



Speech by

CAROLYN MALE

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING BILL
REGULATION OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND
ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY BILL**

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.38 a.m.): I rise in support of the Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill 2003 and the Regulation of Research Involving Human Embryos and Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill 2003 and all clauses. I do so because I believe that what the bills propose is the right thing to do because it is ethical legislation, is humane, just and has the potential to ease some people's pain and suffering.

The objectives of the Prohibition on Human Cloning Bill 2003 are to address ethical and safety concerns about scientific developments associated with reproductive technology by prohibiting human cloning and prohibiting a range of other practices associated with reproductive technology, including the creation of a human embryo for research purposes; creation or implantation of chimeric or animal/human hybrid embryos; creation of a human embryo that contains genetic material provided by more than two people; and commercial trading in human eggs, human sperm or human embryos.

It is important to note that the monitoring and licensing regime associated with this bill is comprehensive, and that inspectors appointed by the chairperson of the Commonwealth NHMRC licensing committee will have monitoring powers to ensure the intent of the bill is complied with. I believe that this bill would have almost universal acceptance in the community and it is vital that Queensland plays its part in a national regulatory scheme, and this bill will achieve that aim.

The second bill, the Regulation of Research Involving Human Embryos and Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill 2003, has raised some controversy in the community. The objectives of this bill are to address ethical and safety concerns about scientific developments in relation to human reproduction and the utilisation of human embryos, and by regulating activities that involve the use of certain human embryos created by assisted reproductive technology. This is complementary legislation to a national regulatory scheme and it specifically prohibits the use of embryos created by assisted reproductive technology for purposes other than fertility treatment, without the consent of the woman for whom the embryo was created, unless the use is authorised by a licence; it supports the establishment of the NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee; and it establishes a scheme for the assessment and licensing of certain activities involving the use of excess embryos and provides for a centralised, publicly available database of information about all licences issued by the committee.

As with all pieces of legislation introduced into parliament, I wrote about this bill in my weekly newspaper columns. It has also been widely publicised in news stories in the various newspapers which service my electorate as well as radio and television news. I would like to state for the record of the House that I have received only one contact from a Glass House constituent complaining about the legislation. All other discussions about embryonic stem cell research have been overwhelmingly positive.

I received more letters of complaint about the amendments to the anti-discrimination legislation and the removal of the right of religious schools to refuse to employ homosexuals. This probably says a lot about people's views on moral issues. However, I did receive emails and letters from the religious right and the far right. It is always amusing to note that one of the major tenets in most religions refers to tolerance, forgiveness and helping others, yet I have found those people in the religious right to be the most unforgiving and hardline people I have ever come across.

Most of the arguments put forward about stem cell research have been discussed ad nauseam in the federal parliament when the mirror legislation was debated. A lot of the federal debate centred on whether or not embryonic stem cells were better or more adaptable than adult stem cells. Both sides of the argument lined up an impressive array of scientists to support their views. It seems to me that these days scientists are getting as good as lawyers when it comes to giving their opinions. Whether it is scientific research, conservation or water management, once one scientist gives an opinion, someone will provide another scientist who will give the opposite opinion. It is like the old saying that if you have five lawyers in a room you will get six different opinions. It could equally be used for scientists now.

The result of all this scientific bickering is that the public has become confused about the issue of embryonic stem cell research. Perhaps that was the ultimate aim of those who are opposed to it! However, for some people, principally those in the religious right, they are opposed to embryonic stem cell research because they believe the Bible says it is wrong. To use the Biblical argument is to base one's argument on a very shaky premise, because the Bible says a lot of different things and it is up to the individual to make his or her own interpretation and to apply it to modern-day life.

For those people who regularly quote the Bible in order to justify their opinions, I would ask them to live their lives strictly as it is laid down. For instance, most people work on the Sabbath even though it clearly states in Exodus 35:2 that those who work on a Sunday should be put to death. Are they morally obligated to kill them or should they leave it to someone else? Maybe the National Party should include it as part of its policy against Sunday trading and enshrine it in its mandatory sentencing policy.

This is just one example of why arguments based purely on religious writings are spurious and should be placed to one side in this argument. For instance, some people opposed to embryonic stem cell research believe that the embryo is a life and to destroy it as part of research is tantamount to murder. Yet these same people are quite prepared to allow these surplus embryos to be removed from their environment and be allowed to succumb. Surely that is still murder. But even worse, some of these embryos will be destroyed without any good use to human kind being derived from them. I just cannot see the logic there.

There are many people who have conditions and diseases that I hope some researcher will find a cure for. I am sure these people, their parents, siblings, partners, carers and indeed all caring people would want to give them every opportunity to lead a life free of pain and suffering. I would not dream of standing in the way of embryonic stem cell research which may provide just such a cure. The argument that is used that adult stem cell research is without the hazards associated with embryonic stem cell research is curious. I am happy for both types of research to be undertaken for the good of our whole society.

This is sensible legislation. It takes into account present standards and beliefs and has some important safeguards enshrined in it. Some argue that the fact we have had to put safeguards in this legislation only shows how morally objectionable this type of research is. However, nearly every piece of legislation, from health and child protection legislation to water management and animal protection laws, have safeguards and reviews embedded in them. First seeking the permission of the donor before any surplus embryo is used is an important safeguard. It allows those who have any reservations to refuse the research on their surplus embryos. Placing a three-year review clause in this legislation allows progress to be reviewed and updated or further safeguards to be imposed depending on the latest developments in research. In my mind, and it seems in the minds of the people of Glass House, the argument for stem cell research and its potential benefits has been made.

The other point that several other members have made—and it is an important point—is that if legislation does not go through in its current form individuals and universities in Queensland not covered by the Commonwealth legislation will be able to undertake embryonic stem cell research without any regulation at all. I do not think any honourable member would wish to see that occur. When we dissect all of the information we can only come to the same logical and sensible conclusion: this is good legislation and both bills need our full support. I commend both bills to the House.