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## A Submission to the Joint Senate Committee on Research Involving Embryos Bill 2002

by Dr Timothy Cox

*representing the Australia & New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology*

The Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology (ANZSCDB) represents nearly 250 scientists with a broad range of expertise in the fundamental cell sciences and the rapidly expanding field of developmental biology. Research on embryonic and adult stem cells is an integral part of these fields and the focus of the activities of many of our members. Although much of this activity is centred on stem cell models (for example, mouse embryonic stem cells), actualisation of this technology will require access to human embryonic stem cell lines. Significantly, Australian researchers were amongst the first to isolate these long sought after human embryonic stem cells. Considerable evidence from more than a decade of research on mouse embryonic stem cells supports the widely held scientific view that these embryonic cells have greater therapeutic potential than adult stem cells. These developments place the Australian academic and fledgling medical biotechnological communities in a position of strength to capture intellectual rights to human embryonic stem cell technology that holds the promise of becoming the single-most significant advancement in the recent history of medicine and medical science.

Amidst the global excitement of both researchers and potential beneficiaries of any new medical opportunities likely to arise from such research, the Society does recognise concern has been expressed by some members of the community at large, primarily in relation to the use of excess and 'otherwise to be destroyed (by law)' IVF-derived embryos for the procurement of these cells. However, the Society concurs with the majority decisions of the recent two-year inquiry into cloning and stem cell research and with the Prime Minister's own view, arrived at following his independent and careful deliberation of the matter.

*"...the central ethical issue here is that I have been personally unable to find a huge moral distinction between allowing the human embryo to succumb as a result of its exposure to room temperature and ending it through research..."*

The Society therefore strongly urges all Parliamentarians to similarly remain open-minded on this important issue so as to leave open the possibility of innovative therapies being developed in this country to help the hundreds of thousands of Australians who suffer from the array of diseases, disorders and disabilities for which stem cell research offers realistic hope for a cure. Importantly, a vote for the continuation of human embryonic stem cell research can still accommodate any concerns shown by some community members through carefully drafted legislation and uniform national regulatory guidelines as well as continued public discussion and education.

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