

Why would a Real Housewife of Auckland go to the parliament protest?

[By Alex Casey](#) Senior writer



The anti-mandate parliament protest has seen several high-profile New Zealanders voice their support. Alex Casey asks one former TV star about her motivations for making the trip.

Anne Batley-Burton is smiling in the sunshine, holding a glass of champagne, on the deck of her own boat in Auckland harbour. "Not sure what's happening with all that's going on," the caption below the photo begins, "BUT the most important thing is that I am making a trip to Wellington in support of the anti-mandate protestors!"

Batley-Burton, aka The Champagne Lady from The Real Housewives of Auckland, is the latest high-profile New Zealander to put her support behind the protest in Wellington. She follows in the footsteps of Sir Russell Coutts, The Masked Singer winner Jason Kerrison, and her fellow Real Housewives of Auckland star Gilda Kirkpatrick.

Why are the rich and famous flocking to parliament grounds like it's Live Aid? Why is The Champagne Lady appearing to set sail to Wellington from Soul Bar?

On Monday last week, soon after she'd made the Instagram post, Batley-Burton told me the photo she used to announce her support for the protests was actually an old one taken during the America's Cup, because she "didn't have one that was relevant to the protests". Batley-Burton said she is vaccinated herself, but doesn't agree with the mandates. "I've heard of people who have lost their jobs, I've heard of businesses that have gone under and collapsed," she says. "All these poor people in hospitality."

Speaking from her second home, Goose Creek in Huapai, north-west of Auckland – she divides her time between here and her house in Parnell – she said: "I know so many people that have had their families ripped apart, people who have lost their jobs, businesses that have gone under." Her motivation to visit Wellington is to hear the stories of "down-to-earth, decent everyday citizens" who have had their lives affected, she said.

She intended to interview people for Face TV, home of her series Keeping Up With Champagne Lady.

In the hospitality industry herself, Batley-Burton said she too has been “badly affected” by Covid-19 restrictions. “I was looking forward to all the Christmas business and people having functions, but my charity ball hasn’t been able to go ahead,” she said, referring to her annual Pussy Party fundraiser for the hundreds of stray cats she shelters in Goose Creek. “We are getting very few donations and are unable to do fundraisers, so it’s just a really difficult time.”

Indeed, just before she answered the phone, she had been picking up all her unworn evening wear that had fallen to the floor due to a faulty wardrobe rack. “By the time all the parties start again, they will probably all be out of fashion,” she lamented. “Terrible. I’m looking at all these beautiful sparkly dresses and wondering if I am ever going to get to wear them. Terrible.”

Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa, a digital communications researcher for Te Pūnaha Matatini, is not surprised to see more and more high-profile people throwing their names behind the protest. “Of course they are going to latch onto whatever is happening in front of the Beehive, because of the sheer centrality that the protests have in the national psyche,” he said. “It is leading all the media coverage, so why wouldn’t you want to be associated with it?”

I asked if Batley-Burton had any response to the online

criticism that, as a Real Housewives of Auckland star, she might be perceived as out of touch with the people worst affected by the pandemic. "People have these ideas in their head that because I'm reasonably well off, that I have an easy ride, but the only way I can do what I do for the cats is because I work hard," she said. "I'm scooping pussy poop everyday, I'm used to getting my hands dirty, so that's not really a problem for me."

Nonetheless, Batley-Burton did not intend to camp on her visit to the protest. "Oh god no," she laughed. "I've never been into camping, sorry. Definitely no camping, I don't think I've ever been camping in my life." She intended to wear a wide-brimmed hat, a sensible pair of wedges and a summery dress – "I won't wear the stilettos on the lawn."

Hattouwa's concern with how the protest is being presented on social media, through the unconventional channels of [mumfluencers](#) and reality TV stars, is that they can avoid some of the darker and more extreme goals that some protesters – including violent white supremacists – are trying to achieve. "There is a very, very dark side to this protest," he says. "It is the case in [Ottawa](#), it is the case in every other country where these are taking place."

Two days later, Batley-Burton spoke to me over the phone from Wellington. She'd spent a day at the protest and described the experience as "fabulous – like a jolly festival". Despite being nervous about entering on her own, and her

fellow Koru Club members warning her that she would have to “take her own armour”, Batley-Burton said she felt safe navigating the protest and interviewing people about their motivations.

“I met some really nice people who told their stories,” she said, having spoken to a barista, an engineer and a camera operator who all lost their jobs due to the mandates. I asked how she felt about the extremist views of some of the protesters, including bizarre conspiracy theories, misogyny, far-right white supremacist ideology and calls for the execution of politicians and media.

“Sadly with any sort of protest, you get these idiots who get in and cause a whole lot of rubbish,” she said. “I was very lucky, I didn’t come across anybody like that.” Still, she mentioned meeting a man who had an “interesting” theory about [frequencies being emitted towards protesters](#) from the Beehive – “I haven’t had a chance to look that up.”

A caravan at the Wellington protests. Photo: Stewart Sowman-Lund

Before she left for Wellington, Batley-Burton said she was warned by fellow Housewives star Louise Wallace that attending the protest was a bad idea. “She was concerned it would be bad for my brand, god, but it’s not actually about me, it’s supposed to be about the people,” said Batley-Burton. On arrival, she bumped into fellow Housewives star Gilda Kirkpatrick, who took her on an on-camera tour around the site that afternoon. “It was a mini reunion, I

suppose.”

Hattouwa said he supports the right for people to protest in a democracy, but remained concerned about the way the protest is being presented through certain social media channels. “I’ve gone on the record as saying that I think the mandates should be debated and argued and discussed in a democratic society,” he said, “but one of the harms is that followers are going to be exposed to something which they might not fully understand.”

After a busy afternoon at the protest and an evening of champagne and Uber Eats in her hotel room, Batley-Burton said she had learned “there’s a huge amount of sadness and despair out there”. As we chatted, she was perusing the beauty aisles of high-end department store David Jones for lipstick before heading home. “Never miss a chance to go to David Jones,” she laughed. “They always have things you can’t get in Auckland.”