond to the issues raised in the reporting.

From: Miranda, Charles >
Sent: Thursday, 18 November 2021 10:22 AM

To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>

Subject: query

Hi Sally, feels a bit weird seeking a response from a fellow media colleague, not a position I ever take, but am contacting you regarding November Platoon story.

As you may be aware the head of the Platoon has written again to the ABC to complain about the story, that being he and his squad allegedly executed a bound prisoner so they could all fit in the extraction chopper in Helmand in 2012.

As I understand the ABC responded to him last week rejecting any basis for a review of the story, ostensibly because it falls outside the six-week window for complaints but allowing him to pursue other avenues for his grievance. His complaint is largely around the fact the basis of the story centred on just one un-named US soldier who heard "the pop" in his chopper headset and concluded someone had been murdered while no-one from November Platoon was contacted nor any other person involved in the mission, the DEA, SOTG, IGADF etc.

I understand from previous commentary you stand by the story. But I'm wondering (1) about it being from just that single source (although I'm presuming that to be the case since only one voice is talking directly on it) and whether comment should have been sought from others?

(2) What other avenues are available for this complaint through the ABC process?

(3) He claims all 30 of his team are suffering stress by being collectively named as murderers, what consideration was given to the trauma of them if a) 29 of them are innocent or b) all 30 of them are innocent as apparently the IGADF has failed to find any corroborating evidence

By way of background, I'm doing a piece for the papers on the matter being rejected for review And Mr Russell seeking redress.

Many thanks

--

CHARLES MIRANDA

Senior Reporter



2 Holt Street Surry Hills NSW 2010

T +61s 47F

M s 47F

E s 47F

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From: ABC Communications
Sent: Saturday, 27 November 2021 8:01 AM
To: Sally Jackson
Subject: ABC Public Affairs Weekend Media Alert



Media Report

s 22

s 22

ABC Content

s 22

Sarah Hanson-Young calls proposed ABC inquiry a 'witch hunt'

The Courier-Mail (Licensed by Copyright Agency) - 22 November 2021

Reach: 2129485

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young is expected to block a proposed inquiry into the ABC on Tuesday, calling it a " ... problems with the **ABC**. Picture: Steve Pohlner Heston Russell, Retired Special Forces Officer has revealed his problems with the **ABC**. Picture

s 22

From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 12:22 PM
To: Chung, Frank
Subject: Re: Heston Russell OnlyFans story

Hi Frank. On background, Ben Fordham was incorrect in this broadcast, the photos are not private. Also I'd suggest you speak to S 11C(1) from Swiss 8 to get all sides of this issue.

On the record comment from an ABC spokesperson:

Swiss 8, which is a charity founded and led by Australian combat veterans to support the mental health of veterans, has legitimate concerns about Heston Russell's activity with the group that they were prepared to put on the public record. The photos in question were not private photos. Mr Russell sold them on the internet, purportedly on behalf of Swiss 8.

Mr Russell has announced plans to run for federal parliament with his own Australian Values Party and is open to public scrutiny. The ABC judges stories on whether or not they are newsworthy and covers them accordingly.

From: Chung, Frank S 47F
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 11:52 AM
To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Re: Heston Russell OnlyFans story

Hi Sally,

My apologies, to clarify "revenge porn" shouldn't be in quotes. He calls it a "revenge attack".

Cheers,
 Frank

On Mon, 6 Dec 2021 at 11:32, Chung, Frank S 47F wrote:

Hi Sally,

We're following up on Ben Fordham accusing the ABC of publishing "revenge porn" with the Heston Russell OnlyFans story yesterday.

<https://www.2gb.com/abc-leads-grubby-revenge-attack-on-veteran-heston-russell-with-onlyfans-expose/>

Would the ABC have any comment?

Cheers,
 Frank

--

FRANK CHUNG

Senior Journalist

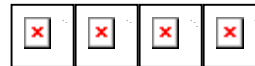


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FRANK CHUNG

Senior Journalist

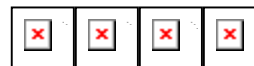


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From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 1:30 PM
To: Elsworth, Sophie; Nick Leys; Peter Munro
Cc: James Madden
Subject: Re: Questions from The Australian

Hi Sophie. Off the record: Swiss 8 wishes to give the charity's side of the story and has advised the media can contact s 11C(1). Also, since the ABC put questions to Russell he has moved to pay the money Swiss 8 said was outstanding, which bears out their allegation.

On the record comment from an ABC spokesperson:

Swiss 8, which is a charity founded and led by Australian combat veterans to support the mental health of veterans, has legitimate concerns about Heston Russell's activity with the group that they were prepared to put on the public record. The photos in question were not private photos. Mr Russell sold them on the internet, purportedly on behalf of Swiss 8.

Mr Russell has announced plans to run for federal parliament with his own Australian Values Party and is open to public scrutiny. The ABC judges stories on whether or not they are newsworthy and covers them accordingly.

From: Elsworth, Sophie <sophie.elsworth@news.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 1:26 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>; Peter Munro <Munro.Peter@abc.net.au>
Cc: James Madden s 47F
Subject: Questions from The Australian

Hi Nick,

I have the following questions in relation to the Heston Russell story that the ABC ran yesterday including on the 7pm news bulletin in Brisbane.

- 1) Does the ABC stand by its description that Heston Russell was selling "pornography?"
- 2) Did the ABC check to see if Heston Russell sold images of himself on other days, not just on Anzac Day which is highlighted in the story? (Heston has defended this and said this was the date it was sold in the US not Australia).
- 3) On 2GB today Ben Fordham has criticised the ABC for its coverage of the story. He said "the ABC is hellbent on destroying Heston Russell". Is this a fair description by Fordham?
- 4) Fordham said the ABC is trying to smear Russell's credibility and have published nude photos of him. Why did the ABC run this story?
- 5) The ABC said on November 19 a complaint regarding the October 2020 the story, "US marine says Australian special forces soldiers made deliberate decision to break the rules of war" is being investigated by the ABC's Audience and Consumer Affairs Unit. Can you please clarify if this has been finalised? If so, what is the outcome?

<https://about.abc.net.au/statements/abc-statement-on-mark-willacys-reporting-on-war-crimes-allegations/>

Can you please come back to me by **3.30pm today**.

Thanks,
Sophie

SOPHIE ELSWORTH

Media Writer

HWT Tower 40 City Road Southbank VIC 3006

Ts 11C(1) Ms 47F

E sophie.elsworth@news.com.au W theaustralian.com.au

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From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 7:54 PM
To: Sally Jackson
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Thanks for your time, Sally and thank you for the statement.

If you would like to add anything else let me know.

Jack

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022, 7:46 pm
To: Jack Houghton
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Jack you're clearly set on whatever it is you want to believe, even though the facts are actually quite simple and evident, so I'll just have to leave you there. The statement is correct. Here it is again:

The story reports on serious allegations that were made by a veterans charity about Heston Russell, an aspiring politician and the founder of the Australian Values Party, which are clearly in the public interest to know about. The allegations directly relate to explicit images which Mr Russell sold to the public via the website OnlyFans. Therefore the images, which the ABC has blurred, are central to the story. There is no legal or editorial reason why they should be removed.

From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2022 7:34:43 PM
To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Cc: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Sally,

Are you saying that posting an image in a private message conversation on a subscription website service is the same as posting it publicly? And therefore the ABC could ignore the request to not distribute the sexually explicit image further to unintended audiences because it had been published to members of the public?

I don't think anyone is disputing that images were posted and sold so I don't understand why that quote is of significance to my earlier questions. That just confirms the original publication happened on the subscription website where terms and conditions prevent further distribution?

Jack

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022, 6:58 pm
To: Jack Houghton
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: Fw: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Jack. The statement is correct. Mr Russell has himself disclosed that he "posted and sold" the content in his own [YouTube video](#):

"I definitely did lie to Swiss8 when I said there wasn't going to be any nudity on that. Even though I said in my caption there was going to be nudity. I definitely allowed myself to be corrupted by those circumstances. And again, I posted and sold photos on there as has already been confessed to, and as has already been highlighted in the media."

Cheers.

From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 6:26 PM
To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Cc: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Sally,

Sorry I'm not following RE your request for information. Im just pointing out that your statement is incorrect as the photos were sent on a person to person basis and were not intended to be leaked to your reporter. The website where the initial image transfer took place has strict terms and conditions members agree to adhere to which prohibit the secondary distribution of any images sent through the website. All parties understand these restrictions and your reporter was not a participant in that original private agreement. Mr Russell also told your reporter he did not have consent to distribute the images. The ABC opted to publish regardless, four days after being told it did not have consent.

Whether you fix the statement or not is entirely a matter for yourself and the ABC but we will be making it clear that your statement, as it stands, is false and misleading.

Regards,

Jack

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022, 6:06 pm
To: Jack Houghton
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Jack. Send through the information on why you believe it's incorrect and I'll get it looked at.

From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 6:00 PM
To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Cc: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Sally,

Sold to the public?

We are talking about the photo that was sent to an individual who then gave it - without permission - to your reporter.

Aside from the fact that "the public" cannot buy something, surely you know that it is factually incorrect to state that the photos in question were sold to "the public"?

Do you stand by the original statement?

Regards,

Jack Houghton

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022, 5:48 pm
To: Jack Houghton
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Sky News Media Request

Hi Jack. Response attributable to an ABC spokesperson:

The story reports on serious allegations that were made by a veterans charity about Heston Russell, an aspiring politician and the founder of the Australian Values Party, which are clearly in the public interest to know about. The allegations directly relate to explicit images which Mr Russell sold to the public via the website OnlyFans. Therefore the images, which the ABC has blurred, are central to the story. There is no legal or editorial reason why they should be removed.

From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 4:15 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Sky News Media Request

Hi both,

We are working on a story about the ABC publishing Heston Russell's "sexually explicit" images in both TV and digital platforms.

Does the ABC have a statement about why Mr Russell intimate photos are still live in the below story despite Mr Heston making formal complaints to the ABC?

Is the ABC concerned it may have broken the law in publishing these photos without his consent?

I need a response by 7pm sharp please.

Regards,

Jack

Article in question:

[Former soldier and Values Party founder Heston Russell lied about selling porn online while fundraising for veterans charity](#)

Jack Houghton
Digital Editor - Sky News

s 47F

5 Thomas Holt Drive, North Ryde NSW 2113

Locked Bag 918, North Sydney NSW 2059



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From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Thursday, 17 March 2022 12:57 PM
To: James Willis
Cc: Nick Leys
Subject: RE: Update on an ABC story review into November Platoon

Hi James. Response from an ABC spokesperson:

Heston Russell did not submit a complaint until a year after the story was published. When the complaint was accepted for investigation Mr Russell was advised that given the serious and complex issues raised, the time elapsed since the story was published, and the availability of key staff, the investigation would take some time. The investigation is well advanced.

From: James Willis <S 11C(1)>
Sent: Wednesday, 16 March 2022 8:54 PM
To: ABC Corporate_Affairs6 <S 11C(1)>; Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Update on an ABC story review into November Platoon

Hi there,

I'm hoping to receive an update on an ABC review into the accuracy and standards of a news item:

1. This relates to a report by journalist Mark Willacy.
2. The story from October 20, 2020 is titled ***"Australian commandos accused of executing Afghan prisoner."***
3. It prompted a complaint from November Platoon leader Heston Russell.
4. The ABC informed Mr Russell on **November 18, 2021** that their Audience and Consumer Affairs Unit had accepted his complaint.
5. The story then featured on "Media Watch" on **December 6, 2021**
6. Heston Russell wrote to the ABC on **February 1, 2022** seeking an update.
7. Mr Russell received a reply on **February 10, 2022** informing him the investigation "is well advanced" but no finish date could be provided.

8. As of 8:52pm on **Wednesday March 16, 2022**... Mr Russell has not received the findings of his investigation.

9. It is now approaching **17 weeks** since the initial complaint was made.

Could you please provide us with a response as to:

a) Is the investigation finished

b) when will it be completed... given the ABC's own website promises to return the majority of complaints within 30 days.

c) Why has this complaint taken more than four months to be published?

We would appreciate an urgent response to this matter and plan to run an update on this story this Friday.

Thank you,

James Willis

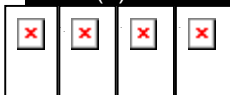
Executive Producer- Ben Fordham Live



T § 11C(1) **M** § 47F

A Ground Floor, Building C, 33-35 Saunders St, Pyrmont NSW 2009

E § 11C(1)



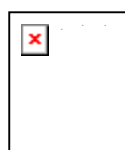
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From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 8:03 PM
To: Mark Willacy; Jo Puccini
Subject: Fw: ABC response

Just fyi

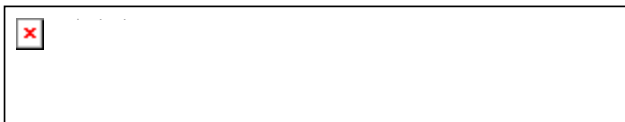
From: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 7:48 PM
To: David N Anderson s 11C(1) s 47E(c)
Cc: Gaven Morris <Morris.Gaven@abc.net.au>; s 47E(c) Sally Jackson
 <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: FW: ABC response
 I suspect this will be the splash tomorrow.
 Jo P and Willacy are across it, very firm on our reporting.

From: Sally Jackson
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 6:16 PM
To: Jonathon Moran s 47F
Cc: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject: ABC response
 Hi Jonathon. Here is an on the record response, attributable to an ABC spokesperson. Thanks.



Sally Jackson
 Communications Lead, ABC NEWS

P s 11C(1) E jackson.sally@abc.net.au
 M s 11C(1) T @Sally_Jackson



From: Moran, Jonathon s 47F
Sent: Tuesday, 27 October 2020 4:01 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>
Subject:

Hi Nick,

As discussed, I have interviewed the former Special Forces officer who was the commander in charge of November Platoon mentioned in a story by Mark Willacy, Alexandra Blucher and Dan Oakes last week.

In the story, an American Marine named Josh alleges Australian forces murdered an Afghan prisoner because they could not fit him on the helicopter.

Can you provide any clarity on this. My source, who has agreed to be named publicly, claims this incident did not occur. He also claims the Marine could not have heard a round firing based on his position in the helicopter as well as the height of the helicopter.

The ABC stands by the story.

The ABC is aware former Commando Heston Russell has disputed the allegation in the report. However, we have no information he was there at the time.

As we have reported, the US Marine heard the shot over the radio communications in which he and his Marine crew on the Huey UH-1Y helicopter were included. They also heard the conversations between the US pilots and the Australians on the ground before and after the shot. Prior to this the Huey crew

was providing close aerial gun support to the Australians and saw prisoners being rounded up and bound.

Can you provide any comment on the following:

* Did the ABC independently verify that Josh was a member of the US Marine Corps?

Yes. We know his real name, when he enlisted and when he served with HMLA-469 at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province. He has provided details of his service record and decorations for combat flights. We have also seen a US news story in which he featured as well as a radio interview he gave from Afghanistan. We conducted two on record interviews with him and corresponded with him for two months before running the story.

* Did the ABC ask for the ADFs input on this story and if so, what information was provided?

Yes. The ADF said it was inappropriate to comment while IGADF inquiry is underway. This was included in all stories.

* Were any official reports or documents provided into the alleged incident claimed to have occurred?

The ABC understands there are no official reports or documents.

Many thanks,

Jonathon

--

s 22



s 22




From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 10:15 AM

To: Mark Willacy <Willacy.Mark@abc.net.au>; s 47E(c) Jo Puccini
<Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>

Subject: RE: DRAFT DT response

No worries at all. Your journalism really does speak for itself. s 22



From: Mark Willacy <Willacy.Mark@abc.net.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 9:56 AM

To: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>; s 47E(c) Jo Puccini
<Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>

Subject: RE: DRAFT DT response

Many thanks for this Sally

M

From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 28 October 2020 7:43 AM

To: s 47E(c) Jo Puccini <Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>; Mark Willacy
<Willacy.Mark@abc.net.au>

Subject: RE: DRAFT DT response

Link: <http://about.abc.net.au/correcting-the-record/response-to-jonathon-moran-and-news-corporation/>

s 47E(d)

From: James Willis s 11C(1)
Sent: Thursday, 11 November 2021 11:14 AM
To: David N Anderson s 11C(1)
Subject: Inquiry from 2GB re November Platoon

Dear Mr Anderson,

I'm writing to you on behalf of 2GB 873 and Ben Fordham's breakfast show.

Over the past few weeks we've been covering a very disturbing story regarding Australian soldiers.

We have attempted to contact your organisation through the front office without success.

I am now hoping management will personally intervene.

In the meantime- this is causing enormous trauma to these veterans- many who developed PTSD while serving overseas.

Requests for an apology and retraction based on insufficient evidence have so far been denied.

David, here are the issues:

1. On October 20, 2020 the ABC ran a 2 minute news report by journalist Mark Willacy. The report is below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKuAhPX7vd8>

2. The report interviewed an unnamed US Marine who "flew 159 combat missions for the USMC's Light Attack Helicopter Squadron."

3. The Marine claimed in 2012 Australian soldiers attached to November Platoon committed a war crime by executing an Afghan prisoner.

4. The Marine says during a mission in Helmand Province the Aussie soldiers informed a US helicopter they had 7 prisoners.

The Marine told Mark Willacy on the ABC:

"The pilot said- that's too many people, we can't carry that many passengers.

"And you just heard this silence and then we heard a pop. And they said- OK- we have six prisoners.

"It was pretty apparent to everybody involved in that mission that they had just killed a prisoner that we had just watched them catch and hogtie."

5. At no stage did the unnamed US Marine witness the shooting or even see a dead body of a prisoner. He simply heard a "pop" on the radio while circling around.

6. The Marine failed to report the incident to his superiors and as far as we know- didn't speak about it for 8 years- until interviewed by Mark Willacy

7. Four members of November Platoon who were involved in this operation have explicitly told us it did not happen. In fact- the November Platoon was never involved in any operation in Helmand Province where 6 prisoners were taken.

8. Members of the Platoon gave evidence to the Brereton Report- but this incident was never proven- nor is there an active Defence investigation.

9. In preparing this story- the ABC failed to interview or offer a right of reply to the Australian soldiers attached to November Platoon.

10. The story went to air on October 20 last year. The next day- the Platoon gathered to honour one of their fellow soldiers Scott Smith who died in Afghanistan in 2012.

- The ABC story from the night before caused great distress and ruined what was meant to be a day of reflecting and mourning.

11. The Platoon's Commander Heston Russell has been attempting to have this story retracted for 12 months- but has been met with constant dead ends.

12. We have requested an interview with Mark Willacy on this matter but the ABC has blocked him appearing.

13. While this story remains on the record- the 25-30 Aussie diggers attached to November Platoon remain under a cloud of ugly rumour and innuendo.

14. The likes of Defence Minister Peter Dutton and former War Memorial chief Brendan Nelson have asked the ABC to apologise.

15. Heston Russell made a formal complaint to the ABC last month but was told you "only investigate claims within 6 weeks of the broadcast."

David- is it really the view of ABC management that this has been resolved?

On reflection there appear to be large parts of this story that are in breach of the ABC's Editorial Standards?

2. Accuracy

- *"The ABC requires reasonable efforts must be made to ensure accuracy in all fact-based content."*

- The story on October 20, 2020 went to air based on the flimsy evidence an unnamed Marine had **heard** on a helicopter- without witnessing an execution or seeing a body. The Marine failed to inform his superiors- didn't say anything on the radio comms- and never mentioned it until the ABC spoke to him 8 years later.

- *"The ABC accuracy standard applies to assertions of fact, not to expressions of opinion. An opinion, being a value judgment or conclusion, cannot be found to be accurate or inaccurate in the way facts can."*

- Mark Willacy and the ABC drew a conclusion based on what the US Marine "heard" that our soldiers had executed a prisoner

- *"The passage of time or the inaccessibility of locations or sources can affect the standard of verification reasonably required."*

- The Marine failed to make an official report and waited 8 years before talking to the ABC about something he heard on a radio and never reporter.

3. Corrections and Clarifications

- *"... a willingness to correct errors and clarify ambiguous or otherwise misleading information."*

- The Platoon has written to the ABC requesting the story be taken down and a correction issued... due to insufficient evidence

- This is not a minor allegation. It is an accusation of War Crimes- which to this day has not been proven by Defence.

4. Impartiality

"The ABC is guided by the hallmarks of impartiality:

"A balance that follows the weight of evidence; fair treatment; open-mindedness; opportunities over time for principal relevant perspectives on matters of contention to be expressed."

- The "weight of evidence" was a Marine hearing a "POP" on a helicopter radio
- The counter view from the Australian soldiers involved was not given, nor were there any other scenarios given for what the "POP" sound may be.

7. Harm and Offence

"7.1- Content that is likely to cause harm or offence must be justified by the editorial context."

- Since the story went to air the members of November Platoon have had their family and friends asking questions about their actions in Afghanistan.
- Many of them have been unable to obtain future employment because of this story

David- I am aware that this story went to air at a time when there were many damaging allegations against our soldiers.

Many of those allegations are legitimate and should be punished accordingly.

But this particular story by Mark Willacy on October 20 last year is not one of them.

A damaging claim of this kind- an international war crime- is surely not the sort of thing that can be delivered to the nation without eye-witness proof or video footage.

If this is available- it has not been provided up until now.

We would be happy to see it.

As a result of the above and on behalf of the soldiers from November Platoon we are requesting the ABC:

- 1. Remove the story, the interview Mark Willacy conducted on the story on October 21 and all transcripts. This would include the stories on YouTube.**
- 2. Issue an apology to November Platoon for broadcasting sickening allegations without compelling evidence- and failing to offer them a right of reply.**

You may wish to discuss this issue on air.

We would be happy to discuss this with you or the journalist Mark Willacy.

Thank you for your time and I am hoping we can get a result on this before the end of the year.

Best wishes,

James Willis

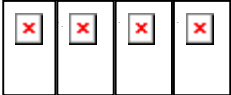
Senior Producer- Ben Fordham Live
Host- Continuous Call Team, Sport Zone



Ts 11C(1) **M**s 47F

A Ground Floor, Building C, 33-35 Saunders St, Pyrmont NSW 2009

Es 11C(1)



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From: Jo Puccini
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 2:21 PM
To: Joshua Robertson
Cc: Mark Willacy
Subject: Fwd: Questions from The Australian

More...

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, December 6, 2021 1:32 pm
To: Jo Puccini; S 47E(c)
Subject: Fw: Questions from The Australian

FYI. At this stage I have just sent Sophie the same response as S 47F.

From: Elsworth, Sophie <sophie.elsworth@news.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 6 December 2021 1:26 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>; Peter Munro <Munro.Peter@abc.net.au>
Cc: James Madden S 47F
Subject: Questions from The Australian

Hi Nick,

I have the following questions in relation to the Heston Russell story that the ABC ran yesterday including on the 7pm news bulletin in Brisbane.

- 1) Does the ABC stand by its description that Heston Russell was selling "pornography?"
- 2) Did the ABC check to see if Heston Russell sold images of himself on other days, not just on Anzac Day which is highlighted in the story? (Heston has defended this and said this was the date it was sold in the US not Australia).
- 3) On 2GB today Ben Fordham has criticised the ABC for its coverage of the story. He said "the ABC is hellbent on destroying Heston Russell". Is this a fair description by Fordham?
- 4) Fordham said the ABC is trying to smear Russell's credibility and have published nude photos of him. Why did the ABC run this story?
- 5) The ABC said on November 19 a complaint regarding the October 2020 the story, "US marine says Australian special forces soldiers made deliberate decision to break the rules of war" is being investigated by the ABC's Audience and Consumer Affairs Unit. Can you please clarify if this has been finalised? If so, what is the outcome?

<https://about.abc.net.au/statements/abc-statement-on-mark-willacys-reporting-on-war-crimes-allegations/>

Can you please come back to me by **3.30pm today**.

Thanks,
Sophie

SOPHIE ELSWORTH

Media Writer

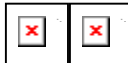
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From: Jo Puccini
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 4:39 PM
To: Mark Willacy
Subject: FW: Sky News Media Request

From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 4:24 PM
To: Jo Puccini <Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>
Subject: Fw: Sky News Media Request

Hi Jo, is someone in Legal involved on this one that I can consult on this? Although I can't see why it is breaking the law to republish photos Russell published and sold.

From: Jack Houghton <Jack.Houghton@skynews.com.au>
Sent: Monday, 31 January 2022 4:15 PM
To: Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Sky News Media Request

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Is the ABC concerned it may have broken the law in publishing these photos without his consent?

I need a response by 7pm sharp please.

Regards,

Jack

Article in question:

[Former soldier and Values Party founder Heston Russell lied about selling porn online while fundraising for veterans charity](#)

Jack Houghton
Digital Editor - Sky News

s 47F

5 Thomas Holt Drive, North Ryde NSW 2113
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From: Mark Willacy
Sent: Thursday, 17 March 2022 3:35 PM
To: Sally Jackson; Jo Puccini
Subject: Re: Update on an ABC story review into November Platoon

Thanks Sally

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From: Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Sent: Thursday, March 17, 2022 12:16:48 PM
To: Jo Puccini <Puccini.Jo@abc.net.au>; Mark Willacy <Willacy.Mark@abc.net.au>
Subject: FW: Update on an ABC story review into November Platoon

Sending this:

Response

Heston Russell did not submit a complaint until a year after the story was published. When the complaint was accepted for investigation Mr Russell was advised that given the serious and complex issues raised, the time elapsed since the story was published, and the availability of key staff, the investigation would take some time. The investigation is well advanced.

From: James Willis s 11C(1)
Sent: Wednesday, 16 March 2022 8:53 PM
To: ABC Corporate_Affairs6 s 11C(1); Nick Leys <Leys.Nick@abc.net.au>; Sally Jackson <Jackson.Sally@abc.net.au>
Subject: Update on an ABC story review into November Platoon

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1. This relates to a report by journalist Mark Willacy.
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3. It prompted a complaint from November Platoon leader Heston Russell.
4. The ABC informed Mr Russell on **November 18, 2021** that their Audience and Consumer Affairs Unit had accepted his complaint.
5. The story then featured on "Media Watch" on **December 6, 2021**

6. Heston Russell wrote to the ABC on **February 1, 2022** seeking an update.

7. Mr Russell received a reply on **February 10, 2022** informing him the investigation "is well advanced" but no finish date could be provided.

8. As of 8:52pm on **Wednesday March 16, 2022**... Mr Russell has not received the findings of his investigation.

9. It is now approaching **17 weeks** since the initial complaint was made.

Could you please provide us with a response as to:

a) Is the investigation finished

b) when will it be completed... given the ABC's own website promises to return the majority of complaints within 30 days.

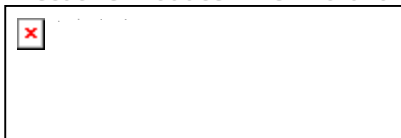
c) Why has this complaint taken more than four months to be published?

We would appreciate an urgent response to this matter and plan to run an update on this story this Friday.

Thank you,

James Willis

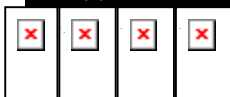
Executive Producer- Ben Fordham Live



T s 11C(1) **M** s 47F

A Ground Floor, Building C, 33-35 Saunders St, Pyrmont NSW 2009

E s 11C(1)



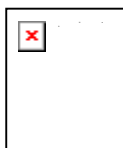
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or completeness of any information contained in this e-mail or attached files. Internet communications are not secure, therefore the sender does not accept legal responsibility for the contents of this message or attached files.

From: Joshua Robertson
Sent: Monday, 21 March 2022 7:00 PM
To: Jo Puccini; Mark Willacy
Subject: FW: STRICTLY EMBARGOED: BRISBANE-BASED RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR SENATE
Attachments: Heston Russell Bio.pdf; EMBARGOED MEDIA RELEASE - RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR SENATE.pdf

“Vision Opportunities:

- Heston pictured with medallions”



Josh Robertson
Journalist
ABC Investigations

P s 11C(1) E robertson.joshua@abc.net.au
M s 11C(1) T @jrojourno



From: s 47E(c)
Sent: Monday, 21 March 2022 5:29 PM
To: Joshua Robertson <Robertson.Joshua@abc.net.au>
Subject: FW: STRICTLY EMBARGOED: BRISBANE-BASED RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR SENATE

Ha!

From: Elise Hodgson s 11C(1)
Sent: Monday, 21 March 2022 5:14 PM
Cc: Abbey Stuart s 11C(1); Emily Whitehead s 11C(1)
Subject: STRICTLY EMBARGOED: BRISBANE-BASED RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR SENATE



Strictly embargoed until Wednesday 23 March 2022 at 12:01AM AEST

Good afternoon,

BRISBANE-BASED RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR QLD SENATE

Coming to you with a story opportunity announcing retired **Special Forces Major, Heston Russell's**, run for **QLD Senate** this federal election as leader of the independent, next-generation political party, [Australian Values Party \(AVP\)](#).

Forming the Australian Values Party in 2021 with the core pillars of **accountability, excellence, teamwork and responsible leadership**, highly decorated combat veteran, Heston Russell, envisions a nation that not only proactively acts on issues to strengthen our 'uniquely Australian' way of life, but also leads by example within

our global community.

Following 16 years in the military with operational service in East Timor, Iraq and four deployments to Afghanistan, Heston is on a mission to channel his lived leadership experience into bettering Australia – with a focus on **reforming our layers of government, proactive mental health initiatives, strengthening our defence, foreign affairs, disaster relief capabilities and more.**

While working to harness opportunities for systemic change over the past few years, Heston identified the critical lack of leadership in politics, with many figures leveraging political spin and academic accolades to mask gross incompetence – resulting in an overwhelming loss of trust and respect from everyday Australians.

"My passion for serving this country, coupled with my military planning expertise and lived leadership experience has equipped me with the tools to serve as Senator - as a real person, focused on real Australians, to bring about real change, not the arrogant and veneered version of leaders reliant on authority we have recently endured," Heston said.

We'd like to offer you an interview opportunity with Heston discussing his vision for the Australian Values Party and motivation behind running for Senate this federal election.

Interview Opportunities:

Date: Tuesday 22nd March – Friday 25th March

Time: On Request

Retired Special Forces Major and QLD Senate Candidate, Heston Russell, to discuss:

- How his lived leadership experience, passion for serving Australia, and military planning expertise has equipped him with the tools to serve as a Senator.
- His focus on reforming our layers of government, proactive mental health initiatives, strengthening our defence, foreign affairs, disaster relief capabilities and more.
- His personal journey with suicidal ideations and how he will pioneer a strong focus on mental health - with an emphasis on proactive health and wellness initiatives that champion communities and provide national purpose to collectively strengthen our society across all demographics.

Vision Opportunities:

- Heston pictured with medallions

Additional information and assets available on request.

POLITICS LEADERSHIP

Kindest,
Elise

Elise Hodgson
SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

[07 3854 1455](tel:0738541455)

§ 11C(1)

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Sabio wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this Country
Australia, Elders of past, present and future generations to come.





AUSTRALIAN VALUES PARTY

Heston Russell is a retired Special Forces Major, having served 16 years in the Australian Military with operational service in East Timor, Iraq and four deployments to Afghanistan. Heston's focus is to now put his lived experience into helping build better Australians, united with purpose and ready to achieve our collective potential.

After suffering through his own mental health issues culminating with his suicidal ideation in August 2020, Heston is on a mission to break down the stigmas surrounding mental health and vulnerability.

In September 2020 he founded the Voice of a Veteran movement, as a platform for Veterans to speak out and be heard, and to take action to fix the failing Veteran support systems. Heston was instrumental in campaigning for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, working with many across the Veteran community and government to achieve this in April 2021. Heston then founded the charity Veteran Support Force in July 2021 to lead the way in providing proactive support for the Veteran community and families during the conduct of the Royal Commission, while also working to harness the opportunities for systemic and cultural change this once in a lifetime event provides.

Heston now sees so many of the parallels between the mental health plight of so many Veterans and that of all Australians who have suffered through the isolation, uncertainty and leadership crisis COVID has revealed over the last two years. His own recovery has been successful through reconnecting and supporting at the local and community levels, then working together to achieve purpose at the highest levels. Heston believes that empowering people to help each other, to never feel alone, and to promote proactive health and wellness are the best preventative measures for minimising the impacts of all potential pandemics and personal struggles we will undoubtedly face as a society.

In order to best serve and support as many people as he can, Heston formed the Australian Values Party in September 2021. The AVP is a new age, completely independent political party, assembling a team of everyday Australians with lived experience, with the focus to bring balance and authentic leadership into Australian Federal Politics. As the leader of the AVP, Heston has set about developing policies that require higher standards of behaviour, professional development and wholistic wellness from all representatives and staff, in a bid to commence the cultural change that is so badly needed within our Federal Political system, and that has been so greatly exposed in recent times.

Drawing upon all that he has lived and learned through, Heston will be campaigning for the Senate in Queensland, while supporting every AVP Candidate towards achieving a balance of power result from the 2022 Federal Election.

**POLITICS
LEADERSHIP**

**AUSTRALIAN VALUES PARTY****MEDIA RELEASE****EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022 AT 12:01AM AEST**

Wednesday 23 March 2022

RETIRED SPECIAL FORCES MAJOR HESTON RUSSELL ANNOUNCES RUN FOR QLD SENATE
Leading the Australian Values Party (AVP) for a Unified Australia

As leader of the independent, next-generation political party, Australian Values Party (AVP), retired Special Forces Major, Heston Russell, has announced his run for the QLD Senate this federal election to bring responsible leadership and balance back into the way Australia is governed.

Forming the Australian Values Party in 2021 with the core pillars of accountability, excellence, teamwork and responsible leadership, highly decorated combat veteran, Heston Russell, envisions a nation that not only proactively acts on issues to strengthen our 'uniquely Australian' way of life, but also leads by example within our global community.

Following 16 years in the military with operational service in East Timor, Iraq and four deployments to Afghanistan, Heston is on a mission to channel his lived leadership experience into bettering Australia – with a focus on reforming our layers of government, proactive mental health initiatives, strengthening our defence, foreign affairs, and disaster relief capabilities together and more.

"Our country is facing a leadership crisis. Australians have had enough of the constant seesawing between the left and right wings of politics – polarising every issue to the extreme and failing to act on the matters important to Australians. Governments should make people's lives easier and more enjoyable, not continuously get in the way," Heston said.

Heston's leadership history extends beyond his extensive military service – founding the *Voice of A Veteran* movement, successfully campaigning for a Royal Commission into Defence & Veteran Suicide, and forming the Veteran Support Force (VSF) charity to help veterans and their families throughout the conduct of the Royal Commission inquiry. Heston and VSF were also on the ground supporting local communities during the recent floods in Northern NSW.

While working to harness opportunities for systemic change over the past few years, Heston identified the critical lack of leadership in politics, with many figures leveraging political spin and academic accolades to mask gross incompetence – resulting in an overwhelming loss of trust and respect from everyday Australians.

"My passion for serving this country, coupled with my military planning expertise and lived leadership experience has equipped me with the tools to serve as Senator - as a real person, focused on real Australians, to bring about real change, not the arrogant and veneered version of leaders reliant on authority we have recently endured," Heston said.

"I know what it takes to build and bring teams together, and I plan to bring Australians together as we recover from the pandemic and recent natural disasters. We need to invest where it counts most, creating a more enjoyable way of life, building a self-sustainable economy and self-sufficient security within our region – leading by example through our actions and words," Heston said.

Having experienced the reality of transitioning out of the military and facing his own suicidal ideations, Heston will also pioneer a stronger focus on mental health, with an emphasis on proactive health and



wellness initiatives that empower communities and provide national purpose to collectively strengthen our society across all demographics.

“I am committed to breaking down the stigmas surrounding mental health and vulnerability – cutting through many of the conventional barriers to create support systems at the community level and inspiring collective purpose at the national level.”

“We need character-based leadership that is willing to step up and change legislation, working to better empower all Australians to have freedom and control over their own lives, while the government works to provide better support, security, and sustainability to all Australians. We must become a more connected and cohesive country, united with purpose and leading by example in all that we do,” Heston said.

To learn more about Heston Russell and the AVP, head to australianvalues.org.au.

The AVP addresses the need for proactive planning and pragmatic policies built upon the fundamentals of serving and protecting the welfare of all Australians.

The AVP will be running a small team of highly capable candidates at the upcoming federal election, with the mission to achieve a balance of power and bring about a parliament that will require everyone elected by the Australian people to actually work together and to consider every policy available transparently, based on its merit and impact on the lives of all Australians at the grassroots level.

The AVP has already established its ‘Workforce Policy’ which requires all elected representatives and their staff to volunteer for random drug and alcohol testing, participate in mandatory annual professional development initiatives including leadership and planning training, and be provided with resources for fitness and nutrition education as a provision of representing the party.

The AVP will campaign on three key strategic priorities:

1. A more enjoyable Australian way of life.
2. A self-sustainable Australian economy.
3. Self-sufficient security within our region.

The Australian Values Party draws upon seven key values that every Australian can uphold in their own lives and expect to see in return from our government and its representatives. These values will form the basis for assessing and justifying every piece of legislation considered by the AVP:

1. Respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual.
2. Commitment to the rule of law.
3. Equality of opportunity for all people - Regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, or national or ethnic origin.
4. Freedom of religion - Including the freedom not to follow a particular or any religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of association.
5. Parliamentary democracy - Whereby our laws are determined by parliaments elected by the people, those laws being paramount and overriding any other inconsistent religious or secular “laws”.
6. Recognising the English language - as our shared national language, as an important unifying element of Australian society, while also recognising and encouraging our diversity of languages.
7. A ‘fair go’ for all - That embraces mutual respect, tolerance and compassion for those in need.

*These values were taken from the **Australian Values Statement**, that is maintained by the Department of Home Affairs.*

**AUSTRALIAN VALUES PARTY****ENDS****For more information or to request an interview:**

Elise Hodgson – Sabio

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Click [here](#) to watch the campaign video.**Websites:**<https://hestonrussell.com/><https://australianvalues.org.au/>**Socials:**<https://www.instagram.com/hestonrussell/><https://www.youtube.com/c/HestonRussell><https://www.linkedin.com/in/hestonrussell/><https://www.facebook.com/HestonRussellOfficial>