

The Australian Senate
Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee.

Submission regarding the Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013.

I respectfully urge members of the Committee to recommend that the above Bill proceed to legislation and make the following points in support of this.

1. Although the Australian public generally don't wish to be reminded of such matters, there is an abhorrence of pre-natal gender selection when reported occurring overseas, and when surveyed in 2006 and 2010 they have shown themselves to be strongly opposed. There is only anecdotal evidence that the practice does occur in Australia already, but the precautionary principle – so often invoked on other issues – would suggest that any means to deter it should be in place, such as this Bill becoming law.
2. Statistically, the gender balance of births in Australia is currently recorded as 51 male to 49 female, which appears to be normal. However, in IVF where gender selection is very feasible at an early stage, the balance is reported to be 53 male to 47 female, with no explanation advanced by practitioners. In Victoria, at least, where gender selection in IVF is not permitted, this should raise questions. In any case, it is anomalous that gender selection in IVF should be proscribed, while very permissive laws exist regarding all other abortions.
3. In several Australian states, abortion is, in practice, on demand up to 20 or 24 weeks, with restrictions on late term terminations presenting no real obstacles, the requirement for endorsement by two medical practitioners being merely a formality, with a financial interest being sometimes a factor. The accessibility of both early and late term abortion, with no cooling off period or counselling required, means that gender selection is certainly available to those who might wish it.

4. Although no studies are available to indicate whether particular ethnic groups are practising gender selection in Australia, the precedent exists for many in their country of origin. The United Nations estimates that world-wide there is a demographic gap of 200 million women and girls. In China and India, where the practice is notoriously widespread, the social results of gender imbalance are already evident: kidnapping, sex-trafficking, prostitution and assaults on women. In countries such as Albania, where statistics are available, the gender balance at birth is clear evidence of pre-natal sex-selection: 112 boys to 100 girls, and this ratio is replicated in several other Balkan countries.

5. Although it is more anecdotal than statistically established in First World countries like Australia, such as the US, Britain and Canada, the planned boutique family's quest for "balance" in the spread of their children's gender makes the medical profession more vulnerable to their requests. Short of the total ban which is morally desirable to protect children from becoming a commodity or accessory in the modern world, support for a Bill such as Senator Madigan's would be a step in the right direction, and accord with the values of the great majority of Australians.

Again I respectfully urge the Committee to support this Bill.

Yours faithfully,

John J Morrissey.
22 April, 2013