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Sect back in fray with blast at Greens

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THE Exclusive Brethren religious sect has dramatically intervened in the federal election campaign with a letter sent "To the citizens of Tasmania" warning about the "anti-development and immoral policies" of the Greens leader, Bob Brown.

The letter will intensify the feud between the Brethren and the Greens, which began after the sect ran unsourced advertising campaigns against the party at state and federal elections.

But media and political pressure on the sect in the past two years to identify itself in electoral advertisements has paid off: the letter names 51 members, saying they are "members of a Christian group commonly known as the Exclusive Brethren".

Members have in the past produced hundreds of thousands of dollars of pro-John Howard political advertising while obscuring the source of the funds.

The letter complains about "many unfair statements" made by Senator Brown, saying he has tried twice to instigate a Senate inquiry into the sect.

It says the senator, who faces re-election, has "actively and persistently vilified a religious Christian minority". "We urge you to have a careful look at the calibre of candidates and their policies to see what type of person is suitable to represent you, as part of the leadership of this great nation," the letter says.

It refers readers to the Greens and Brethren websites, but also to an anonymous, US-registered blog at www.greenswatch.com. The site accuses the Greens of a belief in bestiality, of starting the 2004 race riots on Palm Island and of "plotting to infiltrate the Exclusive Brethren".

Senator Brown said yesterday: "I think the church's members are pouring hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars into this campaign ... and under the Government's new electoral laws, an individual can put in \$100,000 around the country without any disclosure being made."

A spokesman for the Brethren denied any input from the Liberal Party.

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