

Former Brethren Church man in court on sex charges

2:20PM Tuesday July 24, 2007

An elderly former member of the Exclusive Brethren Church has appeared in court on a series of historic sex charges.

The 72-year-old man was in Nelson District Court this morning, charged with six charges of indecent assault and one of inducing a girl to perform an indecent act on him.

The seven representative charges relate to four women, all former Exclusive Brethren members, and date from between 1951 and 1985. At the time of the offending two of the women were girls, aged between five and 10 years of age.

The man's lawyer, Hamish Riddoch, asked for interim name suppression, saying disaffected members of the church had generated publicity about the case.

Because of the publicity there was concern about prejudice and whether the man could get a fair trial.

But Judge Tony Zohrab denied the request, saying it was known there was a former church member facing such charges and by not allowing the publication of his name "the finger may well be pointed at other members of the Exclusive Brethren Church".

He said police also opposed name suppression, believing publication of his name could assist their inquiries into the matter.

But he granted an interim order when Mr Riddoch said he would appeal the decision. Mr Riddoch also indicated he would make an application for a stay on the charges following a depositions hearing.

The man was remanded without plea to reappear in court on August 14 and directed not to have any contact with the complainants and to surrender his passport.

Speaking outside the court, Mr Riddoch said a stay could result in a discharge or the court directing no indictments be laid on the basis that a trial would be prejudiced and the man would not get a fair trial.

As an example, he said the historic nature of the charges meant some witnesses who may have been able to give evidence in defence of the defendant could now be dead.

- NZPA