

**STATUTES AMENDMENT (PROHIBITION OF HUMAN CLONING FOR REPRODUCTION
AND REGULATION OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN EMBRYOS) BILL**

28 October 2008

Adjourned debate on second reading (resumed on motion).

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:41): I also rise to speak to this bill and indicate that I am against it. I did not think I would agree with the member for Newland on anything, but I agree with him on this. There has been a lot of work done on cloning over time. We saw Dolly the sheep 10 years ago, and it was a great discovery, allegedly, but the full story was not told in the first press releases about the 257 failures in getting to that mark. One has to wonder what horrendous outcomes happened on the way to creating Dolly the sheep.

I also think it is outdated already. It is interesting to note the Western Australian legislation, which was debated after the pluripotent therapy was discovered in Japan using skin cells; and it is also interesting to note that the commonwealth legislation was debated before that and that it did not pass by a very large majority. I agree that human life starts at conception, but the question is: when does human life begin? Is it at conception, seven days, 14 days, or 21 days? So we start getting into the maths of it all and the differing points of view on when human life does begin.

I am well aware of the advances that have been made in in-vitro fertilisation technology, which have enabled some families to have children when otherwise they would not have been able to do so. That was a great step forward, and I can imagine that when the legislation proposing IVF went through parliament it would have created much discussion. I think this legislation is taking things more than one step too far because, as indicated by earlier speakers, it is outdated, and there is new technology coming over the top which it seems a lot of scientists are heading towards.

I move on to discuss some of the so-called potential benefits of stem cell research using embryos. In regard to conditions and diseases (including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease, spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, type 1 diabetes, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, muscular dystrophy and liver disease), I, like anyone else, would be more than happy if there were a guarantee that using embryonic stem cells would create a cure for many of these conditions, if not all of them. However, the research indicates that that is a long way off, perhaps the end of this century. By that time I think that pluripotent technology will be far out in front because it is far easier to work with adult stem cells, and it does not involve that ethical dilemma.

This issue has been debated for many years. As I indicated, Western Australia recently voted against embryonic stem cell research legislation and, as indicated, South Australia's law is now inconsistent with the new national regulatory scheme. However, Western Australia is coping, and I think we will cope as well. There is also concern about the impact of these research practices on women (the source of the eggs for embryonic research). So it is not just a moral debate; it also involves what women have to go through in the process of harvesting the eggs and the research.

We are told that potential research uses for embryos are as follows: furthering the understanding of the reproductive processes and improving ART; and as a source of stem cells. Stem cells are cells that can renew themselves and differentiate other cell types and offer great potential for cellular therapies. Pluripotent stem cells are cells that give rise to all or many cell types of the body from all these primary layers, but not to a whole organism. That is an important point: that you are not heading towards a whole organism. Japanese research conducted last year indicates that the use of skin cells could go forward. As I said, Western Australia has voted against similar legislation, and other states and the ACT have considered legislation complementary to the commonwealth changes and they have all passed legislation, so we will not be on our own, as Western Australia will be with us if we reject this bill.

If passed, this bill will legalise (or allow) the creation of research embryos and human embryo clones. It will remove the blanket prohibition on the creation of a human embryo clone and the creation and development of a human embryo other than by fertilisation. That is the nub of the argument: that a clone will be formalised and produced purely for medical

research. As indicated, we want to find outcomes for all these terrible afflictions that people can get, especially in older age. For instance, my father is now 88 and has been on crutches since he was 50 (a victim of osteoarthritis). He does not have a hip in one leg but a steel plate, but to his credit he did not stop working with me on the farm until he was 80. I would have given the world to see a cure for the pain he has gone through over those years. Doctors have done a lot of work trying to get him right, but his body rejected hips.

Mr Venning: He's a good guy.

Mr PEDERICK: He is a good guy, as the member for Schubert says. Nothing would be better than to see him cured. A deeply religious man—a lay preacher with the Uniting Church for over 60 years—he would not agree with this legislation. He has not lobbied me personally about it, but I know what he would think. We need to find the medical solutions.

I remember Christopher Reeve, who played Superman, being put into a wheelchair as a result of a horse-riding accident. He tried to find ways forward, and I remember him saying that cloning may get us the result, but nothing could save poor Christopher's life, or even get it back on track. From my observation, we are a long way off getting the results we want from cloning for research.

Further, if the bill passes it will prohibit placing a human embryo clone in the body of a human or animal. That is a good thing, and I reflect on what the member for Newland said about what was going on in the Second World War, when Germany was trying to achieve the master race and creating people who were tall blondes with blue eyes.

The Hon. J.D. Hill interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I do not quite make it, John: there is too much Anglo-Saxon and English background for me to have been involved in that. We definitely need to be mindful of the actions of history.

I will reiterate some of the arguments against embryonic stem cell research. There is a moral difference between creating an embryo to be destroyed and creating one for reproduction, and that is the nub of the argument. There is a moral difference between omissions and actions. It is a different thing to allow embryos to succumb than to actively make them die. You also can get stem cells from adults. Adult stem cell research shows much more potential. A human embryo has the status of a person or potential person and should not be harmed.

In reflecting on some of the local lobbying, I point out that some people in my electorate were quite concerned when they knew of this debate coming up and made their viewpoint known. There was no way they wanted the legislation to go through. I have had some correspondence, and I will read out a couple of paragraphs from Family Voice Australia, as follows:

The apparent rationale behind the bill (and comparable legislation passed elsewhere) is that scientists need to clone human embryos—as the only source of pluripotent stem cells (those which are capable of becoming any type of cell)—that are patient specific and could perhaps one day treat or cure diseases. But in November 2007 Japanese scientists documented that pluripotent stem cells could be produced readily by reprogramming ordinary skin cells.

Consequently, embryonic stem cell research has now been superseded. Scientists who had supported the cloning of human embryos have now stated that induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS cells) can be made more efficiently and without the ethical difficulties associated with cloning. Pioneer cloning researcher Professor Ian Wilmut said the new discovery which requires no cloning of embryos was, 'extremely exciting and astonishing', and he now plans to do research in this area. This approach, he says, represents the future for stem cell research, in contrast to the nuclear transfer method (cloning) that his team used more than a decade ago to create Dolly the sheep. Moreover, a team of scientists has just published a report demonstrating they have produced a number of disease-specific stem cell lines using cell reprogramming.

I note some other correspondence I have received from lobbyists condemning this bill. We have to be careful in our discussions on this bill because it is like the Rolls Royce has come forward and run over the old bomb, so to speak. New technology has been found in the last 12 months or so and there is Japanese research to get around the ethical argument, the religious argument and the mechanics of the issue of harvesting eggs and people having to work out whether or not they agree with it. With those few words, I express my opposition to the bill, but I certainly respect other members' point of view.