

Michael Lee's Statement to Respond to ABC's "The Strata Trap"

Date: 10.09.2024

To whom it may concern,

On 09.09.2024, ABC aired a program titled "*The Strata Trap*," containing numerous false and misleading allegations against me. The primary claims made in the program include:

1. That I hired security guards at a general meeting and blocked several owners from entering the meeting venue.
2. That in 2021, I surprised lot owners with a proposal to release the builder.
3. That I consented to compulsory management.

First and foremost, these allegations are not only inaccurate but are presented in a highly biased manner, omitting key facts that would provide crucial context. This program does not represent the truth. Instead, it delivers a one-sided story, rooted in misrepresentation, designed to damage my reputation and, ultimately, cause harm to my mental and emotional well-being.

The Reality Behind the Allegations

The meeting in question was the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of August 2023 for a building complex with 183 units. I have been a property owner since 2012, serving on the Strata Committee since 2013, and holding the roles of Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer since 2022. Contrary to what the ABC report insinuates, the following key facts were omitted:

1. **Security Guards:** The decision to hire security guards was not mine alone; it was a collective decision made by the Strata Committee due to prior incidents of aggression and violence from certain individuals. The security was there to protect not only me but all committee members. The implication that I used strata funds for personal reasons is entirely false and defamatory.
2. **Exclusion of Individuals:** The individuals who were blocked from entering the meeting were not registered lot owners. Under strata laws, only registered lot owners or their proxies have the right to attend AGMs. Their exclusion was lawful, and their disruptive behavior during the meeting only highlights why security was necessary.
3. **Builder Release:** The decision to release the builder in 2021 was made by the majority of lot owners at the AGM, following a proper democratic process. The motion to release the builder was supported by more than 80% of the owners, driven by the excessive legal costs of litigation. This decision was not mine alone and was made with transparency and in full compliance with the law.
4. **Compulsory Management:** The program's claim that I consented to compulsory management is also false. The decision to appoint Result Strata under NCAT was made collectively by the committee, in accordance with Section 36 of the Strata Schemes Management Act 2015. As Chairman, I do not have the authority to make such decisions unilaterally, and any suggestion to the contrary is both misleading and defamatory.

The Consequences of Irresponsible Journalism

The way this report was framed is not just poor journalism—it is dangerous. By presenting a skewed and incomplete narrative, the program has caused significant distress to me and others involved. This kind of biased reporting can have severe mental health consequences, especially when it targets individuals in a personal capacity. I have experienced great emotional distress, anxiety, and ongoing mental anguish as a direct result of this reckless portrayal of events.

The impact of irresponsible journalism is far-reaching. Programs like *"The Strata Trap,"* which neglect the principles of fair and balanced reporting, can lead to public defamation, social isolation, and emotional trauma. When a media outlet misrepresents facts or intentionally leaves out critical context, it does more than just damage someone's reputation—it harms their mental well-being. The public, influenced by the narrative presented, can turn hostile, which may lead to psychological distress, including anxiety and depression.

In my case, the ABC report has caused tremendous emotional strain. I have been subjected to ongoing harassment and have been portrayed as a villain in my own community, which has exacerbated feelings of isolation. Being unfairly depicted as a dictator-like figure, as the program suggests, has had a direct impact on my personal and professional life, and has taken a toll on my mental health.

These are real and serious consequences. A responsible journalist has a duty not only to report accurately but also to consider the potential harm their work can cause to the individuals involved. When journalism crosses the line from reporting to personal attacks, it can lead to long-term damage—both to reputation and mental health.

Legal and Ethical Violations

The actions of the ABC and its reporter are not only unethical but also illegal on several fronts. First, the footage of the meeting was obtained without consent, in violation of privacy laws. This intrusion into my private and professional life constitutes a breach of my legal rights, and the publication of this footage without my permission is a clear violation of media ethics. Privacy and consent are fundamental in journalistic practices, and in this case, both were blatantly disregarded.

Second, the defamatory nature of the program has caused irreparable harm to my reputation. Defamation is a serious legal matter, and the ABC must be held accountable for publishing false information that has damaged my standing both within the strata community and in my professional life. Defamation laws exist to protect individuals from precisely this type of irresponsible journalism—reporting that is not rooted in truth, but in sensationalism and personal attack.

Moreover, the reporter's involvement in the internal politics of our building's rival groups raises further ethical concerns. It is evident that the ABC reporter aligned themselves with one faction in a long-standing internal dispute, further fueling division and conflict. This kind of behavior not only violates journalistic integrity but also fosters a toxic environment, both within the strata community and beyond.

Taking Action

As a result of this defamatory and unethical report, I am now in discussions with legal counsel about pursuing legal action against ABC News and the individuals responsible for this attack on my reputation. The harm caused by their biased reporting extends far beyond just myself; it has affected the entire community and undermined the democratic processes that guide strata living.

We are exploring defamation claims as well as breaches of privacy and media ethics. I have a duty not only to protect myself but also to ensure that media organizations are held to account for the harm they cause through reckless and sensationalized reporting.

Conclusion

This program was not a piece of investigative journalism—it was an attack. It failed to present both sides of the story, selectively omitting facts that would have provided a fairer and more accurate depiction of events. Instead, it sought to paint me as a villain, feeding into a false narrative that has caused me significant personal harm.

I stand by my actions as Chairman of the Strata Committee and will continue to defend the integrity of the decisions made by the committee. I will also continue to fight against the kind of irresponsible journalism that leads to defamation, mental distress, and public harm.

ABC News and its reporter failed their journalistic duty in this case, and I am committed to holding them accountable for the damage they have caused.

Sincerely,
Michael Lee

