

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

WEARING OF CAMPAIGN MATERIAL IN THE SENATE

Earlier this evening, during debate on the second reading of the Minerals Resource Rent Tax Repeal and Other Measures Bill 2013 [No. 2], Senator Bernardi, who was in the chair, undertook to refer to me a point of order raised about a garment being worn by Senator Ian Macdonald. The garment was bright orange in colour and had a small slogan above the left-hand breast area which read "Australians for Coal".

It is very well established by rulings of past Presidents, including President Calvert in 2003, that it is not in order to wear in the chamber T-shirts or other clothing bearing slogans. I understand from senators speaking to the point of order that the garments had been distributed to senators by the Minerals Council of Australia which is behind the Australians for Coal campaign. I understand that the garments bear senators' names on the right-hand breast area.

The basis of these rulings is that the wearing of such garments would allow senators to participate in debate in a non-verbal way, other than by receiving the call from the chair and participating in accordance with the normal rules of the Senate. It would be highly undesirable to have debate in the Senate reduced to the level of displaying such material and I confirm that the wearing of such garments in the Senate is disorderly, regardless of the size of the slogan on the garment.

In a related incident, I understand that Senator Ludlam was called to order by the Chair for sitting near Senator Macdonald – so as to be in range of photographers taking shots of the senator with the call – and displaying a sign on a piece of paper. This is disorderly on the same basis. Holding up newspapers or placards or displaying items such as badges with slogans is also disorderly and has been ruled as such by Presidents Sibraa and Reid on numerous occasions. Such practices are disruptive of orderly debate by allowing senators to intervene in ways other than by receiving the call from the Chair.

I understand that senators have strong views on many issues, but debate in the Senate is subject to simple and reasonable rules to maintain order. Senators will be called to order in accordance with these rules.