



Speech by

**Phil Weightman**

**MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND**

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

**Mr WEIGHTMAN** (Cleveland—ALP) (9.53 pm): I rise to speak to the Research Involving Human Embryos and the Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill 2007. I would first like to express my appreciation to the Premier and cabinet for allowing this debate to be settled as a matter of conscience. This in itself is an overt display of both compassion and leadership, which I appreciate.

I have listened intently to the arguments put forward in this House on this very controversial and emotional matter. I appreciate the scientific arguments put forward, and they seem very compelling. I also appreciate the emotional cases put forward by many members. I appreciate that they are very real and very close to them. I, too, know many people who are suffering with debilitating diseases. I have two uncles who live in Townsville and both of them suffer from advanced Parkinson's disease.

I have seen my fair share of the impacts of these diseases on many families with my association with Camp Quality and the diseases that affect the children. I have seen many of those children pass away, and I have seen the anguish that the families suffered watching and hoping that something could be done about it. I listened to members extolling the virtues of the potential of this research to help many people. Knowing all this does not make my decision to oppose this bill any easier.

I have researched this topic in an effort to fully understand the implications of the past. I have canvassed opinions from people I know who are sympathetic as well as those who oppose it. I have discovered that there are very strong arguments for and very strong arguments against the subject currently under debate. I am extremely cognisant that the majority of people I spoke to, particularly in my electorate, asked that I oppose this bill.

I have looked at the scientific, social, emotional, ethical, moral and spiritual aspects of this debate, and I have weighed the probable and potential outcomes for the research. The one point that continually emerged in my mind was that I could not avoid the fact that this is about the creation of life for the purpose of experimentation and subsequent destruction 14 days later. I, like the member for Kawana, who spoke earlier, have had a Catholic upbringing. I was an altar boy just like he was and I was educated at Christian Brothers colleges. I maintain my strong Christian beliefs today and, although these beliefs weigh heavily on my decision-making process, they are not the sole contributor to my decision.

I will say now that I am not opposed to stem cell research per se. In fact, I would welcome further advancements in the realms of adult stem cell research, and indeed the harvesting of stem cells at birth and from the umbilical cord. I am not convinced that all options with regard to this form of stem cell research have been fully explored. I would prefer to finish and understand the potential of one aspect of research before beginning another. It is on this current research that I pin my hopes for those in my electorate who are suffering from debilitating diseases and for those who will suffer in the future. I am not convinced that the creation of life for the purpose of experimentation and subsequent destruction will be the panacea for those debilitating diseases. I love my uncles dearly, but I cannot in good conscience give

them false hope based merely on a supposed potential that a particular research may one day provide some relief for the diseases they are suffering from.

I accept that there are strict safeguards embedded in this legislation, but I am also aware that those safeguards can one day be changed, as the previous safeguards are being changed by this bill. The cliché 'the thin end of the wedge' has been used as an argument in this debate. The reality is that we are at the thin end of the scientific wedge and we do not have a firm grasp of where it will lead us. Again, in my mind this is not good enough. The one thing I am sure of in this debate is that each person who speaks on this bill will honestly believe they are right in what they say and believe. I respect their opinions and sympathise with those who have agonised over which way to vote.

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle said that men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way. You become just by performing just actions; temperate by performing temperate actions; brave by performing brave actions. Soon I will be required to make a decision that could place me contrary to my government's position. This is not a decision I make lightly. I believe the only thing that you can fully control in your life is the level of your own integrity.

Making informed decisions without compromising that integrity I believe is a measure of a person's character. I am very comfortable with my decision to oppose this bill. I am no less hopeful for those people suffering debilitating diseases that science will somehow deliver respite from those illnesses. It is just that I am not convinced that the creation of life for the purpose of scientific research is the way forward in that regard. Therefore, with great respect, I do not support this bill.