

Lawyer Suing Fox News Slams Gag Orders in U.K. Regulator Meeting

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The Manhattan lawyer representing about two dozen people in harassment suits against Fox News slammed [21st Century Fox Inc.](#) in a meeting with U.K.'s media regulator, hoping to influence a review of [Rupert Murdoch's](#) \$15 billion bid to buy the rest of pay-TV provider [Sky Plc.](#)

In a meeting Thursday with Ofcom, which must decide whether the proposed deal would benefit the British public, attorney Douglas Wigdor criticized Fox's practice of forcing people with claims of racial bias or sexual discrimination to sign confidentiality agreements to keep them from going public.

"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 chokehold clauses that bind victims to silence," Wigdor said in an emailed statement after the meeting.

Fox's wide-ranging abuse scandal has erupted at just the wrong time for Murdoch, who has long desired Sky and whose last attempt to acquire it was torpedoed by a phone-hacking scandal at his top U.K. tabloid. Ofcom's deadline to complete its assessment has been pushed to June 20 from May 16 after Prime Minister Theresa May called a snap parliamentary election on June 8.

Civil-rights activists have already pressed Ofcom to consider how Fox executives dealt with harassment complaints from employees against former Fox News anchor Bill O'Reilly and ex-Fox News President Roger Ailes, both of whom resigned over the scandal. Bill Shine, the network's co-president, has also stepped down.

21st Century Fox has demonstrated its clear commitment to providing a safe and inclusive workplace, free of harassment and discrimination, the company said in an emailed statement.

Wigdor's 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," 21st Century Fox said.

"There have been fundamental changes to the channel's on-air talent and prime-time programming lineup," bringing Fox News closer in line with its commitment to a diverse workplace, the company said.

Los Angeles attorney Lisa Bloom also visited Ofcom this week with her client Wendy Walsh, one of the women who claimed O'Reilly sexually harassed her. Bloom and Walsh also said they planned to meet Mark Lewis, the lawyer who represented some of the highest-profile defendants in the U.K.'s phone-hacking scandal.

Earlier this week Wigdor added two more plaintiffs to his class-action lawsuit against Fox, including former accounts-receivable staffer Elizabeth Fernandez. She claims she was subjected to regular racial abuse by her boss who mocked her Hispanic background. And last week, a Fox News radio reporter claimed in a lawsuit that she was fired within 24 hours of emailing the company's independent investigator to complain about gender discrimination.

Ofcom must take into account Fox's corporate governance in deciding whether the public interest would be served with the Sky deal as well as assess Sky's fitness to hold a broadcasting license under a so-called fit and proper test following the purchase.