



Speech by

Evan Moorhead

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (8.13 pm): I rise to speak to the Research Involving Human Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill. I enter this debate after many members have already canvassed the arguments on either side of this debate in a quite comprehensive fashion. While I cannot add anything further to what has already been put, I believe that people who live in the Waterford electorate deserve an explanation of why I will be supporting this bill. I would like to particularly thank the Minister for Health and the member for Surfers Paradise for their contributions to this debate. I listened to the contribution of the member for Surfers Paradise, who addressed both the technical and ethical aspects of the bill. I will be voting for this bill for the reasons put forward by the Minister for Health and the member for Surfers Paradise.

While I have the utmost respect for the views put by those opposing the bill, I cannot agree with them. This debate is a difficult ethical debate and many who oppose the bill oppose it passionately. I thank those people who have contacted me to discuss their point of view on this matter. However, I believe there is a broader community acceptance for the research permitted in this bill and a practical ethical approach to supporting research contributing to human wellbeing.

Technical change has always and will always continue to provide ethical challenges and questions with which society must grapple. In recent decades society has grappled with blood transfusion, organ transplant and in-vitro fertilisation. We have had those debates, and those technologies, implemented with appropriate ethical safeguards, have contributed significantly to the wellbeing of our society. I believe that in coming decades we will look back on this debate in the same way.

This bill allows a human embryo to be created by somatic cell nuclear transfer, a process where the nucleus of a human egg is removed and replaced with an adult cell. This cell has only the DNA of the adult cell donor. This cell could not become a human being without significant further scientific intervention. The development process of this embryo still requires significant chemical inducement. This cell is the building block of our biology but with no distinct DNA from the adult cell donor. This is something quite different from embryos created by an egg and sperm, whether by normal conception or through IVF.

Embryos created by somatic cell nuclear transfer should not be implanted in women for the purpose of allowing human life. This scientific intervention would, in my view, offend the process of human reproduction through egg and sperm. This is reproductive cloning, which remains entirely prohibited by the provisions in this bill. This research has an important promise for developing remedies and increasing our understanding of diseases and afflictions facing our community. There is no guarantee of miracle cures but science is an incremental process of discovery. I do not accept any argument that says that we should not allow this legislation because in our view it is of less value than some other forms of research such as adult stem cells. We should not close the door to this research because we cannot guarantee what will be the outcome. We should always keep an open mind to avenues for knowledge, particularly knowledge aimed at improving the human condition.

This bill will ensure that any research of this nature is subject to strict ethical requirements and a strong licensing regime. As the member for Surfers Paradise has already provided, the extent of this research has been extremely limited since its introduction. Put simply, there are no floodgates being opened. Nor can I accept that passing this legislation is somehow a precursor to further changes. This parliament will continue to consider and reconsider each piece of legislation on its merits and in the circumstances of the time. I strongly support this bill and will do so with a clear conscience. Given appropriate ethical guidelines, the pursuit of knowledge to alleviate human suffering is something I support.