

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO MEMBERS

RE: PROPOSED NOTICE OF MOTION BY
SENATOR BOB BROWN

SCHEDULED FOR:
MONDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2007

<input type="checkbox"/> Priority A (date.....)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reply by Rudbrook
<input type="checkbox"/> Priority B	<input type="checkbox"/> Reply by Ellison
<input type="checkbox"/> Priority C	<input type="checkbox"/> Brief required
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Reply by COS
RECEIVED 26 FEB 2007	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reply by AGD	Action Area <i>Pub</i>
	Init <i>cc</i>
	Date <i>26/2/07</i>

Submitted on behalf of the
Exclusive Brethren Christian Fellowship

Dated: 23 February 2007

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1. (Colour Code White) Letter to all Members
2. (Colour Code Green) Copy of 7 February 2007 Hansard Notice of Motion
3. (Colour Code Sand) The Truth About the Exclusive Brethren
4. (Colour Code Blue) The Brethren Church in Australian Politics
5. (Colour Code Pink) The Facts About Brethren Schools

February 23rd, 2007

The Hon P. M. Ruddock
Attorney General
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Ruddock

We write in an effort to improve understanding of the Exclusive Brethren Fellowship.

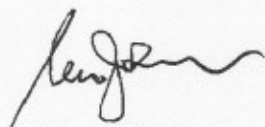
There have been some misleading media reports in recent months about the beliefs and activities of our Church, a Christian organisation with some 13,000 members in Australia.

The Brethren Fellowship has developed the enclosed papers: one provides a brief overview of our Church; one is a factual account of the involvement of Brethren members in Australian politics; and one is about Brethren schools.

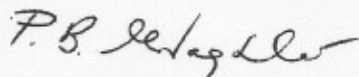
We will be visiting Parliament House on Wednesday and Thursday this week and have arranged some meetings with MPs and Senators.

We would be pleased to meet with you so we can further explain our Church.

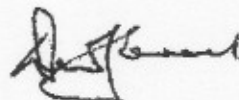
If you require any further information or would like to arrange a meeting, please contact us on one of the numbers below.



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(M) 0438 481 332



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BRETHREN
Christian Fellowship

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29 November 2006

Senator John Watson

Chairman Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2006 concerning the Social Security (Public Interest Certificate Guidelines) (DEWR) Determination 2006 (the Guidelines).

I trust the following information addresses the Committee's concerns it has raised in respect of the Guidelines.

Background

Personal information about individuals is obtained by my Department in relation to pensions, benefits and payments under the Social Security Act 1991 (the Social Security Act) and the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 (the Administration Act). Information of this sort falls within the definition of protected information in section 23 of the Social Security Act.

Prior to disclosure of protected information under subparagraph 208(1)(a) of the Administration Act, the Secretary must certify it is in the public interest for the information to be disclosed. Once the information has been disclosed pursuant to certification, the information may only be subsequently disclosed if it is in accordance with the social security law.

The Guidelines themselves do not authorise disclosure but provide parameters for when the Secretary can certify that disclosure is in the public interest.

Certification may be given if the person to whom the information will be disclosed has sufficient interest in the information and it is for one of the purposes contained in the Guidelines. A person has sufficient interest if in relation to the disclosure he or she has a genuine and legitimate interest in the information or the person is a Minister.

Minister is defined in the Guidelines and means the Prime Minister and a Minister administering the policy or service delivery of the social security law.

The underlying objective of the amendments to the Guidelines is to put beyond doubt the ability of the Secretary, where appropriate, to disclose protected information to Ministers with responsibility for social security matters to ensure they are properly briefed on such matters. I consider proper briefing of Ministers to be critical to discharging their responsibilities in the public interest.

Question 1

In response to the Committee's first question, if a certificate has authorised the disclosure of protected information to brief the Minister, the information could only be subsequently disclosed in accordance with the social security law.

Question 2

The information that is disclosed under subparagraph 208(1)(a) is 'protected information' as defined in the Social Security Act. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner, established under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) (the Privacy Act), has responsibility for the protection of individuals' personal information in accordance with the Privacy Act. The Privacy Commissioner, however, does not have responsibility for the confidentiality provisions in the social security law and ac-

cordingly the Privacy Commissioner's views were not sought in amending the Guidelines.

Thank you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Andrews

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

Presentation

Senator Bob Brown to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following matter be referred to the Community Affairs Committee for inquiry and report by 12 June 2007:

The role of the Exclusive Brethren, including its leadership, in:

- (a) breaching Australian Family Court agreements and denying access by ex-Brethren parents to their children;
- (b) ex-communicating family members;
- (c) prohibiting children from their Australian right to a university education;
- (d) banning unions from Exclusive Brethren workplaces;
- (e) discriminating against women in Australia;
- (f) the use of public monies; and
- (g) any related matters.

Senator Nettle to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate:

- (a) notes the rising tide of public protest in support of a fair go for Mr David Hicks who has been detained for 1 890 days; and
- (b) calls on the Government to return Mr Hicks to Australia to face justice.

Senator Milne to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

- (a) notes:
 - (i) that the Marrickville Council in Sydney has adopted the Oil Depletion Protocol which seeks to address the impact of peak oil by steadily reducing oil usage, and
 - (ii) the council will reduce its oil usage by 3 per cent per year; and
- (b) calls on the Government:
 - (i) to adopt the Oil Depletion Protocol to reduce Australia's dependence on oil and ensure an orderly restructure of the economy and society for the post-oil era, and
 - (ii) encourage state and local governments to adopt the protocol and reduce oil usage.

Senator Nettle to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

- (a) notes that:
 - (i) the internationally significant Ramsar-listed wetlands, the Macquarie Marshes in New South Wales are dying because of a lack of water,
 - (ii) water for cotton irrigation upstream on the Macquarie River has been over-allocated and has

The truth about the Exclusive Brethren

What this booklet is about

Over the last few months, and particularly in recent weeks, there has been much media coverage of a number of issues related to the Brethren Church. Almost without exception, the reports and stories have been hostile. In every case they have included material that was off beam – factually incorrect, exaggerated, speculative or just plain unfair. Brethren members have been harassed and material has been published in various forums that has expressed hatred and ridicule for our Church. This booklet is an attempt to offer factual information about who we are, how we live and what we believe.

Who are the Exclusive Brethren?

The Brethren Church commenced 180 years ago through John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) formerly a clergyman of the Church of Ireland. He with others established a fellowship based on strict observance of Christian beliefs and way of life as set out in the Holy Scriptures.

Today there are about 13,000 Brethren members in Australia and 43,000 worldwide. The Church does not actively recruit members. Occasionally, not often, members do leave the fellowship but, contrary to media reports, only a very small number are on bad terms with the Church.

The principle of separation

The Brethren believe that separation is a vital part of our loyalty to Christ and we derive this belief from the scriptures. Separation principally occurs in matters of fellowship and includes social activities such as eating and drinking, membership of societies and entertainment. Our fellowship in such activities is reserved for Brethren. Social activities must be shared with those who participate in Holy Communion according to scriptural teaching.

We believe that the principle of separation helps us in our endeavour to live in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, however, we freely recognise that we live in a wider community, and as very active participants live, work and lead lives dispersed throughout Australian society.

We do not live in isolation or in secrecy. Our homes are situated amongst the homes of other Australians. We have substantial day-to-day dealings with non-Brethren in our businesses, and over half our employees are non-Brethren. We deal almost exclusively with non-Brethren customers.

All teachers employed at Brethren schools are non-Brethren. Goods and services are purchased from businesses owned and operated by non-Brethren. Our legal, audit and other advisers include non-Brethren.

Separation and family breakdown

Our principle of separation is said by some people to be responsible for family breakdowns. We do not believe this to be a statement of truth.

The divorce and separation rate among Brethren members is less than one-twentieth of the national rate, reflecting our strong emphasis on marriage for life and the maintenance of the family unit. There is always paramount concern for the children of broken marriages, and despite claims that the Church denies lapsed members contact with their children, this is not so. Whilst those responsible seek to ensure that Brethren children grow up according to scriptural teaching, our members are committed to obey court orders and comply with such orders, as the Church expects of them.

The Brethren lifestyle

The Brethren lead a lifestyle that is unfamiliar to the general community, but it is one based on Christian teachings and is fully compliant with Australian laws. We believe that the whole of our life should be a shining witness to the grace and mercy of God.

In conducting our daily lives, we place a lot of emphasis on hard work, minimising debt, not taking risks, caring for families and communities and respecting government. We do not work on a Saturday or a Sunday except in emergencies.

On moral issues, we are conservative in our beliefs. We do not seek to interfere with how other people lead their lives, rather we teach respect for the general community and seek to live at peace with the public.

We are, however, strongly opposed to the teaching of homosexual lifestyles in schools and the concept of gay marriage.

The Brethren lifestyle is one of continuous giving to those in need of help. This includes assisting people in the Brethren fellowship as well as charitable giving. We assist other Church members to establish businesses and provide employment to Brethren members, amongst whom there is virtually no unemployment.

Our lifestyles are quite simple compared to those of average Australians. We do not own radios and television or watch movies nor attend public cinemas and theatre. We do not eat in restaurants unless in emergencies, nor do we gamble, own holiday houses, pleasure craft, or invest on the share market.

Much of the life of Brethren members is taken up in the practice of fellowship with other members including attending bible studies and scripture sermons on a daily basis.

Brethren and the law

Brethren hold, as a principle, the deepest respect for the law, and teach obedience to the law and integrity in personal and business matters. The Church meets Federal, State and Territory law obligations.

Both sides of politics in Australia have for many decades acknowledged that the Brethren hold a genuine conscientious objection against joining

associations and this has been recognised in various State and Federal laws. Other minority religious groups are also covered by these exemptions.

While Brethren members served in the armed forces in the World Wars I and II, and also in Korea and Vietnam, they sought conscientious exemption from bearing arms but undertook many other tasks - such as medical duties - that were assigned to them and this often involved serving in the front line.

Political involvement

The Brethren Church does not participate in politics and members pray for governments regardless of which political party is in office. Our members abstain from voting on conscientious grounds but individual members are free to support causes or principles in which they believe.

We believe, as citizens, that we should be able to warn the public of serious challenges to the moral fabric of society, including through advertisements, and we do not see this as a contradiction with not voting. We also believe it is the democratic right of every person to be able to make representation to government.

Individual Brethren members, on their own initiative, have occasionally placed advertisements in newspapers and produced leaflets because of their concern about proposed policies with which they strongly disagree.

Brethren schools

The Brethren run schools for primary and secondary students in every State of Australia in capital cities and regional centres. In total over 2,000 students attend these schools.

These schools receive government funding under the same formula as all non-government schools. The schools are also vigorously supported by the generosity of Brethren members so that students from lower socio-economic households are subsidised. No funds, either by loan or gift, are provided by

the Brethren Church and school management is completely separate from the Church.

To receive government funding, Brethren schools must meet all Federal and State requirements, including regular inspections and audits in the same way as all other non-government schools. Teachers deliver the curriculum as set out by the Office of the Board of Studies. Educational programs lead onto Year 12 certificates and current student academic performance is at or above State average levels.

Nationally recognised vocational education and training courses are provided to senior students. Many students pursue further education through tertiary study, vocational training, trade courses and other business disciplines.

All teachers, and all Brethren schools, are properly registered and accredited by the appropriate State body and teachers are not members of the Church. Modern teaching aids, including computers and DVDs, are used and students undertake excursions and engage in a range of sporting and physical activities.

We respect and promote education but prefer learning institutions other than university. Even the government precludes access to university for less able students. Brethren endeavor to provide a secure future for young people of all capabilities.

Meeting rooms

There are approved church meeting rooms throughout Australia. They are dedicated to worship and are used for prayer, bible study and gospel sermons. Meeting rooms are generally closed after the starting time of church services for security reasons. The rooms are used frequently because we believe that Christians are in constant need of communion with Christ to enable us to live in accord with the word of God. Keeping near to and having direct links with the Trinity is spoken of in every Brethren meeting.

Well disposed members of the public are welcome to enquire of Brethren regarding attendance at meetings subject to an acceptable Church dress code and an undertaking to respect and not interfere or disrupt the church services.

Meetings are held for the purpose of studying the Holy Scriptures. There are no hierarchies or clerical orders in the Brethren Church. All members are encouraged to participate actively in meetings.

Further information

Visit the website www.theexclusivebrethren.com or contact:

R.M. Garrett, P.O. Box 646 Pascoe Vale Vic 3044

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S.W. Kirkpatrick, P.O. Box 815 Bulimba Qld 4171

G.J. Lewis, P.O. Box 205 Moonah Tas 7009

P.B. McNaughton, P.O. Box 4 West Ryde NSW 1685

D.W. Stewart, P.O. Box 144 Kellyville NSW 2155

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THE BRETHREN CHURCH IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

1. The Church's Approach To Politics

For nearly a century Australian law has permitted citizens with a conscientious objection to abstain from voting. Brethren, along with other minorities, have taken advantage of this.

Brethren's conscience is spiritually based. The apostle Paul says in Romans there is no power (government) but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. There are many old and new testament references to God being over the governments of men. Whilst Brethren do not vote, no one has been excommunicated for voting.

The Brethren Church does not participate in politics. Politics are not a subject of discussion in church meetings. Government, as of God, is prayed for at every occasion, regardless of political colour. All authorities are prayed for; the judiciary, police and armed forces. This is for the nation to lead a quiet and tranquil life.

The Church strongly believes that individuals have the right to express views on matters that they find contradict scriptural teaching or conflict with Christian principles. Australian churches have long exercised their right to be vocal on political, social and moral issues concerning them.

Any activities undertaken by individuals are on their own behalf and not on behalf of the church. No financial help is given by the Church to such individuals, either by loan or gift. Because of the constant study of the Holy Scriptures it is not surprising that Brethren members in widely separate geographical regions have the same concerns over public issues.

Brethren members should have no lesser right than other Australian citizens to express their views and be able to warn the public of serious challenges to the moral fabric of society.

2. Political Issues Concerning Brethren

2.1. Expressions Of Political Viewpoint

Over the years Brethren in Australia have maintained good relationships with many Parliamentarians. We have appreciated political positions such as the ALP's strong defence of minority rights and the Coalition's stance on moral issues.

At times when Brethren perceive a crisis in public affairs, church elders may communicate with various assemblies and urge prayer about the situation. These letters are not a 'call to arms' as has been claimed but simply a call to prayer.

Brethren also make submissions to Crown Ministers and government enquiries on matters of concern to them. Topics covered in recent submissions range from water resource management to same-sex marriage.

2.2. Exemptions From Participation

Both sides of politics in Australia have recognised for decades that the Brethren hold a genuine conscientious objection to joining associations and voting and this has been acknowledged in various state and federal laws. Other minority groups are also covered by these exemptions.

The reference to an 'Asian threat' in the letter was in the context of defence policy where the authors assert the need to maintain strong links with the UK and USA in the face of growing terrorism in Australia's area.

2.7 Homosexuality And Prostitution

Brethren are bound by Holy Scripture on moral issues such as homosexuality and prostitution. We do not attempt to interfere with how other people lead their lives. We are, however, strongly opposed to the teaching of homosexual life styles in the schools and legislation for gay marriage.

3. Information About The Brethren Church

The Brethren Church commenced 180 years ago through John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) formerly a clergyman in the Church of Ireland. He with others established a fellowship based on strict observance of Christian beliefs and way of life, as set out in the Holy Scriptures.

Today there are about 13,000 Brethren members in Australia and 43,000 worldwide. The Church does not actively recruit members. Occasionally, not often, members do leave the fellowship, but, contrary to media reports, only a very small number are on bad terms with the Church.

For further information ask the booklet entitled "The Truth About The Exclusive Brethren" or visit the website www.theexclusivebrethren.com.

The facts about Brethren schools

1. Brethren schools

Schools are run for primary and secondary students in every State of Australia: in capital cities and regional centres. In 2006, there were 36 Brethren campuses throughout Australia. In total, about 1,600 students attend these schools.

Despite the reality that Brethren schools are managed and regulated in accordance with Federal and State legislation, it has been suggested in the media and elsewhere that the Brethren have sought and received special treatment for these schools. This paper addresses misconceptions that have arisen as a result of these reports.

Brethren schools are established for the same reasons as other schools affiliated with religious groups. Brethren parents, like parents of other religions, are keen to see their children taught the government-endorsed curriculum in an environment that is consistent with their religious beliefs and lifestyles.

Brethren schools are subject to the same rules as all other government-funded independent schools.

2. Specific issues

2.1 Funding

On 29 January, 2007, A Current Affair asserted that "Australian taxpayers are pumping millions of dollars into exclusive schools set up for Brethren children only". This is no more true of Brethren schools than it is of Catholic, Anglican, Jewish or Muslim schools.

Brethren schools receive recurrent general government funding for operating expenses. This funding is less than the cost of teachers' salaries and considerably less than the cost of educating students in government run schools.

Government funding covers less than 50 percent of all operating costs and the considerable shortfall is made up by contributions from parents and friends. In addition, all capital expenditure is financed by parents. No funds, either by loan or gift, are received from the Brethren Church.

To secure funding, Brethren schools must meet all the requirements of both Federal and State governments, the same as any school that receives funding.

For instance, Meadowbank Education Trust (MET) School is a multi-campus school registered and accredited by the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Office of the Board of Studies.

In 2005, each MET School campus was inspected by the Office of the Board of Studies as part of the renewal of registration and accreditation for Years 7 – 10 and initial registration and accreditation for Years 11 – 12. The maximum registration/accreditation period was granted in each case.

In 2006, all MET School campuses underwent Registration and Accreditation Inspections with the Office of the Board of Studies as part of the renewal of registration for Years 11 – 12 and registration for Years 5 – 6 and initial registration for Years 3 – 4. The maximum registration/accreditation period was granted in each case. 2.2 Teachers Accreditation

All teachers are qualified and university-trained, and all are non-Brethren.

All teachers meet the relevant state authority requirements and deliver curriculums as set out by those bodies.

At the MET School in NSW, for example, the School and professional teaching staff have worked closely with the Office of the Board of Studies to ensure that the teaching and learning programmes at the school comply with the syllabus requirements.

The teaching programmes, student work samples and assessment records are subject to the rigorous inspection process undertaken by the NSW Office of the Board of Studies during their regular inspections.

2.3 Biblical Studies

Apart from the accredited curriculum, additional studies taught in Brethren schools are Current Affairs and Bible Studies. The purpose of these subjects is to engage the students with world events and the scriptures.

2.4 Computers

Modern teaching aids include computers and DVDs. Access to the internet through the Australian Independent Schools Association server is being established. This will make available a vast range of educational research, including real time connection to such events as NASA space work, nuclear experiments and so forth.

Brethren schools are committed to meet the requirements of state education authorities' syllabuses as they become mandatory. It is their aim that all students become computer literate.

2.5 Curriculum

The Schools do not have, nor have they sought to obtain, approval for modification of the curriculum at any level in relation to Brethren schools. Students undertake excursions and engage in a range of sporting and physical activities.

In NSW in 2006, Brethren HSC students completed a pattern of study that included the following courses: Agriculture, Business Studies, English (Standard) 2 unit, Food Technology, Geography, General Mathematics, Mathematics, Modern History, Senior Science, German Beginners, Hospitality Examination 2 unit.

Brethren schools teach the theory of evolution where it is required by the science syllabus.

Students participate in state-wide standardised testing procedures. Mean student academic performance is recorded to be generally at or above state mean levels.

Nationally recognised vocational education and training courses are provided to senior students. Many students pursue further education through tertiary (except university) study, vocational training, trade course and other business disciplines.

2.6 Ownership

No funds, either by loan or gift, are provided by the Brethren Church and school management is completely separate from the Church.

A Trust exists for each school campus, with Directors selected from the school community. This is, and has always been, regarded as an honorary position by Brethren persons. Funds received from school fees, government recurrent general funding, and fundraising, are used to pay teachers salaries and other operating expenses.

End-of-year financial statements are prepared and audited prior to lodgement of annual returns with the Federal Department of Education.

No one person can exercise control, directly or indirectly, over funds held by the Trusts.

2.7 Sprinter Tyres

Channel 7's *Today Tonight* reported that: "Sprinter Tyres ... operates in four Australian states, but behind the businesses are private schools, run by religious cult, the Exclusive Brethren".

Sprinter Tyres is a legitimate business established by individual Brethren, and its profits are retained and distributed for charitable purposes including the advancement of religion, relief of poverty and education. No funds have been given to Brethren schools by Sprinter Tyres.

In December 2006, the federal Education Minister, Julie Bishop, said that "to date all Brethren schools in receipt of Australian Government funding have met the conditions". These include requirements they be not-for-profit.

3. Information about the Brethren Church

The Exclusive Brethren Church is a spiritual fellowship that was begun nearly 200 years ago by people who left the Anglican Church. Brethren beliefs are derived directly from the Scriptures and Christian principles are adhered to rigorously. There are about 13,000 Brethren members in Australia and 43,000 worldwide. The Church does not actively recruit members. Brethren members believe that separation helps them live in accordance with Biblical teachings.