



Speech by

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RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.52 pm): In rising to speak to the Research Involving Human Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Amendment Bill, I express my deepest opposition to this bill. In so doing, I speak on behalf of all of those who are deeply concerned about the headlong rush to keep in step with other states that have already passed legislation, especially in light of current developments which suggest that embryonic cloning technology is fast becoming obsolete. In fact, it has been described as already redundant. Rather than blindly trying to keep up with other states, we should be leading the way to the future with the latest developments in mind. We have before us an excellent opportunity to be leaders, not followers.

Industries minister Ian Macfarlane is quoted as saying that Australia's reputation as a global player in biotechnology could be undermined if conservative forces succeeded in banning embryonic stem cell research. Yet the fact is that research involving adult stem cells has been surging ahead for years with spectacular success. We have the opportunity to make our mark for future generations and for those who are suffering from disease and disability by abandoning the risks and uncertainties of therapeutic embryonic stem cell research and moving into research that is producing startling results. Adult stem cell research is producing staggering results which have been catalogued in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* for over 70 diseases, including diabetes, cancer, Parkinson's disease and spinal cord injuries. Reports of specific and spectacular cures using adult stem cells and umbilical cord blood cells have been widely reported.

If adult stem cell therapy has been used successfully for many years and continues to be refined in medical applications, why would anyone argue for embryonic stem cell research which, to date, has not produced anything positive at all? The one achievement of embryonic stem cell research has been the production of extremely aggressive tumours. Why go there? In the United States Congress last year a bipartisan majority stopped federal funding for any stem cell research that involves using human embryos and cloning. ES Cell International, a major biotechnology investor of the Australian Stem Cell Centre, has just recently left the field of embryonic therapeutic research as reported in an article in the *Courier-Mail* on 26 July. According to Alan Colman, stem cell pioneer and previous ESCI chief executive, the likelihood of having products in the clinic in the short term was vanishingly small. The *Courier-Mail* reported that the company has abandoned work on embryonic stem cells due to lack of success and soaring costs. Again, why go there?

An amazing research report, described by scientists as unbelievable, is the production of pluripotent stem cells from mouse skin cells. Research is continuing in this area, with further advances being reported. Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University headed the pioneering team in this research, but already it has been replicated by other scientists in different countries. Shinya Yamanaka said neither eggs nor embryos are necessary. Regardless of the trendy terms and descriptions used in the embryonic stem cell debate, the bottom line is that human embryos will be destroyed to allegedly save other lives, although that has not been proven so far to be either successful or safe. Governments are required to ensure the protection of life, not the destruction of one life for the dubious unproven benefit of another. However dressed up by

contemporary thought and argument, a human embryo is still human. When human life is seen as expendable, society is on the path to total degradation.

Do not think for a moment that experimentation will magically stop with this bill. I remind the House that in 2002 the Commonwealth government voted to ban cloning—every single member. What has changed? If cloning was so clearly wrong in 2002 when the Commonwealth parliament unanimously banned cloning, how can it be right in 2007? So-called safeguards will be put in place but not every person, not every politician and not every scientist will permanently honour restraints in this area. Without a doubt, one day someone will arise and go, legally or illegally, beyond the limits. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is impossible to put it back. It is impossible to say, 'Thus far and no further,' with confidence that there will be no progress beyond the limits.

Where will the endless stream of human eggs come from? From female human bodies. Will a lucrative business arise for the buying and selling of human eggs? Extraction is neither a simple process nor a guaranteed safe procedure. Already reports have come from the United Kingdom where women have died from the consequences of this procedure. I had to read it a dozen times because I thought I was seeing things: the bill allows for the creating of hybrid embryos by the fertilisation of an animal egg by human sperm. I wonder what the reaction of Queenslanders would be if a *Courier-Mail* headline was to read 'First hybrid embryos created by fertilisation of an animal egg with human DNA'—all in the name of medical science of course. Do we call this scientific advancement? Do we call this leadership?

Governments have no ethical right to allow bizarre experiments to satisfy the demands of some scientists for ambiguous results. Where would we go from there? Those who support therapeutic cloning usually do not go as far as supporting cloning of human beings. But history tells us that, over time, people often revise their opinion and position on contentious issues. The goalposts previously in place have been moved, current goalposts are in danger of being moved and future goalposts will again be moved unless we have the guts to oppose this bill. It does not stand up to either scientific or ethical scrutiny. Lives have been saved through the use of adult stem cells, especially a patient's own adult stem cells. When using adult stem cells, there are no moral or ethical dilemmas to resolve, no rejection of foreign bodies and no formation of aggressive tumours. It is totally untrue and totally unfair to insinuate that those who oppose this bill must obviously be prepared to see somebody's loved ones continue to suffer with debilitating ailments and diseases. That is rubbish! We are all committed to stem cell research but we are not all committed to embryonic stem cell research.

Already the idea of allowing human embryos to grow to foetus stage has been promoted in the prestigious *Journal of Medical Ethics* for the sole purpose of harvesting organ tissue. Honourable members may say 'not in Australia', yet how many members have changed their mind on the issue of therapeutic embryonic cloning over the last few years from a definite no to a yes? What has changed their mind and how can they be sure they will not change it again based on what seems today to be unthinkable research to what down the track will appear to be legitimate research? Australia may be an island geographically but, as far as interchange of research is concerned, we are all intrinsically linked. Nations elsewhere which may not be inhibited by legal restrictions will be able to take research done in Australia and go beyond the boundaries that we set in place. There will be no stopping research involving the creation of human life. Our senses would be dulled to the next stage and the next and the next. Let us look beyond the fleeting buzz of being able to keep up with the rest of Australia and have the intestinal fortitude to take steps which can take us to the forefront of stem cell research.

One of my staff members has a severely physically disabled adult son with spina bifida. He has paraplegia and a vast range of associated medical conditions, sometimes life threatening. Ross has given his permission for me to use his comments. He challenges the science that creates an embryo for destruction to aid people like him when stem cells can be harvested from a range of other sources. Ross cannot understand why science is not focusing on ethical harvesting of stem cells; why massive amounts of money will be poured into research that has no guarantee of results when time and resources could be invested in adult stem cell research which is already yielding positive results. He would like to be here himself to speak against the assumption that embryonic stem cell research is the only way towards a cure for people like him and asks that parliamentarians not be swayed by emotional hype in some media reports. He says, 'Not all disabled people are pleading for you to embrace embryonic stem cell research. Like many others I am totally opposed to this dangerous research.'

There is no need to allow so-called therapeutic cloning to produce embryonic stem cells, as adult stem cells and cord stem cells and even nasal cells that are obtained ethically are proving to be a much more promising and safer treatment alternative. A human being, even at the embryo stage, is still a human being and should never be destroyed for research purposes. I ask those who have indicated that they are supporting this bill—and I know how difficult this position can be for some of them—to consider that we have another proven alternative, and that is adult stem cell research. We do not need to go down this unethical path. There is nothing wrong with members reconsidering their position because, as long as they are a member of this House, this will be the most important decision they will ever make. Like I said, let us not go down this path of therapeutic cloning but choose a better ethical alternative, which is adult stem cell research. I oppose this bill.