



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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### RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (11.42 am): What price do we put on hope? That is what this debate seems to be all about for me. It is also a great concern to me that the means seem to justify the ends. From my own ethical background and from my own ethical view, I cannot accept any debate or any argument which will influence me with 'the means justifies the end'. We have heard a lot of very strong and passionate performances in this parliament since about midday yesterday. Many people who have participated in this place have sought to indicate the broad breadth of personal experiences they have had in their life and have used them in some way to justify the decision they have come to to either support or oppose the legislation before the parliament.

The one thing which has been absolutely and profoundly obvious to me is that the people who propose that we continue to open the door for embryonic stem cell research in the area of the specific creation of embryos, the cloning of embryos and the use of hybrid embryos seek to use the mantra of hope and faith as their very, very real justification. I, like many of those people who are advocating the hope mantra, also have been touched very closely and very markedly by people whom I love dearly who have suffered from degenerative diseases or who have been subjected to particular diseases from birth which have caused them lifelong injury and defect.

My own father suffered from diabetes. My own father had his death accelerated from his diabetes condition. I would have loved nothing more than for there to have been some ultimate hope for him. Also, my best friend at school and subsequently the best man at my wedding—he was a very great friend and a very dear friend—suffered from spina bifida. I do not know if the proponents of this would actually advocate that in his case he was going to be helped by embryonic stem cell research or, progressing it further, the area of cloning or the specific creation of embryos for the purpose of research. I have got no doubt that deep down he was one day hoping that there would be a cure.

This was a very, very touching thing for me. He was a great person. I remember I made a speech in this place in 2002 and I stepped out of here to take a telephone call from one of our mutual school friends who informed me that he had died. He ultimately died of the complications that had arisen from operations that people with that condition have to have from time to time, but he lived as long as people with that condition could expect. He was an extremely smart, extremely intelligent, extremely well-beloved individual. I remember standing in this place a few minutes later having to deliver a speech as shadow minister and wondering in my own mind about the things that are important to us in our life and the decisions we have got to make. Here, my best friend and a person who was very dear to me and indeed was the best man at my wedding had passed away not long before.

We all are caught up in these ethical decisions, these ethical challenges. What I am saying here today is: are we offering and indeed proffering false hope? If we go back a number of decades, we were told that there would be great revolutionary breakthroughs from gene therapy. We are still waiting for that. In actual fact, complications have arisen as a consequence of that gene therapy and they may be greater

than the rather minimal benefits which have been bestowed. So we are hearing the same sort of debate today in a more contemporary environment.

If I was going to step over the ethical abyss into the unknown, I would want something supporting me which is greater than hope and faith, because if you take the wrong step there is absolutely no way of turning back. That is a very, very real concern I have here today.

I have listened with a great degree of interest to the passion which has poured out in this place in the last 24 hours about 'Don't deny an opportunity. We've got to grasp that opportunity.' In actual fact, some of those people who have advocated the position that we should support this have been challenging those who oppose it by saying to them, 'Don't let your religious convictions usurp this opportunity for hope for others. Don't let religion get in the way.' I have made an observation that the faith and the hope argument seems to be coming more from those people who are advocating support of the legislation than those who are actually advocating more of a religious position.

The point is that, ironically, religion is based in many ways on a faith-hope argument. It is one of the fundamental foundations of many religions—a faith system might be a belief in a God, in a single entity, or other entities, but it is faith and hope. Yet it has been interesting to see in this place that those who seem to have more of the religious convictions are saying that you are offering false hope: 'Don't judge us on a religious background.' But those who are seeking to set aside the veracity of a religious argument are offering little more than a faith-hope argument. To me I think in many ways that intellectually denigrates the argument which has been put forward by many of those people who are seeking to advocate in its favour.

I stood in this place in March 2004 and provided guarded support for the legislation which currently provides the act of parliament in Queensland. That is the legislation that actually says that, yes, we can utilise surplus embryos created specifically for in-vitro fertilisation purposes for the purpose of research. I did so in a very, very guarded way.

What seems to have been lost sight of in this entire debate is that 4½ years ago the then Premier, the then health minister and the current Deputy Premier were very much at pains to point out that there were not going to be incremental changes to the laws as exist in Queensland. They were at pains to point out that there would be no specific creation of embryos in Queensland for stem cell research. They very specifically and very strongly said that there would be no creation of cloned embryos under any circumstances. That was 4½ years ago. They specifically ruled out any process of hybridisation of embryos for any purpose. Hybrid embryos, as we all know, are embryos where the DNA of a human being is mixed with an animal. This legislation indicates that we are going to lift the current ban on the creation of hybrid embryos for whatever purpose, so that now you will be able to fertilise an animal egg with human sperm.

This legislation, if passed, now says that we are going to specifically clone embryos for research purposes. This legislation now says that we are going to specifically create embryos for research purposes. Could anyone who was here 4½ years ago stand up and tell me that that was in line with the assurances which the government of the day was at pains to point out was not going to happen? All of those things which were promised to us 4½ years ago are now being swept away by this legislation incrementally.

As I said recently in an article in a paper, if you think the notion of going further, to growing embryos to a further stage beyond 14 days, is pie in the sky, if you think the implantation of a hybrid human-animal embryo for the purposes of growing a foetus in an animal host is pie in the sky, look at what was said would be pie in the sky 4½ years ago. This is a process of incrementalism which we need to be very concerned about.

Anyone who knows me knows that I do not come from a faith based background. My objection to this is not based on religion. My objection is not particularly based on faith. My objection to this is based on a set of ethical values that says there is a benchmark beyond which I am not prepared to step. That benchmark is being breached by the bill which we are currently debating in this parliament. Surely those who are advocating that this is the brave new way to go need to demonstrate this clearly beyond the basis of faith and hope, which is the dogma they themselves have now embraced and are choosing to use against people who might oppose something based on a religious faith background.

I listened yesterday with some hope and even this morning that there might be one example in the 20-odd years of embryonic stem cell research in this country and around the world of a demonstrable benefit that has been commercialised for people that can cure degenerative diseases or maybe even acquired injuries. On no occasion have I heard one demonstrable benefit which has been taken out of a lab, out of a test tube, and which has provided that particular manifestation of hope to those people who have placed so much hope on it—not one occasion.

I have had the pleasure of visiting the Reeve-Irvine centre in California which was jointly funded by Christopher Reeve and university benefactors. We know Christopher Reeve of *Superman* fame who held out right to his dying day that there would one day be a cure that would reverse his accident-caused spinal injury. Unfortunately for him that did not happen because, I understand, of chest complications which he developed. I remember saying to the researchers in 2002 when this whole embryonic stem cell research debate was just starting, 'Tell me what I should do because this will be a matter of some ethical debate in

Queensland in the future.' They said to me, 'We do not know where we are going with this, but we should not close the door because there may be some benefit around the corner.'

I took that advice, and I voted for the restricted laws that we currently have in the state. But I have been interested in, and have actually hungered over, every piece of research which has been reported ever since about what we can expect with embryonic stem cell research. And do you know what? I am still waiting. It is five years down the track and I am seeing exactly the same arguments today proffered by the research fraternity as what I saw five years ago without any benefit to come from it.

One thing that we need to set against any background is that the research sector—whether it is in these cutting-edge areas, as they would call them, or climate change—in recent years has been extremely effective in utilising public pressure, the conscience of the public and the hope of the public to lever incremental changes in laws into areas we would never be expected to go and also precious research dollars. We know that. I am just saying that we should be extremely cautious about what we do.

Let us look at what happened in Singapore in recent months. ES Cell International is a major embryonic stem cell research foundation and operation in Singapore. As I understand it, Professor Trounson was involved in this. This is what a media release stated in 2004 when it was set up—

ES Cell International Pty Ltd ... and Australia's Biotechnology Centre of Excellence, the National Stem Cell Centre ... today announced a collaborative agreement that could ultimately facilitate the development of new treatments for diabetes and other debilitating diseases.

The agreement pertains to research on human embryonic stem cells being undertaken at the Monash Institute of Reproduction and Development ...

It further states—

Under the terms of the collaborative agreement ESI will commercialise the outcomes of research relating to diabetes.

That was almost four years ago. Let us now turn to the *Courier-Mail*. On 26 July this year it reported the following—

Embryonic stem cell research has suffered a major blow with a major Singaporean-Australian company abandoning work on therapies due to lack of success and soaring costs.

ES Cell International ... was set up in 2000 with the help of Australian investors and the Singapore Government, with the aim of being the world leader in embryonic stem cell technology.

It goes on to state—

But the current issue of the leading international journal *Science* reports ESI is 'halting work on human embryonic stem cell therapies' as investors had lost interest because 'the likelihood of having products in the clinic in the short term was vanishingly small', according to stem cell pioneer Alan Colman ...

It further states—

But making well-functioning, insulin-producing cells 'proved really difficult', Professor Colman said, as both therapies would have needed at least a billion cells for each dose and producing them at such numbers was prohibitively expensive.

It further quotes Professor Mackay-Sim, who says that he is not surprised himself. He is a former Queenslander of the Year. He is saying that the number of cells needed is beyond what can be achieved with embryonic stem cell research. That is why we need to be going to adult stem cell research and investment, where we have seen demonstrable benefits over so many years and enormous hope. That is one of the issues that we need to be aware of.

I also bring to the attention of members another ethical issue, and that is the harvesting of donor eggs, and the difficulties and the complications for women as a consequence. This information comes from Women's Forum Australia. Some women members may be aware of this. The forum points out not only the ethical issues but also the commercialisation issues and the consequent health issues for very many women. I commend this to all members because it goes on to outline all of the serious complications that women can have from this hyperstimulation of their ovaries to produce large numbers of eggs for donation purposes.

Let us look at what is happening around the world. There is commercialisation of egg harvesting among women to provide enough eggs for this process of creating embryos for research purposes whether they be cloned or otherwise. This commercialisation has actually led to the death of women in places like the United States. A woman releases one egg a month. We are talking here about the hyperstimulation of a woman's ovaries to cause the release of dozens if not hundreds of eggs.

Remember the case in 2001 of the famous South Korean researcher Dr Hwang who claimed to have cloned a human. As I understand it, that turned out to be a fabrication. This is the most important thing beyond that particular hoax. He used 2,061 eggs taken from 169 women and failed to produce a single cloned embryo.

Have members thought about the issue of egg supply? Have they thought about the issue of what that actually means for women in an ethical context? Have they thought about what it means for commercial egg harvesting? Have they thought about what it means for impoverished nations around the world where we are seeing a trade in human organs and potentially a trade in human eggs?

For me this risk is just far too great. The case has not been made out properly for our support of this extension of the legislation. I will make the prediction here today, as I did a number of years ago, that in the not too distant future we will be back in this place seeking further amendments because in some way some

entity or some researcher says we are just around the corner—we should now implant an embryo in an animal host for the purpose of growing it into a foetus in order to do research. Then we will have the same hope arguments out there with regard to the need to implant an embryo for growth into a foetus for research purposes. Mark my words, that is going to happen. It is going to happen incrementally. If someone is going to step across the ethical abyss they need to be very sure that they have something more supporting them than faith and hope.