

# Secret WhatsApp messages show co-ordinated campaign to oust Antoinette Lattouf from ABC

By [Michael Bachelard](#) and [Calum Jaspán](#)

January 16, 2024 — 5.00am

The ABC sacked broadcaster Antoinette Lattouf after a high-level and co-ordinated letter-writing campaign from pro-Israel lobbyists that directly targeted the corporation's chair, Ita Buttrose, and managing director David Anderson.

Dozens of leaked messages from a WhatsApp group called Lawyers for Israel show how members of the group repeatedly wrote to the ABC demanding Lattouf be sacked, and threatened legal action if she was not.



Broadcaster Antoinette Lattouf. *CREDIT: LOUIE DOUVIS*

An ABC manager told Lattouf in the early afternoon of December 20 that she had been dismissed. Hours earlier, the WhatsApp group shared a letter from Buttrose saying she noted their concerns, and adding: "I have forwarded your email on to Chris Oliver-Taylor, the ABC's chief content officer, who is dealing with this matter."

The messages also reveal members of the group calling Lattouf's lawyer, Josh Bornstein, who is Jewish, a "traiter" (sic), and that the deputy president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Robert Goot, was actively involved in a discussion about having Lattouf dismissed.

The WhatsApp messages, obtained by this masthead, give an insight into how Lawyers for Israel used aggressive lobbying to try to exert influence at the ABC. A source with knowledge of events says the group was also involved in a [campaign against the Sydney Theatre Company](#) over a pro-Palestinian protest by some actors, but those messages had since been deleted.

The campaign against Lattouf became intense in the week starting December 18, during which time she was contracted to present the ABC Sydney radio morning program for five days. Before the ABC employed her, Lattouf had made a series of controversial social media posts that accused Israeli soldiers of using rape as a weapon of war and raised questions over whether protesters in Sydney had in fact chanted "gas the Jews" after the October 7 Hamas attack.

## Action of the day

December 20, 2023

### Person 1

ACTION OF THE DAY: CALL TO ACTION ...  
Michelle Rowland is the federal minister for communication. Please use this link to ask how Antoinette Lattouf is hosting the morning ABC Sydney show ...

Clause 4 of the ABC code of practice is to be impartial and employing Antoinette is in breach of this clause.

Please send a copy to

1. ABC Ombudsman
2. David Anderson, Managing Director of the ABC
3. ABC Board

6.53am

### Person 1

Needs to be done again today ... It is important ABC hears not just from individuals in the community but specifically lawyers so they feel there is an actual legal threat.

6.54am

### Person 1

I have basically written to them and told them I expect a proper response, not a generic one, by COB today or I would look to engage a senior counsel. I know there is probably no actionable offence against ABC but I didn't say I would be taking one - just investigating one. I have said that they should be terminating her employment immediately.

7.10am

### Person 2

Why is the ABC allowing this woman to host a radio show?

7.11am

### Person 1

Exactly which is why we need to stamp it out.

7.12am

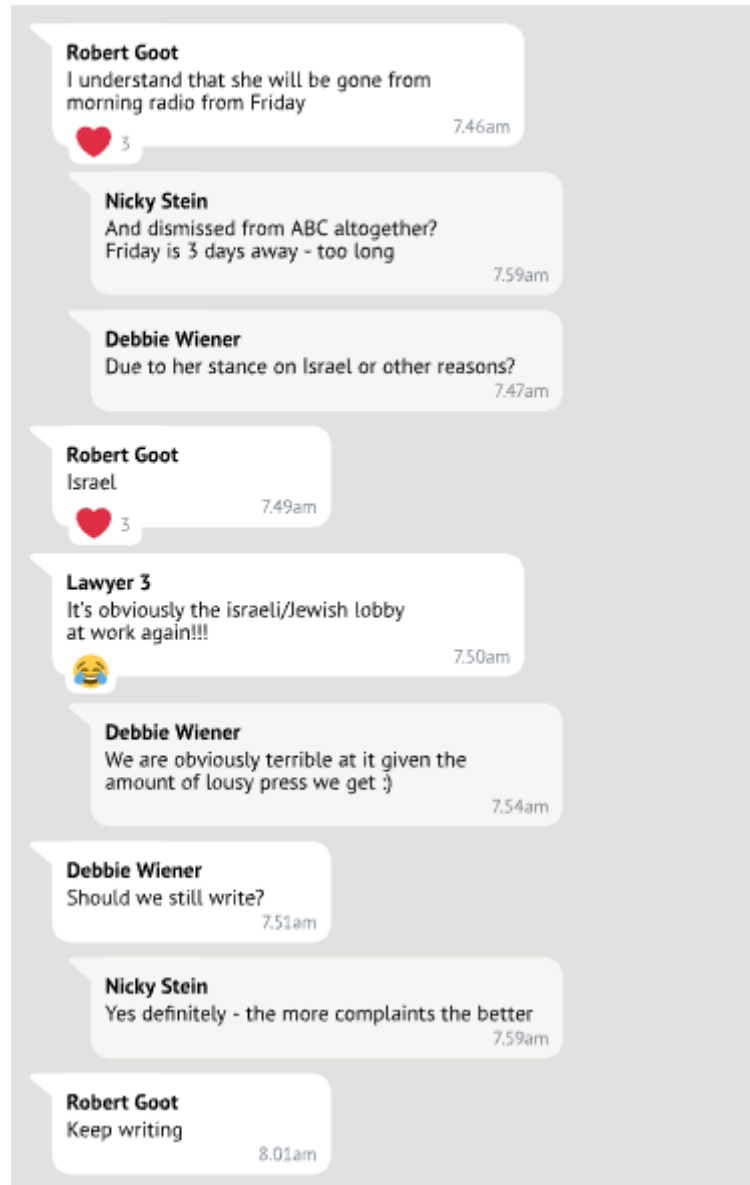
According to [an unlawful termination claim](#) Lattouf later filed, ABC managers told her the morning program had been well received by audiences. But on the third day of her contract, according to the claim, she was told she was sacked, with her boss, Elizabeth Green, saying the order had come from “above me”. The stated reason, according to Lattouf’s claim, was that she had reposted a Human Rights Watch report saying Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war.

Lattouf now alleges she was sacked illegally for her political opinions, as a result of racism and after a campaign by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. A key question in her unlawful termination case is likely to be whether the ABC acted due to external lobbying or because Lattouf had breached internal ABC policies.

Screenshots from the Lawyers for Israel WhatsApp group, which has 156 members, show a co-ordinated letter-writing campaign that became intense during the days Lattouf was on air. A stream of letters were sent on her second day, and on the third day – the day she was sacked – one of the group’s administrators, Sydney conveyancing lawyer Nicky Stein, sent a message at 6.54am entitled “Action of the day: call to action”.

## An organised campaign

December 20, 2023



This post urged group members to target Communications Minister Michelle Rowland and copy in the ABC ombudsman, the board and Anderson, adding: “It is important ABC hears not just from individuals in the community but specifically lawyers so they feel there is an actual legal threat.

“I have basically written to them and told them I expect a proper response, not a generic one, by [close of business] today or I would look to engage a senior counsel. I know there is probably no actionable offence against ABC but I didn’t say I would be taking one – just investigating one. I have said that they should be terminating her employment immediately.”

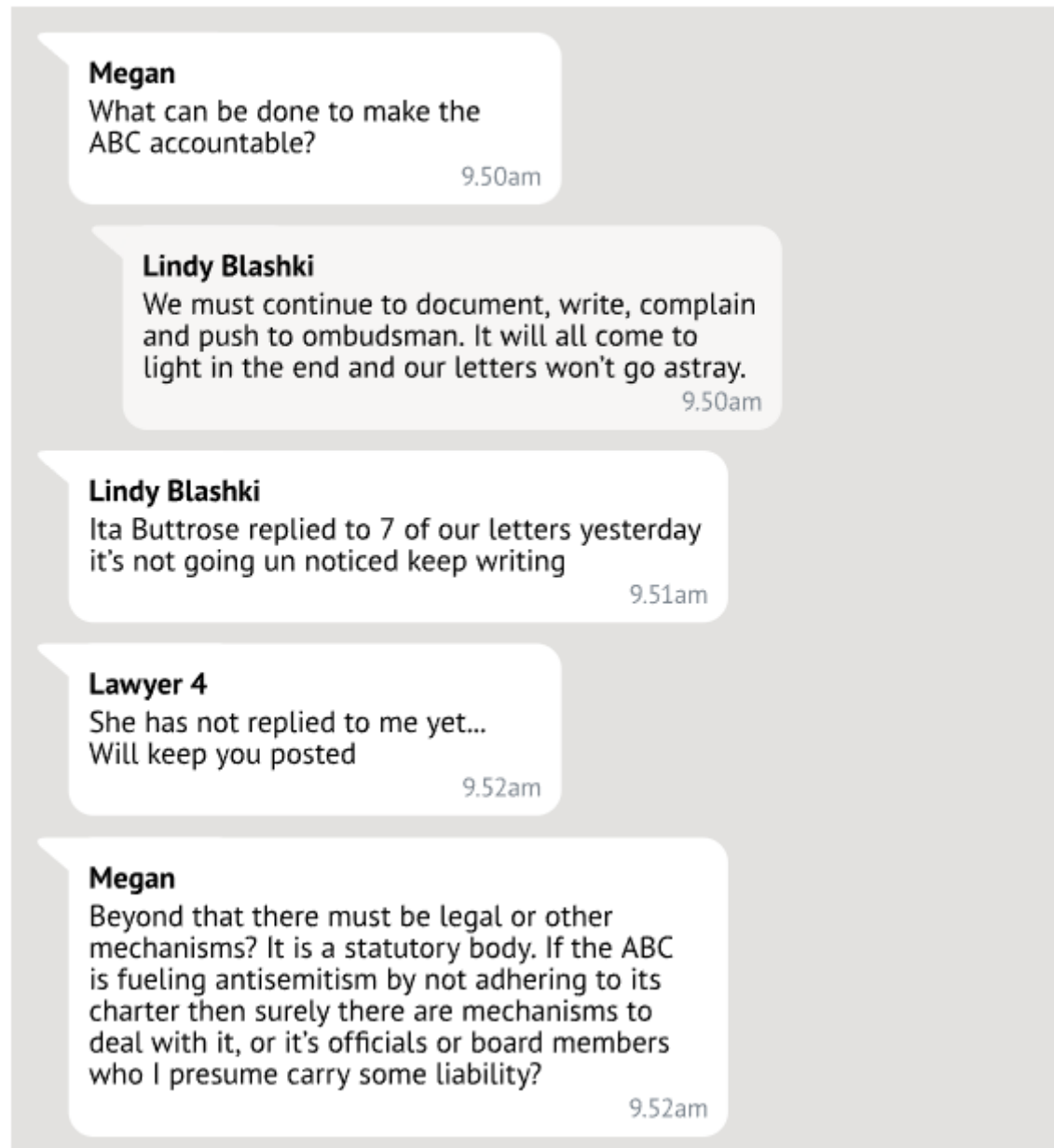
Stein's letter to the ABC and the minister said: "Anything short of terminating [Lattouf's] position would not be sufficient."

At 9.51am that day, another group administrator, Lindy Blashki, wrote that "Ita Buttrose replied to 7 of our letters yesterday". About 90 minutes later at 11.15am, Stein posted her response from Buttrose. Lattouf was sacked about 1.40pm that day.

Lattouf and her lawyer, Bornstein, both declined to comment on the leaked messages. An ABC spokesperson said the national broadcaster had "a transparent complaints process and responds accordingly, regardless of the source of the complaint".

## Pushing options other than letter writing

December 20, 2023



Stein told this masthead the Lawyers for Israel WhatsApp group was simply “a group of lawyers concerned about Israel and rising antisemitism”.

“The suggestion that there was a co-ordinated campaign for [Lattouf] to be fired is fanciful,” Stein said. Asked who decided on the “call-outs” in the group to take action, she said: “Any suggestion that it is controlled by anyone is completely unfounded.” Blashky could not be contacted for comment. There is no suggestion the Lawyers for Israel WhatsApp group is officially affiliated with any recognised Australian Jewish community advocacy body, nor the international group of the same name.

On Friday, the co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Alex Ryvchin, said the idea that his group or any of its members had organised or co-ordinated a campaign to have Lattouf sacked was “total bullshit”.

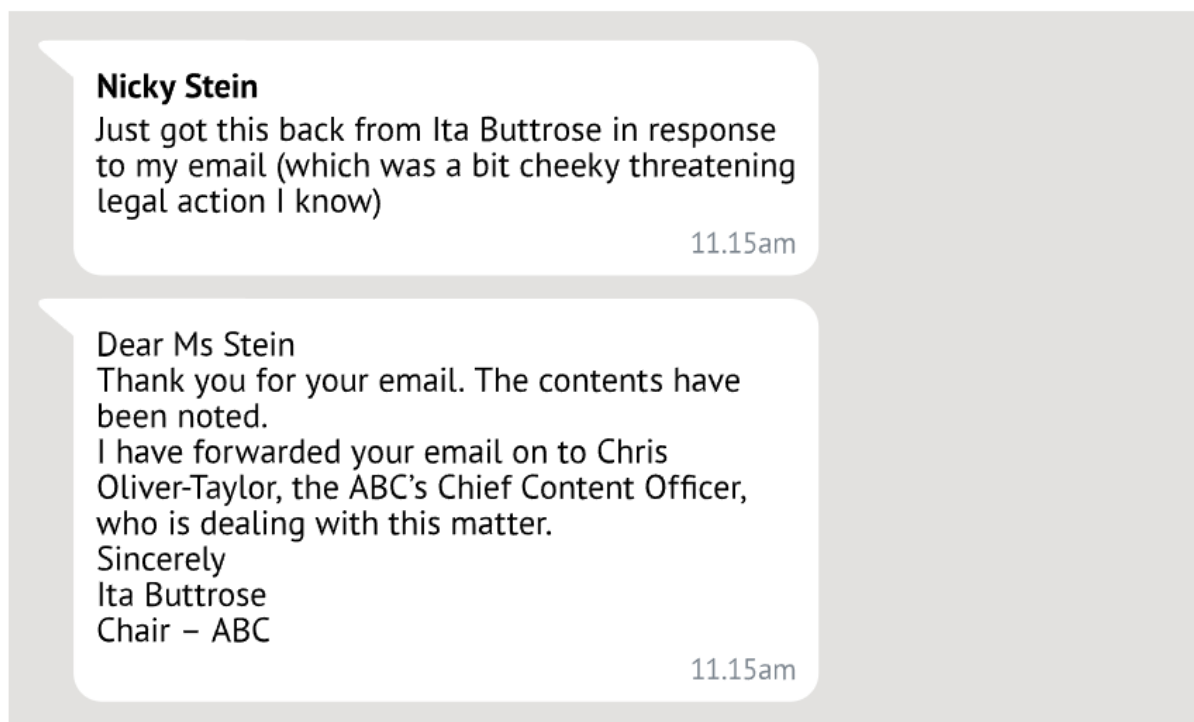
Approached for further comment on Monday, Ryvchin said: “The ECAJ did not contact the ABC about Lattouf, nor did we call for her sacking. This was a grassroots initiative of individuals exercising their right to make their objections known.”

But the screenshots of the lawyers’ WhatsApp group show the council’s deputy president, Robert Goot, was feeding back intelligence from the ABC about Lattouf’s position, and then encouraging people to continue the campaign.

“I understand she will be gone from morning radio from Friday,” he wrote at 7.46am on December 20, the day Lattouf was sacked. Stein responded: “Friday is 3 days away – too long.”

### **Ita Buttrose responds on the day Lattouf is sacked**

December 20, 2023



Goot confirmed to the group that, according to his information from the ABC, Lattouf’s “stance on Israel” was the reason. Asked if the members of the group should continue lobbying, Goot replied: “Keep writing.”

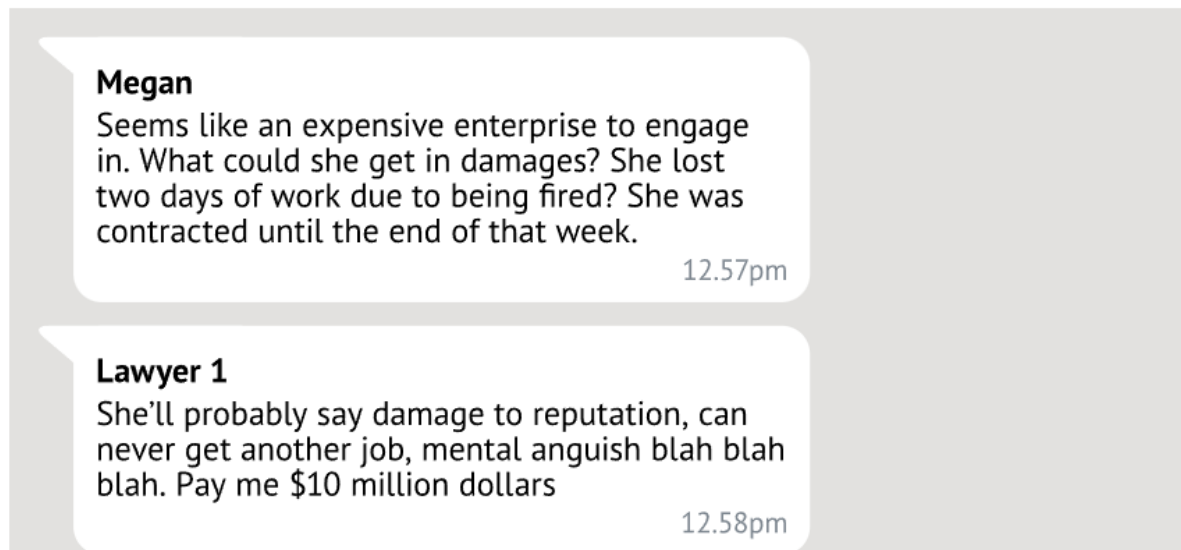
Asked about this conversation by this masthead, Goot acknowledged he had spoken to “someone at the ABC” but could not remember who. However, he said this did not constitute lobbying or co-ordinating a campaign. “Someone told me that they thought that Lattouf had overstepped the mark and would be disciplined, what does that have to do with my encouraging that course, or causing it to be brought about?” he said. “Alex [Ryvchin] has given you a bona fide response and my WhatsApp message doesn’t contradict it ... I wasn’t egging them on.”

On January 11, after it had become clear that Lattouf was taking legal action, a discussion followed in the Lawyers for Israel chat about what she hoped to achieve. One member quoted her lawyer, Bornstein, who is Jewish, saying she was after an apology, compensation and a commensurate role on air.

“Bornstein? Traiter! [sic]” responded another member, Melbourne family lawyer Deborah Wiener.

### **Antoinette Lattouf's legal claim**

January 11, 2024



Wiener told this masthead this was a “throw-away line in the heat of the moment”. Wiener also denied the purpose of the WhatsApp group was to campaign, saying it was to “share ideas and vent a bit”.

After this masthead approached a number of key members of the group, access was restricted. The group’s rules ask for “no screen shots of comments ... but assume whatever is said here is public”.

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Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240115180155/https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/secret-whatsapp-messages-show-co-ordinated-campaign-to-oust-antoinette-lattouf-from-abc-20240115-p5exdx.html>