A PROMINENT anti-vaccination group has been banned from fundraising following an investigation.

The Australian Vaccination Network had breached NSW charity laws and potentially misled the public, according to an investigation by the NSW Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, which oversees charitable fundraising. A spokesman for the office last week said the Minister for Gaming and Racing, Kevin Greene, had approved the revocation of the group’s fundraising authority, to take effect from 20 October.

“The AVN had undertaken fundraising without an authority … and had failed to keep proper records of income and expenditure,” he said.

In making its decision, the office had also taken into account the AVN’s failure to comply with orders by the Health Care Complaints Commissioner earlier in the year to post a disclaimer on its website saying its information should not be considered medical advice, he said.

The move has been condemned by AVN founder Meryl Dorey as an assault on democracy.

“In a true democracy, the government should be defending its policies in the court of public opinion — not by abusing its power by suppressing legitimate consent,” she wrote in an email.

Penalties of up to $5500 applied for unlawful fundraising, the government spokesman said.

Dr Julie Leask (PhD), a senior research fellow at the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance who has documented AVN’s activities over several years said she believed revoking their fundraising authority was the “morally right decision”.

“They are hardly doing anything charitable by telling parents not to immunise their children,” she said.

However Dr Leask said the ban was unlikely to stop anti-vaccination groups’ influence.

Sarah Colyer