

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 1  
**Output Group:** ARC

#### **DEST Question No. E707\_04**

Senator Harradine asked on 18 February 2004, EWRE Hansard pp. 34-35.

#### **Question:**

Senator HARRADINE – This is a rather important matter. Do you know why Professor Bob Williamson is doing the coordinating? Is he an ethicist?

Mr HARPER – I am not fully aware of his background, but I understand him to be interested in this area.

Senator HARRADINE – No doubt; he is very much supporting human cloning.

Senator CARR – There might be a point of departure with us, Senator Harradine. I am not sure he actually says that, does he?

Senator HARRADINE – Yes. Along with Alan Trounson he supported the cloning of 30 human embryos in Korea just recently. Can I ask the ARC how it was that he became the coordinator in developing a stem cell ethics committee?

Mr HARPER – The document we are looking at is a redacted version of the business plan of the Stem Cell Centre which indicates that Professor Williamson would be coordinating that committee. We have received a business plan to that extent. If you are asking what it was that led the National Stem Cell Centre to conclude that Professor Williamson would be a good person to coordinate the ethics committee we would need to take that on notice and take advice from the Stem Cell Centre.

Senator HARRADINE – And provide information as to Professor Williamson and if there is any indication on his CV of his being an ethicist.

Mr HARPER – We can ask that as well.

#### **Answer:**

*Professor Bob Williamson's role as the coordinator of the independent ethics advisory committee*

The ARC has provided the following response:

The NSCC's agreement with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, as the convener of the Independent Ethics Advisory Committee (IEAC), was to provide seed funding of \$65,000 to assist in the formation of the IEAC, with the understanding that the existence of this committee would enable educated discourse and ethical advice regarding issues in stem cells and tissue repair, including discussion of differing views held by people from differing sectors of society. The formation of the IEAC, including the nominations of individuals, has been overseen by Professor Bob Williamson, Director of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

As a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, Fellow of the Royal Society and Officer of the Order of Australia, Professor Williamson has a distinguished scientific career and has longstanding interests in and contributions to the field of ethics, including:

- Member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (1992 – present)
- Contributions to the studies of the Ethics, Legal and Social Issues (ELSI) Working Group to the Human Genome Project (2000)
- Rapporteur of the World Health Organisation conference on Ethics and the Human Genome Project (2000)
- Member of the Australian Academy of Science Stem Cell Research Working Committee (2000)
- Acting Director of the Ethics and Human Genome Project Unit at Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

Professor Williamson is filling the role as Chair of the IEAC in an interim capacity. Candidates for the role of IEAC Chair are being actively considered. A high-profile person with an interest in stem cell and tissue repair ethical matters is being sought to encourage debate within the IEAC and the broader community. When a suitable person agrees to adopt the role of Chair, Professor Williamson will step aside as Chair of the IEAC.