



## Bob Brown 'vilified' Exclusive Brethren

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THE Exclusive Brethren has accused Australian Greens leader Bob Brown of vilifying its church and members.

Senator Brown yesterday urged the Upper House to conduct a wide-ranging inquiry into the activities of the Exclusive Brethren sect, saying it had prevented thousands of young Australians proceeding to tertiary education.

But Exclusive Brethren spokesman Daniel Hales said Senator Brown's attempt to refer the church to the Senate's community affairs committee was based on a "fictional account" of the group's activities.

"Senator Brown's remarks in the Senate were characterised by many factual inaccuracies," Mr Hales said in a statement.

The Greens leader suggested the inquiry should examine \$10 million in government payments to five Exclusive Brethren schools throughout Australia, even though they had a total of just 2000 students.

Brethren schools received funding in the same way as other non-government schools, Mr Hales said.

"Church members, their businesses and schools are subject to exactly the same regulations, laws and scrutiny by government agencies, tribunals and courts as other Australian individuals, businesses and schools.

"We obey the law scrupulously."

The Brethren called on Senator Brown to stop vilifying the church and its members.

The sect was embroiled in controversy before last year's federal election, when it was alleged it was campaigning for then-environment minister Malcolm Turnbull in his marginal seat of Wentworth in Sydney's east.

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