

## Brethren Deny Strict Rules

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THE **Exclusive Brethren** has denied claims it is cutting off children from their parents in the Wheatbelt town of Dalwallinu.

Former members of the group have claimed that since leaving the Brethren they have been denied contact with their children.

But Brethren members Bruce Jackson and Bill Wallis have written to The West Australian denouncing the claims and complaining of inaccuracies and distortions in reports about the dispute which appears to be dividing the town.

"The assertion that we split families is completely untrue," they said. "We uphold the family unit tenaciously and regard marriage as the providential bond of all moral order in the world.

"The claim that children have been cut off from their parents by us is false. If children leave parents they could only do so on their own responsibility and in accord with whatever Scripture applies.

"No children are ever forced to stay in our fellowship, nor if they were minded to stay, would they be forced to leave."

Mr Jackson and Mr Wallis also rejected claims that they were governed by bizarre strict rules.

"One of these alleged rules - no red cars - was amusingly belied by your paper when you unwittingly published a photograph of two girls from our fellowship getting into their red car.

"To say that we are not allowed turbo-charged cars or china cabinets is simply ridiculous as well as false.

"There would be very few households amongst us that do not have at least one musical instrument or more. By the same token there would be few households who would not go on picnics.

"As to no working on Saturdays although we uphold the Sabbath many persons who care for stock or have other circumstantial obligations would work on Saturday. These are just a few examples of the absurdity of these allegations.

"We know only the Scriptures as our guide and our whole conduct is to be in accord with the Scriptures. We issue no creed or rules or directives of our own.

"The things that you have printed are putting us in a bad light which is hurtful and unfair. You have seriously misrepresented our position, done damage to our community and put our livelihoods in jeopardy."

The list of rules published in The West Australian came from information supplied by a former sect member.

Mr Jackson and Mr Wallis also denied suggestions that a former member's dog was locked in a cage and shot because dog ownership was outlawed by the Brethren.

"We regard the wanton killing of God's creatures as abhorrent and would view any such action as criminal," they said.

They said the Brethren was not a cult or a sect but "persons who take the ground of believers in the Lord Jesus who have come under the efficacy of His finished work to live a different life from what the world lives as provided for in the fullest way by divine grace".

Meanwhile, the Department of Family and Children's Services said it would be available to help mediate in a bid to reunite the families.

Bill Budiselick, an executive director, said the department would wait for a formal approach before intervening.

It would act on its own volition only if there were allegations that the welfare of the children was at risk or if the children were younger than teenagers.

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