



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

30 April 2008

Mr Peter Flinn


Dear Mr Flinn

The Prime Minister has asked me to acknowledge and respond to your letter dated 25 February 2008 written for and on behalf of 33 ex-members of the Exclusive Brethren.

I acknowledge, in particular, the moving personal accounts contained in the thirteen 'life stories' appended to the letter.

The Prime Minister does not resile from the views he expressed last year about the Exclusive Brethren. In particular, the Prime Minister remains concerned about the reported imposition of doctrines that weaken family bonds. He also remains concerned about reported doctrines that prevent children accessing online learning tools.

I note your observations on the role played by Exclusive Brethren members in recent Australian election campaigns. The Government is committed to enhancing transparency in our electoral system and has recently announced reforms related to the disclosure and sources of donations. A Green Paper on electoral reform will be released for comment later this year.

While appreciating your deeply held concerns, the Prime Minister cannot agree to your request for a wide-ranging inquiry into the Exclusive Brethren. The Government believes that such an inquiry could unreasonably interfere with the capacity of members of the Exclusive Brethren to practise their faith freely and openly.

Religious observance should not be regarded as a shield behind which breaches of the law can be hidden. Any alleged breaches of the law by members of the Exclusive Brethren, or any other member of the community, should be brought to the attention of appropriate agencies for investigation.

Thank you for writing to the Prime Minister about this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Epstein', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Epstein
Chief of Staff