



Speech by  
**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.56 pm): I will be speaking against and voting against the Research Involving Human Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill 2007. Even the title is misleading, because this bill does allow human cloning and it does allow it for research. I have respected and admired the speeches and contributions that have been made by all members of this House to this debate, and I admire the deep genuineness in all of those speeches, but I want to say very strongly in my contribution that this is a very serious decision on a matter to do with the sanctity and dignity of human life, and so much of the argument I believe has been based on false hope.

In my speech I want to point out that it is morally and ethically wrong to create an embryo or life with the deliberate intent to destroy that life. I want to point out the huge and exciting success of adult stem cells which hold so much hope. I want to point out the dangers and risks to vulnerable women and what will be allowed by this bill. I want to point out the disregard and the dehumanising of female embryos and fetuses which this bill will allow. I want to point out that in the future very real and increased pressure could lead to an escalation throughout the world of the use of embryos and fetuses as a result of this bill, if it is passed, and other similar legislation.

Many members in this debate have spoken of their personal experiences and how they affect our concern for others and the hope of cures. I for one will never forget my great friend and half-back in the first 15 at St Laurence's College passing the ball to me, being tackled and breaking his neck, and standing beside him on that field. For two years my team mates and I visited him in the Mater Hospital. We all hoped and prayed—and slowly that hope slipped away—that he would be cured and that he would get better. Forever I have wondered about what could be done for paraplegia and quadriplegia and always hope that some research will bring about a cure.

I saw my mother battle Parkinson's for 15 years—a cruel and debilitating illness. I wondered was there hope and was there a chance. I watched her, with her great intellect, endeavour to research for herself and find out whether there was a cure. In this debate tonight we have heard much about that hope. I think we have to look at the real hope that is there through adult stem cells and what has been achieved and can be achieved without going through the unbelievable moral and ethical dilemmas that we face with these other decisions.

My speech is based on the fact that this is wrong, it is unnecessary, it is dehumanising and there are inevitable consequences. Cloning is another way of making embryos just the same as IVF. Professor Loane Skene of the Lockhart committee said, 'We did not shy away from calling it an embryo.' The most important principle that we all have to face up to in this bill is whether or not we will allow the creation of an embryo or life with the sole intention of destroying it in the interests of research. Compare it with IVF where we create an embryo with an intention of giving life. This is the conscience question for all in this House: will we allow the creation of life for the sole and express purpose of killing that embryo? Please, honourable members, consider this deeply.

In 2003 in this parliament and in the federal and other state parliaments a bill to allow the use of spare embryos from IVF programs because they were going to die anyway was passed. Not all parliamentarians agreed with that. I was certainly one that did not. Across the nation there was unanimous opposition to cloning. Everyone, including all members who were here during that parliamentary session, voted no to human cloning because no-one supported deliberately making an embryo for the sole purpose of destroying that embryo.

What has changed? This bill today also permits the taking of precursor cells from a human embryo or foetus. These precursor cells are the immature egg cells of a female embryo which will be taken from the dead foetus after eight weeks but preferably around 20 weeks. So an aborted baby girl would become, through her harvested egg cells, the mother of an embryo which itself would be destroyed for research. This is another conscience decision for us today: how can we possibly allow our society to dehumanise life and females to this extent?

In IVF we take living human egg and sperm and naturally combine them. That process can still be difficult. With cloning they take an egg and remove the nucleus—that is, the genetic material—which leaves only about one per cent of the genetic material. They take a somatic cell—for example, from the skin or mammary gland—and take the nucleus out of it and put this nuclei into the enucleated egg. Then electrical stimulus is used to mimic the stimulation of a sperm to trick the egg into dividing. Thus if human cloning were ever successful it would create a human embryo which is the identical twin of the donor of the DNA—that is, the donor of the somatic cell.

No embryonic stem cell has ever been used in humans because they form tumours in animals. The head of the Australian Academy of Science, Professor Bob Williamson, said in January 2006 that therapeutic cloning 'is not important to give cells to treat patients; these are far more likely to come from so-called adult stem cells.' In May 2005 Professor Alan Trounson, head of the Australian stem cell centre said, 'I don't call it therapeutic cloning because it's not about cells for therapy.' Professor Alan Mackay-Sim, head of the national adult stem cell centre in Brisbane, told the 2006 Senate inquiry, 'The purposes for using therapeutic cloning can be achieved using adult stem cells.' That is such an important statement.

In the journal *Nature Biotechnology* it is estimated that 80 human conditions can be treated by adult stem cells. In August 2007 here in Australia three major medical research institutes announced further advances in treating human heart disease using adult stem cells. These were the Victor Chang Institute, the John Hunter Institute in Newcastle and Microblast, a private company in Melbourne.

Contrast the problems of tumours in embryonic stem cell therapy in animals with these 80 different treatments and trials using adult stem cells. In the same month we read that Singapore company ES Cell International, which is linked with Monash University, announced abandoning attempts to get embryonic stem cell treatment for heart disease and diabetes because private investors had lost confidence. We read at the same time of adult stem cell advances in heart disease and the first public trial of treating diabetes in humans. The world renowned journal of the American Medical Association this year wrote about some patients achieving three years free of insulin.

Why is the linchpin of the argument for those supporting the bill the possible treatment and cures that may come from research into embryonic stem cells, including cloned embryos, when we do not have a need for that? There is a real consolation for all in this House who want to do their absolute best for those who suffer, those who hope and for future generations to overcome illnesses, accidents and disease—particularly those who oppose cloning on ethical grounds. A vote against cloning is not a vote against hope or potential or real opportunity. It has been shown, and I have spoken about the fact, that embryonic stem cells are unusable at present and it is likely to stay like that for a long period of time. Adult stem cell therapy and research could only be described as going gangbusters.

The ability to do the right thing by our constituents, our families and friends is there for everybody in this House because we do have that opportunity through adult stem cells. In plain English, this bill allows the use of an aborted baby girl as the mother of embryos that will be destroyed for research. This violates all our principles and ethics of mother and offspring, the creation of human life and humanity.

The use of aborted female foetuses as a source of eggs to create embryos was confirmed by the Senate committee last year. I would like to go through that matter. I turn to a question on notice from the Senate committee signed by Professor Loane Skene, the acting chair of the Lockhart committee, whose recommendations are embodied in federal and state bills. The question was—

Is your recommendation (26) that 'creation of embryos using precursor cells from a human embryo or human foetus should be permitted under license' intended to allow the creation of embryos by fertilisation using ova obtained from a foetus?

Professor Loane Skene answered—

The Committee's recommendation envisaged that an embryo could be created for use in this way.

Therefore, there is no question that this bill allows for the use of an aborted female foetus as a source of eggs to create embryos, whether created by IVF fertilisation or by cloning. As I have said before, an aborted baby girl can be made the mother of embryos which are themselves to be destroyed in research.

Harvard University spent almost \$100,000 advertising this year for donors of eggs. Once the dangers of the process of providing those eggs was explained they had zero response. The danger is hyperstimulation. In England it is now possible to have a major discount on the cost of IVF in return for the donation of unwanted eggs. These are some of the issues that concern me about making women vulnerable and about women being used as a commodity. Cloning of human embryos has never been done. But if this bill is passed and if in this state we were successful in developing cloning, it would spread throughout the global world that we live in. That would mean that scientists would want to in the future bring about a birth from some of those clonings or—worse—bring cloned embryos to mature fetuses to harvest organs for transplants. These are hard thoughts to digest or comprehend, but I think we all know in our hearts and minds that that would be the way that the boundaries would be pushed.

Professor Julian Savulescu, a Melbourne ethicist and professor of ethics at Oxford University, said in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, a leading journal, that we must clone embryos and grow them to the advanced foetal stage—that is, 20 weeks—to obtain their organs for transplant to solve the organ transplant shortage. He said that it is morally required that we employ cloning to produce embryos or fetuses for the sake of providing cells, tissues or even organs for therapy. I believe that all of us in this House would find that statement awful and difficult but true. But the reality is that that will be the type of pressure that will be faced in the future if we allow this bill to pass and if ever cloning is successful. Despite the good intentions or naive hope of speakers here that these things should not occur, this bill does provide a head of power for human cloning and thus the inevitable demands and activities that would follow throughout the world.

There has never been an authenticated case of human cloning reported in a peer reviewed scientific journal. Why would we want to try to form a human clone in Queensland or Australia and to destroy that life and use it for research when we have adult stem cells, which are proving to be spectacular in therapy, treatment, possible cures and ongoing research and without the guilt of troubled consciences, as speakers on both sides have admitted in this debate? As an example, I refer to the Parkinson's trials at Griffith University using olfactory cells and turning those cells into muscle, heart, liver, kidney and Parkinson's type cells. In June 2006 the first human trial was reported in the *Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine* of adult stem cells in spinal injury. *Nature Biotechnology* reports that an estimated 80 conditions can be treated by adult stem cells. I ask those who have so genuinely spoken of hope for a cure for so many people to please think about this. That hope, that cure, that treatment is there in proven, ongoing and successful research and treatment through adult stem cells.

The creation of human life for the deliberate purpose of destroying that life is wrong. The dehumanising of aborted female fetuses for harvesting of eggs for cloning attempts and research is wrong. The stated intent of some in the global environment of our world to take these developments further to organ harvesting and so forth is wrong. The permitted development of human/animal clones in other parts of the world such as the UK demonstrates to us how the boundaries will be pushed in the future. The harm to vulnerable and poor women must also be considered in the ethical consideration and humanitarian consideration of this bill. Cloning has been successful in 12 animal species but scientists have not been successful in cloning a human because of the explosion of the pluripotent cells forming tumours. No matter how many thousands of experiments have been done with animals, embryonic stem cell cloning cannot be transferred to humans because of the problem of tumours.

Some 2,000 human patients are being treated for heart disease safely and effectively in the USA with adult stem cells. Emeritus Professor Jack Martin at the University of Melbourne and a fellow of the royal society said in the *Age* in 2006—

There are no therapies for any disease that would warrant the preparation of human embryonic stem cells by SCNT. Proof of this as an approach has never been obtained from any experimental model of disease in animals. It remains the case that embryonic stem cells have never yet been shown in animal research to provide a cure that is sufficiently prolonged and free of complications to warrant human studies.

He concludes by saying—

To accept the urgency of work on human embryonic stem cells in the face of the ethical barriers, then at least one experimental examination should be provided of safe, prolonged and substantially effective treatment that is better than any existing treatment.

There is no advantage of embryonic stem cells. They are pluripotent and they explode and turn into tumours whereas adult stem cells can be used in a controlled way to develop all types of tissues. Honourable members, if you vote against this bill you do not remove one vestige of hope for loved ones, friends and other people, because the truth is that adult stem cells can and are providing these treatments, research opportunities and real results. In fact—and this is extremely important—rejection of this bill will direct all attention, research funds and talent to the genuine and true opportunity of adult stem cell research and therapy, particularly here in Queensland. The future is full of hope with adult stem cells and research therapy within the safeguards of human values and human standards. I urge all members to consider this carefully and vote against this bill for the sake of human dignity and true hope.