

Eddie McGuire would be a poor choice for Labor leadership

By Chris Haviland

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Controversial media personality Eddie McGuire has been criticised for years over racist commentary (Screenshot via YouTube)

A recent article suggested Eddie McGuire should take over leadership of the Labor Party. [Chris Haviland](#) explains why this idea is absurd.

2020 WAS A YEAR like no other. It was particularly tough on opposition parties at both state and federal level.

December and January are often called the “silly season”. But last December, Fairfax’s [Rob Harris](#) surely found a new level of stupidity.

A shocking piece was [written by Harris](#), again raising the issue of the Federal Labor leadership and casting doubts on the future of leader [Anthony Albanese](#).

Harris seems to have an obsession with Albo. It was the fourth or fifth piece he had written, attempting to stir up Labor leadership tensions, where in fact none exist. But that wasn’t what was

shocking.

Harris’s solution to Labor’s problems, as he saw them, was to ‘lock in’ [Eddie McGuire](#) and make him Labor leader.

McGuire, the ‘working-class kid from Broadmeadows’, apparently ‘represents everything modern Labor should aspire to and everything it is searching to reconnect with’, said Harris.

He then mentioned McGuire’s many public gaffes. But he dismissed these almost as a badge of honour.

‘No one would ever accuse him of being woke’, Harris said, later adding that the examples of [Boris Johnson](#) and [Donald Trump](#) show that voters don’t always ‘embrace PC sentiment’.

Although he was perhaps right to compare McGuire with Trump, Harris has clearly fallen for the self-serving narrative about Labor peddled by News Corp and elements of the political Right. So having a social conscience is now “woke” or “PC” at Fairfax?

The article claimed that McGuire has made ‘grovelling apologies’ for his gaffes, including his “King Kong” racist slur of the Sydney Swans’ Indigenous champion [Adam Goodes](#), just after Goodes had been called an “ape” by a Collingwood supporter during a match in the AFL’s Indigenous Round of 2013. I can recall no such apology, at least not one of any sincerity or substance. Just a rant full of excuses and self-justifications. “The drugs made me do it.”

The article also claimed that McGuire's gaffes were accompanied by a 'lack of malice'.

Ask Adam Goodes or the Sydney Swans about that. The "King Kong" comment wasn't the only time McGuire attacked Goodes and the Swans club in that period.

McGuire used one of his programs to falsely accuse Goodes of "[staging](#)" for free kicks.

McGuire also led a vicious campaign of disinformation and dog-whistling against the Swans over their cost of living allowance under the AFL's [salary cap](#). Exploiting Victorian parochialism and using fake news that would make Donald Trump blush, he succeeded in having the allowance removed.

However, that wasn't enough for McGuire. He then started an outrageous conspiracy theory about the [Swans Academy](#), where the Swans provide training and development for young athletes in a non-AFL state, at their own expense, in order to promote the game as well as identify talent for their senior team.

McGuire made such a fuss, again by exploiting Victorian parochialism with Trump-style lies, dog-whistling and hysteria, that the AFL introduced a ridiculous [points system](#) to penalise the Swans at the National Draft, whenever they drafted their own Academy products.

In 2015, during the Indigenous Round, two years after Goodes had been vilified by the young Collingwood supporter, he was again [attacked by McGuire](#) and his baying panel of "experts" on [Fox Footy](#), for performing an Indigenous dance after scoring a goal. McGuire was forced into a backdown of sorts after some facts about the dance were explained, but there was no apology, just more fuming.

In 2015, Goodes endured repeated episodes of disgraceful, racist booing throughout the season, which became his last. This has been the subject of two excellent documentaries, [The Final Quarter](#) and [The Australian Dream](#) which I have written about

previously in [Independent Australia](#). There is no doubt that the Victorian AFL media, led by McGuire, was instrumental in encouraging this behaviour which became one of the ugliest episodes in Australian sporting and cultural history.

Even after Goodes announced his retirement, McGuire wasn't done bullying him. The Swans were eliminated after losing to North Melbourne. The following week, there was speculation on whether Goodes would appear in the Grand Final motorcade, which is traditional for retiring star players who aren't playing in the Grand Final. Unsurprisingly, Goodes indicated he [would not attend](#).

There have been plenty of other examples of malevolent attacks on anyone who threatens McGuire's self-serving agenda.

McGuire made similar attacks on the Brisbane Lions when they were successful in the early 2000s, beating Collingwood in two Grand Finals. After the 2002 decider, McGuire told his club members that they had been robbed and launched an [unbelievable attack](#) on the Lions and their retention allowance — a blatant and pathetic act of sour grapes.

There was the [attack on Tim Paine](#), now Australian cricket Captain, who had made a jocular reference to the Melbourne Stars BBL team's ability to attract high profile players, with a quip about their salary cap. McGuire, Stars President, threatened him with legal action for defamation, which was clearly an attempt to bully Paine or anyone else who dared to shine a light of scrutiny anywhere near McGuire's affairs.

And there was [Harry O'Brien](#), now known as Héritier Lumumba, a star player for Collingwood for many years. But Lumumba is a person of colour. Moreover, he has a social conscience and has often spoken out about racism, homophobia and other issues.

Just as Goodes spoke out on Indigenous disadvantage and dispossession in his role as

Australian of the Year in 2014, Lumumba also [spoke out](#) and, like Goodes, drew the ire of some footy supporters. Unlike Goodes, however, Lumumba copped it from his own club supporters at Collingwood.

[Russell Jackson](#) has an extensive and excellent article about the saga of Lumumba and Collingwood on the ABC website.

As Jackson says:

'May 29, 2013, was the day everything changed for Heritier Lumumba.'

That was the day McGuire made his "King Kong" comment about Goodes. Lumumba took exception to it and criticised McGuire, his club's President, on Twitter. That evening, both Lumumba and McGuire appeared on *Fox Footy*.

Lumumba called out McGuire and talked *'passionately about casual racism, and the distinction between direct and indirect racism'*.

Jackson says:

'Certain layers of context are essential to understanding how Lumumba's confrontation of McGuire led to his exile from Collingwood and estrangement from the game.'

Lumumba threatened Collingwood with Supreme Court action over his treatment at the club.

An internal report on the saga was completed in December. It has now been leaked and reveals a shocking history of racism at Collingwood under McGuire's 20-year tenure as President.

Lumumba, who was not interviewed for the report, accused the club of not releasing the report with the intention of "burying" it. McGuire announced three days later that he would step down as President at the end of the 2021 season. Coincidence? Lumumba clearly doesn't think so.

1/ Six months after announcing an internal review on racism and racial discrimination, a report was finally delivered to [@CollingwoodFC](#)'s board. Eddie McGuire announced he would be stepping down just 72 hours later. [?][?]

— Héritier Lumumba (@iamlumumba) [December 23, 2020](#)

Here is Lumumba's response to McGuire after his bizarre press conference on 1 February following the leaking of the report.

1) I'm grateful to all the people who have reached out to me in support - including CFC members and supporters - as well as all those who have challenged the Collingwood Football Club's bizarre response to their own report finding them guilty of systemic racism.

— Héritier Lumumba (@iamlumumba) [February 1, 2021](#)

Notwithstanding Rob Harris's assertion that McGuire has a social conscience, despite not being "woke" or "PC", the evidence around McGuire and issues of race is problematic for anyone who simply wanted to join the ALP, let alone become its leader.

The ALP is proudly a party that will not tolerate racism, sexism or any other form of discrimination. This is not negotiable, notwithstanding any misreported or misconstrued findings of an election review, or any policy differences or debates which might legitimately occur on issues like climate change.

So, does McGuire represent 'everything modern Labor should aspire to and everything it is searching to reconnect with'? No way. Quite the opposite.

Furthermore, it makes no sense even from a purely populist viewpoint. It was suggested to me that McGuire would ensure that Labor would win the votes of all 106,000 Collingwood members, plus supporters who aren't members.

Even if that were true, many of those would already be Labor voters.

Furthermore, there are 17 other clubs and McGuire isn't too popular at any of them. Ask Port Adelaide about why they can't wear their [traditional jersey](#). Even in Melbourne, he's not universally loved by non-Collingwood people.

The latest [Roy Morgan poll](#) shows that the Sydney Swans have over 1.2 million members and supporters throughout the country. Yes, you can argue about the methodology, but the results have been consistent over 13 years.

Lots of those Swans supporters, in Sydney or elsewhere, live in marginal seats. And they have long memories.

I am a former Labor MP and a proud 40-year Party member. I serve on the NSW Administrative Committee and in 2021 I will be nominated for Life Membership.

But if Eddie McGuire ever becomes Labor leader, I will seriously reconsider my Party membership.

[Chris Haviand](#) is a former Federal MP. He is a 40-year member of the ALP and a 25-year member of the Sydney Swans.