


Order of Australia: Mike Carlton, Bettina Arndt keep awards as criminality set as benchmark

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Australians will only be stripped of their gongs if they are found to have broken the law or are subject to official adverse findings, the Order of Australia Council has ruled.

The council on Friday issued a statement explaining its decisions not to strip shock jock Mike Carlton and social commentator Bettina Arndt of their awards, after both were roundly condemned for “offensive” public comments.

Carlton’s Member of the Order of Australia in this year’s Queen’s birthday honours prompted outrage from Liberal MPs, who cited his history of attacking critics in torrid terms, such as “Jewish bigot”.

Last year, Carlton hit a new low, tweeting his mystification as to why Q&A panellist Jimmy Barnes did not “leap from his seat and strangle” Liberal MP Nicolle Flint.

The Australia Day AM for Arndt also created a furore, coming not long after the author was forced to apologise for suggesting Nicolaas Bester, a Tasmanian teacher who repeatedly abused a 15-year-old girl, had been “persecuted” by feminists.

Some schoolgirls, Arndt had further claimed, were “sexually provocative” towards their male teachers.

However, Council for the Order of Australia chairman Shane Stone said calls for both to be stripped of their awards had been considered and a decision was taken not to make such a recommendation to the Governor-General.

“In the council’s view, as a general principle, for the Order to be brought into disrepute a conviction, penalty or adverse finding must have occurred,” Mr Stone said.

“In essence, the council recognises that a finding under the law prescribes the behaviours, and expressions, which are abhorrent to society and therefore uses such findings as the threshold for cancellation.

“In a system that recognises the service of hundreds of people each year, it is inevitable that each list will include some people who others believe should not be recognised.

“Unanimous community approval is not a criteria.”

Mr Stone said those nominated for awards were judged on the endeavours for which they were nominated, not their “political leanings, social views or religious convictions”.

“The council’s recommendations are not an endorsement of the political, religious or social views of recipients, nor is conferral of an honour an endorsement of the personally held beliefs of recipients,” he said.

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