



Speech by

Barbara Stone

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

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RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (4.25 pm): A recent *Courier-Mail* article listed me as being undecided on this bill and it was correct in that statement. I have spent many hours reading, asking questions, attending briefings and having general conversations with friends and community members in order to make a decision. I read pages of research material, correspondence from individuals and organisations, and received phone calls and personal representations regarding this bill from both supporters and nonsupporters.

I want to tell the electorate that I used the following material in my research to assist me to make my decision: the *Lockhart review recommendations and responses to FAQs* by Professor Loane Skene, Deputy chair, Lockhart Committee, dated May 2007 and *Cloning and stem cell research—issues in society volume 265*, which gave well-researched articles on both the arguments for and against this issue. From the Australian Stem Cell Centre I looked at *Advancing stem cell research for better health and disease outcomes* and a number of fact sheets on stem cells and nuclear transfer. I also looked at the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's *Alert Digest* and the second reading speech by the Minister for Health. I attended a forum with the following people: Professor Leone Skene, spokesperson, Lockhart review committee; Professor Alan Mackay-Sim of Griffith University; Professor Melissa Little of the Institute of Molecular Biosciences; Dr David Molloy of the Queensland Fertility Group; and Professor Warwick Anderson of the National Health and Medical Research Council, speaking on the embryo licensing committee.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the member for Kurwongbah who provided me with research both for and against and also for the briefings that she organised. I also want to thank Professor Melissa Little who gave her time and knowledge to me in a nice briefing that we had and she answered many of my questions. So I thank her for that. In making my decision I believe I have looked at both sides of this debate with an open mind.

So what was it that influenced my decision? Firstly, the question: when does life begin? That is a question that gets a variety of answers. In religion we see different views: the Christian perspective, Jewish laws, Buddhist views and Hindu teaching, all of which are very different views. Even in this chamber we will find differing views. With this in mind, I went on gathering more research, I kept reading the correspondence that I was receiving, I sought answers to the questions that I had and I kept speaking with people about this bill.

Secondly, I was consistently hearing and reading an overwhelming view that human cloning should continue to be banned. This is something that will continue and with this bill we will see the maximum penalty increased to 15 years imprisonment for committing that offence. The bill imposes 15 years imprisonment for any attempt at reproductive cloning or any attempt to develop an embryo artificially for any more than 14 days. The bill also makes it an offence to engage in any commercial trading in human sperm, human eggs, or human embryos. There is no doubt that public opinion certainly condemns the cloning of human beings and in my research I found no evidence that the scientific community in Australia supports human cloning or, indeed, is asking for that.

I believe that the Australian science community is well regarded and recognised in the world as being ethical and valuing appropriate regulation. Like in any other profession, or in any industry, we will always have someone not wanting to follow the law or willing to push the limits. Do I have concerns in this area regarding this bill? Of course I do.

But I believe we have the appropriate regulations, the appropriate safeguards and the overwhelming community pressure to stop scientists moving too quickly into areas the community will not accept. Australian scientists are the men and women who we grew up with, who we went to school with and who we went to university with. I had many friends who followed a science path at university and followed science as their career. Do I have faith in them to be ethical, responsible and professional? Yes, I do. I also have faith in scientists of the future. After all, they are going to be our kids and our grandchildren.

Thirdly, the argument is that this bill is opening the door to scientists to ask for more and where will it stop. Do I believe that this could eventuate? Yes, I do. And if and when that time comes I will be very happy to stand in this place and have that debate at that time. If and when that time comes we will see what we are seeing today: a parliament that will reflect a number of views, a parliament that will decide on the basis of a number of things, including the community views of their time. I look at the talented, smart young people in our schools, universities and communities and I have no doubt that they will be the ones to debate that issue when and if it arises. I have great faith in them to do this wisely, just as I have faith in the community to wisely elect their officials who will be making that decision. My decision will be made on the bill before us today.

Fourthly, scientists admit that the potential benefits of embryonic stem cells are still a long way off in the future. I believe the majority of scientists have been very honest about this statement. I do not believe that there is anyone who wants to see a disservice done to those who are suffering by overstating or giving false expectations. I do not believe the science world is giving false expectations. I believe it is us, as human beings, who put hope into some form of dimension. Would I have the same perception of false hope as a sufferer of Parkinson's or someone with motor neurone disease? I would say probably not. So should the fact that there is no certainty or a strict time frame take away the opportunity for this research? That is a question I also had to consider.

I heard the member for Chatsworth say that his family would have grabbed at anything to assist their mother in her battle with cancer. I have to say that I think I would do the same. So that brought me to the question: should the opportunity be available to carry out both adult stem cell and embryonic stem cell research? After considering the factors I have spoken about and a number of others, I have decided that this opportunity, along with appropriate regulations, should be available in Australia. We know that this research can be done in other countries around the world. Could this possibly lead to a situation where only Australians who can afford to travel have the benefit of that research? That is another question I considered in making my decision.

I thank the individuals and the organisations who have contacted me with their views. I respect and value their input, just as I do all the members in this chamber. In respect to the women's rights issues raised in the public debate, I believe that they have been appropriately dealt with in this bill. I also thank those members who have shared some very personal and painful memories and experiences with us during this debate. What those members have done is made me realise just how very lucky I am. I have no personal experiences to share with the House in this debate. How very fortunate I am. How very, very fortunate my family is. I thank those members for sharing those experiences with us.

Of course, I have been touched by the experiences of friends and acquaintances who have had family members suffering from debilitating diseases and conditions. This also raised the question: is it the quantity of life or the quality of life that is most important? I also note the question that other members have raised and which was contained in the *Courier-Mail* editorial yesterday—if research involving therapeutic cloning produced a medical breakthrough would one also oppose the adoption of potentially life-saving treatment because of ethical concerns about the research that preceded it? In all honesty, I cannot stand in this place and say that I would not support people wanting to use a treatment that came from therapeutic cloning, nor would I stand in this place and say that I would reject a treatment that I may want to use because it has come from therapeutic cloning research. After long and serious consideration I will be supporting this bill.