

## 'Unprofessional behaviour': Crikey editor-in-chief heckles ABC journalists during Walkleys speech



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The editor-in-chief of independent publication *Crikey* has apologised for heckling the winners of the top gong at Australia's most coveted journalism awards during an incident which has infuriated the ABC and prompted the national broadcaster to make a formal complaint.

ABC journalists Anne Connolly, Stephanie Zillman and Ali Russell won the Gold Walkley at the annual Walkley Awards on Thursday night but during their speech Peter Fray shouted "what about *Crikey*" from his table at the International Convention Centre in Sydney.



ABC journalist Anne Connolly and Crikey editor-in-chief Peter Fray.

The intervention shocked the room. The ABC's director of news, analysis and investigations, Justin Stevens, wrote to Private Media chair Eric Beecher on Friday demanding an apology from Fray to the ABC reporters.

"I'd like to offer my sincere congratulations to the ABC's Anne Connolly, Stephanie Zillman and Ali Russell for their Gold Walkley and unreservedly apologise to them for my unprofessional behaviour at the award ceremony last night," Fray said when contacted by this masthead on Friday. In a public post on Twitter late on Friday, Fray said he had contacted Stevens, Connolly, Zillman and Russell to apologise.

Connolly, Zillman and Russell were recognised at the Walkley Awards for their investigation that examined the public guardian and trustee agencies controlling the lives of more than 50,000 Australians. The investigation, which was a year in the making, went to air in early March.

*Crikey* journalist Amber Schultz published a series of articles on the same matter in *Crikey* in September 2021 and March 2022 as part of an investigation called "Kidnapped by the State".

"My passion for the reporting of *Crikey*'s Amber Schultz on the same subject is zero excuse for my behaviour," Fray said on Friday. "I appreciate all of my journalistic colleagues, especially those working for the public broadcaster."



**Peter James Fray** @Pete... · 1h ...

Crikey wins gold Walkley for ABC  
[#walkley](#)

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**Peter James Fray** @P... · 57m ...

Dear ABC , you are a fraud



**Peter James Fray** · 3/11/2022 ...

Crikey editor-in-chief Peter Fray published a series of tweets to vent his frustration. SCREENSHOT

After the ABC journalists were awarded the top gong, an intoxicated Fray interrupted the speech to vent his frustration at Crikey's lack of recognition. He then fired off a series of tweets including "Crikey wins gold Walkley for ABC #walkley" and "Dear ABC, you are a fraud". The tweets were later deleted.

"My passion for what we do should not take away from the achievements of others," Fray said on Friday morning. "So, well done to the ABC and all last night's Walkley winners." He singled out former *Four Corners* executive producer Sally Neighbour, who won the outstanding contribution to journalism award.

In a post on Twitter, Schultz condemned her editor's behaviour and described the ABC's reporting as "phenomenal". "They jumped through significant legal hurdles to show victims faces amid gag orders. Peter's actions were unprofessional, and I hope the team accept his sincere apologies [sic]."

An ABC spokesperson declined to comment further on the matter but has contacted Beecher, who oversees *Crikey*. Beecher and Fray are former editors of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

This is not the first time a *Crikey* representative has been involved in an incident at the Walkley Awards. In 2006, its founder, Stephen Mayne, was prepared to present an award when journalist Glenn Milne went on stage and shoved him to the floor. Milne launched into a tirade of abuse, labelling Mayne an "absolute disgrace".

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