

Brethren leader behind campaign funds'

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A SENIOR leader of the secretive Exclusive Brethren religious sect channelled \$320,000 to a company which used the money to fund pro-Liberal and anti-Greens political advertising, the ABC has reported.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) is investigating the spending before the 2004 election of \$370,000 on advertising by Willmac Enterprises, set up by church member Mark William Mackenzie.

The ABC *Four Corners* program tonight said it had seen evidence that between late September to late December 2004, Brethren elder and parliamentary lobbyist Warwick John deposited \$320,000 in cash into Willmac's bank account.

These donations were not declared to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), the ABC said.

While church members around the country booked and authorised ads, Mr Mackenzie said the ABC reported.

Warwick John sent a statement to the program which read: "I can confirm the church funded Willmac Enterprises, and to suggest otherwise is a complete fallacy".

Exclusive Brethren spokesman Phil McNaughton said on the program that no money was used for the campaigns. "I know that the church funds are audited and that no money was used for the program."

In August this year, two-and-a-half months after the AEC called in the AFP to investigate Willmac, Exclusive Brethren leader "Elect Vessel" Bruce Hales, Mr John and Mr Mackenzie met with Prime Minister John Howard in his Canberra office.

Mr Howard has defended the meeting and the sect, which he says has been victim to "villainous attacks" by Australian Greens leader Bob Brown.

The ABC also reported the Brethren was taking an active role in political campaigning as far back as the 1993 election campaign, when John Hewson was Liberal Party leader.

Asked if he had been aware the Brethren had been campaigning in support of him, Dr Hewson told the program: "No I wasn't, and they should have campaigned harder, just that little bit more. I didn't know anything about it."

Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd has branded the Exclusive Brethren an "extremist cult" and criticised Mr Howard for meeting with its leaders.

The sect also has been accused of running a smear campaign against New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark and hiring a private detective to investigate leading members of the New Zealand Labour Party.


Exclusive Brethren members are prohibited from voting, attending university, and having TVs, radios, personal computers



and mobile phones. They are also banned from contact with family members who leave the church.

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