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Brethren lobbyists given passes

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THE Opposition Leader, Brendan Nelson, helped a leader of the Exclusive Brethren sect get a special pass to Parliament giving unfettered access to the corridors of the legislature.

In response to questions from the Greens leader, Bob Brown, the Senate president, Alan Ferguson, has confirmed that the Brethren elder Stephen Hales has a lobbyist's pass.

He said Dr Nelson and the former Tasmanian Liberal MP Michael Ferguson had sponsored the pass application by Mr Hales, who is the brother of the sect's Australian leader, Bruce Hales.

Senator Ferguson also confirmed that another senior Brethren figure, Warwick John, had been issued with a pass sponsored by the NSW Liberal MP Danna Vale and Mr Ferguson.

The passes give holders access to Parliament's non-public areas. They are sought by lobbyists seeking to influence the political process. Applicants must be sponsored by two MPs.

The Greens have campaigned against Brethren involvement in political campaigns. Senator Brown said last night he did not mind Brethren having passes but this should be disclosed.

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has promised to set up a lobbyists' register.

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