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The Big Answer

Should Australia increase its refugee intake?

Yes(38.5%)

No(61.5%)

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Brethren ad probe

[Jai Bednall](#)

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AN ADELAIDE member of a secretive religious sect, known as the Exclusive Brethren, has been a political advertisement being considered by the Australian Federal Police.

The advertisement, which attacked the Greens Party before the 2004 Federal Election, was referred to by the Australian Electoral Commission. The AEC had been investigating whether payment for this advertisement interstate had been properly disclosed, a requirement under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. A Messenger Newspapers investigation has learned Adelaide businessman Warwick Joyce, a senior member of the Exclusive Brethren, was involved in the anti-Greens advertisement and 10 others in Adelaide that supported the Party before the 2004 Federal Election.

Mr Joyce booked advertisements to appear in all Messenger Newspapers on October 6, 2004. All 11 ads urged the re-election of Prime Minister John Howard.

The involvement of the 53-year-old Netherby man, who runs a Richmond-based machinery wholesale company and also a director of an Exclusive Brethren school at St Marys, has not previously been disclosed. When contacted about the ads last week, Mr Joyce said he had acted on his own and stressed "the Brethren has nothing to do with this". When he was then asked why these advertisements were "authorised" by another Exclusive Brethren member who runs a school in Victoria, he said "that's a good question" and asked for further questions to be put to him. Mr Joyce failed to respond to a series of questions faxed to his home address, and did not return Messenger Newspapers before presstime. The AEC was unaware last week of the involvement of Mr Joyce when contacted by Messenger Newspapers.

Advertising by the Exclusive Brethren originally was brought to the AEC's attention by Greens leader Senator Bob Brown, in September 2005, after he found pamphlets criticising his party were circulated in Tasmania before the election.

Mr Brown questioned whether the full expenditure for the pamphlets, and a number of political advertisements in several NSW, Tasmanian and South Australian newspapers, had been disclosed to the AEC. A 12-month investigation into Mr Brown's claims concluded last year that all of the advertisements and pamphlets as well as the Exclusive Brethren were paid for and disclosed by a Sydney company, Willmac Enterprises. However, the AEC has since handed the case over to the AFP.

This week Mr Brown said voters deserved to know who was behind the advertisements. He criticised the investigation saying: "They took too long to take the matter seriously". Mr Brown said he hoped the AFP would be more thorough.

The Exclusive Brethren continually has said the advertisements were not part of an organised campaign but were either booked or authorised by senior Exclusive Brethren members.

With a population of just 43,000 Australia-wide, the Exclusive Brethren is a secretive and controversial group. Members are not permitted to own radios or TVs, watch movies or eat in restaurants. They are also not allowed to vote.

An AEC spokesman said in an emailed statement the AEC would not "as a matter of protocol, comment on the methodology it may or may not have employed, or individuals it may have contacted as part of AEC investigations including that regarding Willmac Enterprises, and the AEC has no comment in response to your inquiry about Mr Joyce." The spokesman refused to say if the AEC would investigate Mr Joyce's involvement further, or if it would pass on the information to the AFP.

Additional reporting - MICHELLE ETHERIDGE