

Fox News must let Ofcom meet harassment victims, lawyer says

 [theguardian.com/media/2017/may/11/fox-news-must-let-ofcom-meet-harassment-victims-lawyer-says](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/may/11/fox-news-must-let-ofcom-meet-harassment-victims-lawyer-says)

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5/11/2017

Rupert Murdoch's [21st Century Fox](#) should waive gagging orders on victims of alleged racial and sexual harassment at Fox News so they can speak to the UK media watchdog, a lawyer representing the victims has said.

Douglas Wigdor talked about the allegations on Thursday with [Ofcom](#), which is considering whether to approve 21st Century Fox's acquisition of the 61% of Sky it does not already own. It must decide whether it believes 21st Century Fox, which is run by Rupert Murdoch and his sons Lachlan and James, is "fit and proper" to own Sky.

Wigdor said Ofcom could only properly consider the company's fitness by talking to the alleged victims, 21 of whom he is representing. He said the culture at "18th Century Fox" was scandalous.

The [Fox News chairman Roger Ailes](#) and [leading presenter Bill O'Reilly](#) have left the broadcaster as a result of the scandal.

In its latest financial results, released on Wednesday, 21st Century [Fox](#) revealed it had spent about \$45m (£35m) in relation to sexual harassment litigation, including settlements, in the nine months to the end of March.

The New York Times revealed last month that O'Reilly and 21st Century Fox, the parent company of Fox News, have paid out more than \$13m (£10.1m) to settle allegations from five women about inappropriate behaviour and sexual harassment. [More women have since come forward with allegations.](#)

Wigdor said on Thursday: "I told Ofcom that the only way for them to get the full truth of what the Murdoch media has done to its victims is for the company to remove the choke-hold clauses that bind victims to silence.

"These are Fox's 'hidden figures' – talented, brave people who fought for their rights but were threatened, bullied and permanently gagged ... When you have a company that acts more like 18th Century Fox rather than 21st Century Fox by breaking the laws against discrimination, harassment and retaliation, you have to ask yourself, is this the sort of company that you want controlling Sky Plc?"

The Murdochs dropped their previous attempt to buy Sky in 2011 because of the phone-hacking scandal at the News of the World.

Wendy Walsh, one of the women who has accused O'Reilly of sexual harassment, [met Ofcom](#) on Monday and called for Fox to be blocked from taking full control of Sky.

The lawyer Lisa Bloom, who is representing Walsh and three other women who claim sexual harassment or discrimination at 21st Century Fox, said Ofcom should rule that Murdoch would not be a "fit and proper" owner of Sky.

"It's phone hacking part two," she said. "As with phone hacking in the UK, this Murdoch-owned company has stood by senior staff they knew had acted illegally or immorally. By my count, [Fox News](#) currently faces lawsuits filed by 19 different employees alleging sexual and racial harassment and retaliation.

"We want the British regulator to understand the corporate governance failures at that company."

Fox said it had overhauled the management of Fox News, had made changes to its on screen line up as well and demonstrated a commitment to providing a workplace free of harassment.

The statement added: “Regarding Mr Wigdor’s promotion of his class action lawsuit, we take allegations of any form of discrimination extremely seriously and would note that his claims center on the unacceptable behavior of a single employee who, as was publicly disclosed by the company, was fired immediately, before any claim was filed.”

Ofcom, which is also examining the deal in terms of media plurality, is scheduled to make a recommendation to the government by 20 June.