



Speech by

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RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.02 pm): The atheist will say there is no God because they have not proven it scientifically and yet they are willing to take an extraordinary leap of faith to trust scientists who merely offer a whiff of hope to create miracle cures. I do not support the utilitarian view that people's value is determined by their use which overrides one's intrinsic humanity. I strongly reject the concept in this legislation which permits the creation of human embryonic life for the purpose of destruction through scientific research and justifies it because of what potentially may be discovered even though ethical alternatives are light-years ahead in developing therapeutic applications in many areas of need.

Does the end justify the means? I would argue no, particularly when there are stronger ethical alternatives to potentially reach good outcomes. Let us promote good and ethical science and therapies from our many outstanding scientists and ensure the funding goes to the areas that show the greatest amount of proven promise rather than the greatest amount of hype. There are exciting alternatives to human cloning research which do not involve the creation of embryos for their destruction and are validated, not just with lofty claims in the media from lobbyists but actual breakthroughs by peer reviewed scientific panels.

Respecting human life is not just about respecting those of us who have beaten the odds of being born. It is about respecting the unborn. It is about respecting those who are not physically or intellectually perfect. It is about respecting people regardless of their age. In seeking to do the greatest good for humanity we should also be constrained by that great medical motto of doing no harm. I do not believe there is one person in this chamber who does not want to see scientific breakthroughs for crippling diseases or life-threatening diseases. However, anyone who suggests otherwise is being dishonest. The questions in this debate surround the values that different people ascribe different stages of human life, the potential for abuse of this technology as the boundaries are pushed further and further and whether this line of controversial research is necessary in light of the extremely viable and non-ethically compromised alternative sources of stem cells.

There are complex ethical issues involved in this legislation and they will be informed by a number of beliefs. There are people opposing this legislation—we just heard the member for Southern Downs; he actually supported the last tranche of legislation which permitted research on so-called surplus embryos from IVF—who are not necessarily opposed to embryonic stem cell research per se but are stating their opposition for a number of reasons, but mainly because of a concern about where the line will be drawn and the ethical sourcing of embryos.

In 2003 legislation was passed in this House to allow research on embryos. It was argued by the legislation's supporters that the embryos were surplus—they were going to die anyway so they should be used in science. I did oppose that piece of legislation as I believed it lacked respect for all human life and that there were alternative lines of research with far greater likelihood of success. My view stands. There

are ethical alternatives for stem cell research which also address the other moral issue—the need to do whatever is possible and appropriate to find cures for the afflicted.

However, here we are in 2007, just a few years later, being asked once again to push the boundaries further and further out and to trust the government that the checks and balances are sufficient to stop abuse. Here we are now being asked not just to use so-called surplus embryos from the IVF program but to create embryos specifically for the purpose. I predict, as have other colleagues of mine, that this parliament will in a few short years be asked to push the boundaries out further again.

What is next? Will we see steps like those in the UK where scientists have been able to have legislation framed so that they are able to experiment on hybrid clones, hybrids of animals and human beings. That is not some lofty maybe or what some people are pushing for; that is possible in the UK. They can research hybrids of humans and animals.

The Queensland law has a maximum 14-day destruction order on the cloned human life and there continues to be a ban on implantation. How long will that last? Will it really matter if the technology for human cloning is perfected here and we have this flimsy barrier we pretend that no-one is going to breach and then the technology that may be developed here is shipped off overseas where there are no legislative barriers? The checks and balances in this legislation are flimsy and flawed. There is no ban on technology which may be pioneered here being used overseas and abused overseas. Is that our concern? Of course it is. Ethics is not just about what one intends. It is about the consequences of our actions.

I have heard about the amazing cures people hope so-called therapeutic cloning from embryonic stem cells may give rise to. However, what about the potential for abuse? What about the potential for organ harvesting of clones created in an overseas jurisdiction using Australian technology? Is that crazy? Is that from a science fiction novel? Yes, we will find it in science fiction. On the weekend *The Island* was on television. But it is the holy grail for overseas researchers. We should not be naive about the fact that technology delivered here is able to be delivered elsewhere once people have it in their hands.

Knowledge is global, but so is our ethical responsibility for how it is used when it goes offshore to be used in less constrained scientific communities. We have heard that if we do not do this research here somebody else will do it. People say, 'It doesn't make a difference. Let's just go ahead,' and all of these sorts of justifications. But I repeat: knowledge is global, but so is our ethical responsibility for how it is used. Will this parliament take responsibility if this technology is abused in another jurisdiction and pursued for human cloning? For those of us who oppose the creation of embryos specifically for scientific destruction, we are saying that ethical alternatives are available. There is a way to address the concerns and the hopes of those who do want to see breakthroughs. In this regard, the research into adult stem cells is far more substantive and already demonstrating astounding outcomes in peer reviewed and proven research.

I want to address one of the other ramifications of this legislation, and that is the exploitation of women. The fact is that for people to be able to use embryos in what is proposed in this legislation they would have to harvest a large number of eggs from women. As has already been outlined, this is no easy matter. In fact, there are very real risks involved in hyperstimulation in being able to get the sheer number of eggs required. Now once again we might hear people say, 'Well, that's not going to happen here,' but it has occurred in other jurisdictions. For this legislation to have effect with regard to embryos being created for the specific purpose of scientific research, scientists have to be able to get eggs from women. Are women now going to have another area of exploitation? Are women going to be the egg factories of the future for science because people say that there is hope in this particular area?

Another issue of concern is the ability for people to use potential human cloning technology in order to harvest spare parts. As has been outlined, there is also concern about human/animal hybrids. One area that I do not think has received enough attention is that there really is a battle for the research dollar going on here. Do we really want to see the allocation of research dollars being determined mainly by those who are most effective with media hype, those who can hit the most political pressure points or whether it is going to be about the greatest amount of outcome? Obviously I argue for an ethical approach in how people pursue outcomes and research, but surely we should be looking at where the greatest number of outcomes will be, and there is no doubt: the greatest track record so far with regard to stem cell research in terms of breakthroughs has in fact been from adult stem cell research.

But to go back to the risks for women with regard to harvesting eggs, Justice Lockhart said—and I have heard other members quote the Lockhart report, but this is interesting—that getting the eggs from women 'carries significant risks, including in very rare cases infertility or even death'. He went on to say that the need for oocytes may therefore lead to the exploitation of vulnerable women through financial or other incentives. Other members have referred to the experience in South Korea and the now discredited Dr Hwang, who used over 2,061 eggs from 160 women and failed to produce a single cloned embryo. But that was an example of somebody who was passionate in their belief about a particular type of scientific research. Did the ends justify the outcomes? Certainly not. In the process of that research we saw a significant number of women who could have been potentially harmed—exposed to risk when one considers the number of eggs that were harvested. Hundreds of thousands of ova would be required to

treat just a few of the conditions which scientists are identifying that millions of adults suffer from. We are not talking about small amounts; we are talking about literally hundreds of thousands.

Clearly, while this issue is controversial today—and I understand that there is a divide over what people believe—we must consider now not just the impacts of this legislation today but the impacts tomorrow. We must consider not just what people say are the potential benefits; we must also consider the potential abuses. We have already seen those abuses demonstrated in scientific research. I applaud the amazing work that scientists do achieve, but I do not subscribe to the laissez-faire view that the outcome justifies removing ethical barriers. Science and what man can unlock of the unknown is truly amazing, but human life, even in its most vulnerable stage, is the even greater wonder and deserves respect. That is why people on both sides of this debate fight for better answers about how to heal sicknesses of those they love. That is why we celebrate the creation of life with all of the joy it brings and we feel incredible sorrow when we commemorate the passing of a loved one. One of the primary differences between humans and animals is our ability to reason, to think in the abstract and to engage spiritually.

Not one person in this place had a say in being born. We are a privileged few. We as legislators have even stronger privileges in that we are being asked to make decisions not just for a current generation but for many generations to come. We may be biased towards our own generation, but we instinctively know that human life is sacred and transcends other life forms. I strongly oppose this legislation. I urge caution about what will come in future, because there is no doubt that if this legislation passes this House today we will see more legislation come back to push the boundaries—to keep asking for greater rein with regard to human/animal hybrids and the boundaries of what is allowed. Ultimately, we have to consider that these in themselves undermine the very benefit of supporting good research.