

Hackles rise as some stay seated

COUNCIL

by Imran Ali

Councillor Warwick Syers caused a stir at the Whangarei District Council meeting by attacking ratepayers for not rising when mayor Stan Semenoff walked in.

His outbursts before Wednesday's meeting caught many, including Mr Semenoff, by surprise.

Mr Syers comments were directed at regular attendees Warren Slater, his wife Pat, JP Owen Lewis, Wayne Deeming and Jeremy Busck, who have refused to rise for the First Citizen since mid-2008.

Mr Syers said the protocol at council meetings was similar to Parliament or courts where people rose for those controlling proceedings.

He said those who rise do so not for Mr Semenoff personally, but for the position he holds.

"If people want to enjoy the hospitality, they should respect protocol and I hope they reflect on what I've just said," Mr Syers said.

"If they can't abide by the protocol, they should join the meeting after prayer," Mr Syers said.

Mr Semenoff said he was surprised by the comments before opening the meeting.

Mr Syers' comments were strongly rebutted by those on the receiving end.

Mr Slater said they stopped rising for the mayor after they say he "showed disrespect" by turning his back on Councillor Sheryl Mai at the Community Enterprises meeting on July 9, 2008.

He said Mr Semenoff refused to apologise for his behaviour.

"We sincerely respect the office of the mayor . . ." Mr Slater said.

"We don't get abusive and there's no rule that says people have to stand up when the Mayor comes in."

Mr Deeming echoed similar sentiments. "Syers raised the issue in the meeting where we had no right of reply. Why highlight people protesting?"

He said Mr Semenoff showed no respect to ratepayers by calling them innate, abject whingers and insipid, aimless windbags last year.

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