

Sect drops legal bid on ex-member

By JIM KELLY

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A SECRETIVE religious sect has dropped legal action against a former member and paid him \$25,000.

The Exclusive Brethren sued exiled member John Wallis for defamation over a letter alleging the church was dividing families.

The action was dropped on Friday, three days before it was due to be heard in court.

Mr Wallis said the Brethren had demanded \$50,000 to settle the claim but instead walked away after paying him \$25,000. The offending letter, which was highly critical of the church, was sent to several church elders.

"I do not back away from anything in the letter," Mr Wallis said after the action against him was dropped.

"This has been a long and bitter dispute which the Brethren has chosen to pursue.

"The church needs to understand it no longer has control over what I do or say."

A church spokesman said the members had agreed to a settlement rather than allowing Mr Wallis to publicly air misleading and damaging claims about the church.

In a separate action, senior church members are seeking a court injunction to stop Mr Wallis coming within 100m of them.

In a statement of claim lodged in the Supreme Court, lawyers acting for the Brethren claim Mr Wallis has harassed church members and made false statements about their religion.

It alleged the provocative acts included plans to produce a book or movie about the church.

Church members also alleged Mr Wallis had shown up uninvited at homes, businesses and places of worship.

Alan Clarkson, one of the Brethren involved in the action, said he would be happy if Mr Wallis got on with his life and left the Brethren to theirs.

"I do not see why John Wallis should have the right to make judgments against me just because I am a member of the Brethren," he said.

"John has turned very bitter against the whole Brethren movement, which I think is completely unjustified."

The Brethren, whose members live by a strict interpretation of the Bible as dictated by their Sydney-based world leader, have several hundred members in Perth and in Wheatbelt towns.

Members are born into the church and taught the outside world is corrupt.

Mr Wallis was first expelled for buying his family a set of encyclopedias.

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