



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (4.35 pm): I congratulate those members of this House who have already risen to speak. I have learned a lot. I acknowledge the integrity, truthfulness and honesty with which they have approached this debate and I acknowledge their hard work. I was particularly impressed by our shadow minister's contribution, who presented a magnificent speech covering many different technical aspects of this bill. I will not be so technical.

This legislation that is before the parliament of Queensland, the Research Involving Human Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill, commonly known as the stem cell legislation, is one of the most important pieces of legislation that members of this chamber have ever had to consult on, consider, debate and study. It is a once in a political lifetime opportunity to be involved in a debate about legislation that will drastically change and shape the destiny and future of Queensland and Australian families.

I believe that many members who support this legislation try to frame this debate as being about trying to find cures for horrible medical conditions such as MS, cancer, Parkinson's disease and paralysis and that those of us—and I am going to oppose this legislation—who oppose and refuse to support this legislation are condemning our fellow Queenslanders and Australians who suffer from these awful diseases and their families to a hopeless future without cures for cystic fibrosis, MS, cancer, Parkinson's disease and paralysis. Unfortunately, I believe that many supporters of this legislation try to paint a simplistic picture of those who intend to oppose this legislation as being nothing more than healthy, selfish politicians who are climbing on to their soapboxes full of hypocritical moral and religious indignation to say no to the advancement in medical science all because they are either religious fanatics or scientific Luddites. That simplistic, glib, shallow argument is quite simply a lie that, unfortunately, some supporters of this bill perpetuate because they have not taken the time to examine properly the medical science that is involved in this debate or the human ethics and taboos that are associated with cloning science, which is also supported by this legislation. Some public supporters have been duped or dazzled by the cloning lobby which I believe is using this debate and stem cell science to further its own agenda.

I will shortly address the issue of cloning, but I would like to bring to the attention of this House an article about stem cell research written by a *Courier-Mail* journalist dated 29 September 2007. I believe it is a good example of a journalist presenting an unbalanced view of this legislation. Beside the headline, 'Waiting for a life line' on the right-hand side of the page is a tragic photo of a young man called Michael O'Neil smiling while he undertakes treatment for cystic fibrosis. It is a particularly poignant and emotional photo that shows Mr O'Neil, stripped to the waist, holding on to an IV stand with his right hand with intravenous lines connected to his stomach. His face wears a smile that is full of unexplainable happiness, trust and innocence.

One would have to be a monster to want to cause further harm to a sensitive human being like Michael O'Neil, yet in a deceptively clever piece of what I believe to be sophistry, spin doctoring and biased

writing, the journalist leaves readers with the overwhelming impression that opponents of this legislation would be prepared to see Mr O'Neil die from cystic fibrosis simply because a possible cure would compromise our morals or ethics. The journalist uses a well-worn emotional argument and logic template when he writes the following—

On current medical thinking Michael O'Neil will be dead by the age of 40. Cystic Fibrosis does that to you. The debilitating disease progressively attacks key organs, principally the lungs and pancreas leading to a life expectancy for an Australian male of about 36 years.

So this journalist, after describing very accurately and truthfully the tragic medical condition which Mr O'Neil and too many Australians face, then went on to blatantly I believe misrepresent the truth by subtle techniques of omission. He stated—

O'Neil is one of the millions of Australians who one day could benefit from Embryonic Stem Cell research—perhaps not a cure in his lifetime, but maybe a glimmer of hope.

Why has this journalist failed to acknowledge that adult stem cell research and breakthrough stem cell research, which has emerged from Japan in recent months, have far greater chances of offering a cure to Mr O'Neil and millions of Australians than the scientifically flawed embryonic stem cell research? Why hasn't this journalist acknowledged that those who intend to vote against this legislation are not voting to condemn Mr O'Neil and millions of Australians to a life of disease and no hope of cure? In fact, the opposite is true.

By voting no to this legislation, I am voting to ensure that scarce research dollars are spent on two medical plans of action most likely to bear fruit. Those medical courses of action, from the research I have read, are the adult stem cell therapies and the breakthrough stem cell therapy emerging from Japan. Both methods stand a greater chance of delivering cures for cystic fibrosis, MS, cancer, Parkinson's disease and paralysis. Why hasn't the journalist acknowledged that embryonic stem cell research is scientifically inferior when compared to adult stem cell research and the Japanese stem cell breakthrough?

Many journalists have failed to note and include in their articles that by voting against this legislation I am not voting against stem cell medical treatment and the magnificent future medical benefits it promises. I am voting against just one method of obtaining stem cells—that is, the embryonic method, where the reality is that human life is created and then destroyed in order to cannibalise and obtain human stem cells. If I could vote yes for stem cell medical treatment, I would vote for adult stem cell therapy or the recent revolutionary stem cell therapy which does not even require the use of morally risky, expensive and complicated cloning technology.

One of the most important reasons I am voting against the current stem cell legislation is that the proposed law is now technically behind the times and out of date. The Research Involving Human Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill 2007 was written before the stem cell revolution occurred on 7 June this year when a Japanese scientist created stem cells or cells which acted like stem cells without the need for cloning. That Japanese scientist was Shinya Yamanaka, and I apologise for my Japanese pronunciation.

According to Dr David van Gend in an article in the *Courier-Mail* on Tuesday, 26 June, Japanese medical researcher Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University took a mouse skin cell and introduced four small proteins which reprogrammed the cell's nuclear DNA to make it pluripotent—effectively the same as an embryonic stem cell. Up until June 2007, the only way that medical scientists could obtain stem cells was from two basic sources—human embryos and adult stem cells. There is now a third method of creating stem cells using molecular and cell biology science, not cloning techniques. The third way is cheaper and less complicated and is a morally and ethically risk free method of stem cell creation which now makes the first two methods superfluous. This new medical breakthrough, according to Dr David van Gend, is bad news for cloning specialists but good news for Queensland, which has world-class institutions for molecular and cell biology.

When this legislation is defeated—and I hope it is defeated—it will not mean that Queensland will lose the brand of Smart State because we already have in place, as Dr van Gend states, world-class institutions for molecular and cell biology. We will lead the research field. It will mean that the Smart State in defeating this legislation will become the 'Smarter State' because we already have, as Dr van Gend says, world-class institutions for molecular and cell biology—in other words, the medical research technology to assist, develop and financially benefit from the new Japanese breakthrough in stem cell technology.

This debate we have in Queensland parliament is nationally significant and I believe a chance to right some wrongs. I do not believe the argument that, because the federal government can overrule us, we should declare this a fait accompli and not put up a fight. If this medical breakthrough from Japan had occurred and been explained before the stem cell legislation was debated in federal parliament and passed by only one vote, then I believe we would not even be having this debate here in this chamber today. The stem cell legislation in its current form would have been defeated in our nation's capital if the

politicians who voted for it had known about the new medical breakthrough and new scientific method to obtain stem cells.

This is the first time in Australia where this type of legislation allows human cloning to occur—despite what I believe is a very clever and deceitful bill title—and is to be debated while embryonic stem cells can be obtained without the creation and then the destruction of human life. Even though part of the title of the bill is ‘prohibition of human cloning’, this legislation in reality allows for Queensland scientists to develop and perfect techniques for the cloning of humans. The legislation allows for Queensland medical scientists to create a human embryo and then destroy it 14 days later. So why doesn’t the title of this bill honestly reflect that reality? Why doesn’t the bill truthfully reflect the legal and scientific fact created by this bill? Why isn’t this bill titled ‘Research Involving Human Embryos and Permission to Clone Humans for at Least 7 to 14 Days Amendment Bill 2007’?

The reason why this bill is not called that is that people in my electorate and other electorates throughout Queensland who have not been fully informed by the popular media and briefed about the scientific proposition and fact made possible by this bill know that cloning of humans is wrong and we would begin to ask questions about the science, the economics and the ethics of cloning. The explanatory notes for the legislation state—

However, the creation by means other than by fertilisation of a human egg by human sperm (such as through somatic cell nuclear transfer), of a human embryo involving genetic material from more than two persons, is permitted if authorised under licence issued by the NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee.

This allows for the beginning of legal cloning of humans. There is no doubt about that. No amount of scientific weasel words—like somatic cell nuclear transfer—can hide the fact that this legislation is legalising the beginning of human cloning. It is the point at which Pandora’s box is opened, it is the thin end of the scientific wedge and it is the beginning of a frightening future for Queensland and Australia.

This will give those scientists who are advocates of human cloning the ability to continue to create cloned human embryos and experiment with and on them—human embryos which given the chance would have become human babies. I have no doubt that in the next 10 years if these scientists are allowed to have their way there will be legislation before this House which allows the creation of a cloned human baby involving genetic material from more than two persons if authorised under licence issued by the NHMRC Embryo Research Licensing Committee.

The agenda and the objectives of these scientists is not the further development of stem cell technology and the subsequent medical cures which, as we have heard from numerous credible and eminent professors and doctors, can be achieved through adult stem cell technology or, as I have mentioned before, the Japanese method of stem cell creation. The agenda and the objectives of these scientists is the further development of cloning technology. I believe that they are using the stem cell debate as a Trojan horse for their own unethical and illegal purposes.

The cloning of humans is wrong. The cloning of human beings using animal eggs—which is where this cloning technology is taking us—is an abomination. At the moment, society is talking about the liberties and rights of humans. If this legislation is allowed to pass, one of the cloning possibilities is a future in which we will be debating the liberties and rights of a new animal/human species, a chimera. Once again this sounds like science fiction but, in fact, it is a science reality.

In closing, I wish to put forward some of my constituents’ views on this debate. Like many other members of this chamber, I have received many written submissions on the issue. A submission from the Scots Presbyterian Church in Bundaberg states—

Prayerfully seek that as the local member in the Legislative Assembly of the QLD Parliament that you would consider all the ramifications especially where there is a concern in regards to God’s creation of human life and so considering that human life at the time of conception is a gift from God and therefore why should man interfere with what God has created.

A submission from Mr BJ and Mrs CJ Robinson states—

While we appreciate that there ought to be a standard approach on this matter throughout Australia, we believe that embryonic stem cell research—even with the addition of the cloning dimension—is scientifically flawed and ethically untenable. We fully support adult stem cell research—which is already resulting in successful treatments for a range of medical conditions—but note that embryonic stem cell research is yet to produce any verifiable and beneficial medical advances.

However, if QLD is going to permit the creation of laboratory-cloned human embryos to be destroyed within fourteen days to ‘harvest’ their stem cells, we would urge the QLD Parliament to draw ‘a line in the sand’ at the proposal to harvest ova from the bodies of late-term aborted baby girls. We believe that the abortion of any child is a tragedy, but surely we would be crossing a line into barbarism to then dissect the body of the aborted baby girls to extract their ova. While we would prefer no ‘therapeutic’ cloning in QLD, if such a practice is to be established, we would plead with you to support any amendment that would prevent the utilisation of ova from late-term aborted baby girls.

Jana Mackie, a 31-year-old Bundaberg resident, has written to me stating—

I am writing to you today to let you know that I am greatly saddened about the federal government's legislation to allow immoral harvesting of human babies to use for cloning and other purposes. Please take time to consider the fact that if something as valuable as human life is exploited in this way in 2007 around Australia, what will remain sacred in the future of my children?

I beg you to fight for our current state laws that ban cloning so that Queensland does not join the madness. The argument of whether an embryo can be called a human being is clear especially for those people who can't conceive and those that value human life in all its early stages. The procedure of somatic cell nuclear transfer really creates a human embryo. Please vote no for cloning.

I would like to note a number of things. I note that we Queensland parliamentarians are to be given a conscience vote and I appreciate that right and privilege. I note that the idea of creating human life to destroy it violates the principles of the sanctity of human life. I would also like to put on the record the fact that the efficacy of embryo stem cells has never been proven in animal models, and remains dangerous and unusable in humans. I note that ethically acceptable adult stem cells are being used safely in 80 human conditions.

I respectfully urge all Queensland members of parliament to thoroughly investigate the claims of miracle cures from cloning before voting on this issue. I plan to oppose the bill before the House.