

The Directors
The Walkley Foundation
245 Chalmers Street
Redfern NSW 2016
By email: walkleys@walkleys.com

Dear Directors

Request for withdrawal of the 2021 Gold Walkley Award given to Samantha Maiden for the article “Open Secret; The Brittany Higgins story” – [news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au).

I am writing to express my concern about journalist Samantha Maiden’s retention of the 2021 Gold Walkley for her article about the Higgins rape allegations. I request this award be withdrawn following the settlement of a defamation action in relation to that article by Bruce Lehrmann.

Whilst the details remain confidential, Lehrmann states that he is “extremely happy” with the settlement whereby the publisher, now known as News Life Media, contributed to his legal costs. More importantly, [news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au) specifically notes that “it does not suggest that he was guilty of that charge” (rape).

This undermines the main thrust of Maiden’s article which is given over to simply repeating verbatim Brittany Higgins’ allegations that Lehrmann had raped her. There was no investigation into the veracity of the claims, many of which have been proved to be incorrect in the subsequent court case and the ongoing Board of Inquiry. The same can be said about the claims of a cover up and lack of appropriate response by the Minister and staff. Here again Maiden simply repeats the claims made by Higgins which have now been shown to be baseless.

An accusation of rape is a serious charge and whilst Maiden does note that it is alleged, there was no mention of the presumption of innocence. Such a claim is likely to prejudice any subsequent legal proceedings which breaches the Press Council guideline of Avoidance of Harm and Prejudice.

There was also no attempt to contact Lehrmann for comment or opportunity for a reply which breaches the Press Council requirement for Fairness and Balance.

The Board of Inquiry has heavily criticised the media generally for the deleterious effect of such speculative journalism on the proper administration of justice. Maiden’s article is a prime example of this failing and should not be celebrated as “Gold Standard” journalism but rather as something to avoid.

I was pleased to note that your organisation has [revoked](#) the Walkley Award for journalists involved in the defamation of former MP Andrew Lamming following his successful defamation action. I urge your organisation to take similar action with regard to Maiden’s award.

Please sign with full name and address

