

— Exclusive

Pratt denies she 'abdicated responsibility' to Waislitz

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Billionaire Visy heiress Heloise Pratt has vehemently rejected claims by her ex-husband Alex Waislitz that she failed to pay attention to the couple's business affairs, arguing that she had an army of assistants and advisers helping to manage her interests.

The latest legal salvo precedes a court hearing on Friday in the messy family dispute over the couple's \$1.5 billion private investment vehicle. Both sides are armed with a team of lawyers including prominent king's counsel Allan Myers for Ms Pratt and Jeremy Stoljar, SC for Mr Waislitz.





Alex Waislitz and Heloise Pratt are fighting in the Supreme Court of Victoria over the control of Thorney Investment. **Michaela Pollock**

Ms Pratt alleged in her case brought in the Supreme Court of Victoria in November that Mr Waislitz falsified board records and withheld information about Thorney Investment Group, and directed more than \$1 million to himself and his charity without her knowledge.

She alleges that her former husband's claim that the pair had an arrangement where he "was attending to these matters on her behalf" is not true.

Ms Pratt's allegations relate to the management of the former couple's jointly owned private vehicle known as Jamahjo, which controls Thorney Investment. In new court documents filed on Friday but released by the court only on Wednesday, Ms Pratt said the pair "did not at any relevant time have an understanding or arrangement" giving Mr Waislitz power to run Jamahjo.

"Heloise Pratt had at all material times assistants and advisers to assist her in carrying out her duties as a director of Jamahjo and who could be expected to assist her in responding to any request that she execute a document in connection with the administration of the trust," Ms Pratt's defence to Mr Waislitz's counterclaim states.



Visy heir Heloise Pratt and her new partner, Noiseworks lead singer Jon Stevens. **Eddie Jim**

But in his defence filed on Christmas Eve, Mr Waislitz claimed his ex-wife often failed to sign documents left for her at the couple's Toorak home, and had “abdicated her responsibilities [<https://www.afr.com/companies/manufacturing/waislitz-claims-ex-wife-pratt-abdicated-responsibilities-as-director-20241227-p5l0ue>] as a director” and had waived any right to require that decisions be made unanimously by the Jamahjo board.

Ms Pratt alleges that Mr Waislitz knew she had a team helping her and had previously sought her sign-off for certain documents.

This included, she alleges, Thorney Investment chief operating officer Peter Landos contacting Ms Pratt's executive assistant in August 2019 for her to sign a document relating to Thorney's purchase of regional news publisher Australian Community Media with Anthony Catalano.

Ms Pratt also alleges her former husband knew that she contended that the appointment of Ashley West as a director of Jamahjo in 2017 was invalid. Visy group counsel allegedly raised the matter in meetings with Thorney director Martin Casey between 2019 and 2022, she said.

Ms Pratt has claimed that Mr Waislitz and Mr West passed a resolution that resulted in \$1.1 million of dividends from Thorney flowing not to Jamahjo but to Waislitz Charitable Corporation and the businessman personally.

In November 2023, Mr Waislitz's lawyers claimed Mr West was appointed “to provide further check in terms of authorisation of bank transfers”.

“The bank transfers representation was false to the knowledge of Alexander Waislitz, or alternatively misleading,” Ms Pratt's claim said.

The pair have been fighting over who gets control of Thorney Investment, a fund manager founded in 1991 after Richard Pratt, Heloise's father, gave his future son-in-law a \$1.2 million parcel of Amcor shares. Within the decade, Mr Waislitz grew his portfolio to nearly \$300 million. He has now amassed a fortune worth almost \$1.5 billion.



Alex Waislitz in a black fedora with fiancée Rebekah Behbahani, at left, at the Australian Open men's final. **Arsineh Houspian**

Mr Waislitz and Ms Pratt have both moved on to new partners after splitting in 2015. Mr Waislitz went public with a relationship with pop star Rebekah Behbahani in 2018. They have a four-year-old daughter, Storm. Mr Waislitz and Ms Behbahani are also involved in a legal dispute with the latter's sister, Real Housewives of Melbourne star Venus Behbahani.

Ms Pratt began dating New Zealand singer Jon Stevens, lead singer of the rock band Noiseworks.

The stoush between Ms Pratt and Mr Waislitz had played out in private for months before Ms Pratt launched the explosive claim in the Supreme Court in November. Prior to this, the pair seemed to have maintained an amicable relationship. Ms Pratt greeted guests at Mr Waislitz's 60th birthday in 2018.

The dispute is not the only court case involving the Pratt family. In October, Paula Hitchcock – the daughter of Richard Pratt and his long-time mistress – was allowed by a court to challenge the billionaire family for her slice of the fortune [<https://www.afr.com/companies/manufacturing/richard-pratt-s-love-child-free-to-sue-family-for-slice-of-the-fortune-20241016-p5kinx>].

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