

A club where debate is strictly tongue in cheek



Members of the Reclaim the Pants club get together for a few beers and to indulge in some trivial banter.

Picture: SHANNON MORRIS

Men make great strides in small talk

By MELISSA MARINO

In a cosy pub in North Fitzroy, Mr Apricot and Mr Mauve are in deep conversation. Around them are Mr Cerise, Mr Fawn and Mr Terracotta, equally absorbed. Mr Cream, Mr Charcoal and Mr Shiraz are at the bar.

In working hours these men go by their given names. They are barristers and plumbers, business owners and broadcasters.

They usually have important things to say.

But tonight, they're talking crap.

They are all members of Reclaim the Pants — a men's group that meets once a month for a beer, a parmigiana and inconsequential conversation.

Getting together to chat is some-

thing women have done successfully for years, they say. Now, the men are relishing a chance to meet and talk purely for the fun of it.

"All talk and no action" is one of the mottos of the group that pretends to take itself seriously but doesn't. There is certainly no power talk here.

"It's just five hours of uninterrupted crap talking," says founder Stuart McArthur. "The four topics of conversation, pretty much exclusively, are conspiracy theories, ridiculous money-making schemes, sport and whether Benny Hill was funnier than the Three Stooges."

The group has grown rapidly, through a website and a neighbourhood of local men who had enviously eyed their wives and

partners, who seemed to have ample opportunities to meet and talk.

Mr McArthur founded the group in March last year with 10 members. He has just signed up number 69. Usually between 35 and 40 members of the group turn up for any one session. Most are in their 40s and live locally, but one lives in Norway.

Mr McArthur says while women will often meet just for lunch, men always need a pretext, organising gatherings around sports or committee meetings. He says Reclaim the Pants' popularity shows that men like to meet without diversions, expectations or responsibilities, to simply "go out and talk crap".

At Reclaim the Pants, all men

wear badges with a swatch of colour from a local paint shop and refer to each other by their colour-inspired alter egos — a simultaneous send-up of *Reservoir Dogs* and the earnest men's movements of the 1970s and 1980s when, Mr McArthur says, "finding your inner female" was popular.

"In *Reservoir Dogs* all the people are Mr Blue, Mr Brown — all serious," says Mr McArthur. "We're Mr Avocado and Mr Magenta."

Mr McArthur says the men encounter little dissent from their partners, who are in on the joke. Anyway, he says, women are always welcome "as long as they sit in a corner with bunny ears and a little pom-pom and they don't say anything".