

To: Committee Secretariat, Australian Senate - Community Affairs Committee
Fax 02 6277 5829
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Topic Legislative responses to recommendations of the Lockhart Review

**SUBMISSION TO SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
ON ISSUES CONCERNING:**

* Legislative responses to recommendations of the reports of the Legislative Review Committee on the *Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002* and the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002* (the Lockhart review)

* That in undertaking this inquiry the committee may consider any relevant bill or draft bill presented to the President by a Senator when the Senate is not sitting.

I understand that matters relating to Therapeutic Cloning, Stem Cell Research and the Lockhart Report fall within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Aging. Also I understand that the Senate has referred these issues to the Community Affairs Committee, which is chaired by Senator Humphries.

Further I am aware that draft Bills are being submitted by Senator Kay Patterson and Senator Natasha Stott Despoja. The latter Senator's Bill relates to "*Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) and Related Research*" and not to the "*Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002*". Senator Stott Despoja states "Importantly, this bill does not alter provisions prohibiting human reproductive cloning, a practice I continue to oppose whole heartedly". I support the Senator in this opposition but I disagree with her in many other aspects of her proposed Bill.

My submission on this issue is based on the need for the Committee to consider the ethical and moral implications of these issues and the sensitivities of many citizens and groups within our community to matters concerning the value our community places on human life. There have been a range of views expressed in the media. I ask that the Committee refer to the full range of media and expert opinion that goes beyond the mass media and looks at the community, religious and ethnic media.

I write about the value of human life from the perspective that I am a 76 year old husband with a wife and 4 married children and 8 grandchildren, all living in Canberra. I have experienced many stages of living and am very grateful for those experiences. Health and aging are of concern to me now.

I refer specifically to Bills which are to be introduced in relation to stem cell research and which seek to overturn the current legislative ban on therapeutic cloning and to allow embryos to be created through therapeutic cloning for their stem cells to be used in research. It is essentially evil to destroy or damage living human embryos even if the long-term intent of such action is to help other human beings.

I ask you to oppose these Bills on a number of grounds, which include respecting the sanctity of human life and acknowledging the evidence that the scientific advances in adult stem cell research and the use for research of stem cells from umbilical cords allows stem cell research to proceed without damaging or destroying human embryos.

I note that Senator Stott Despoja refers to the claims made for adult cell research and notes that new research is challenging the former claimed limitations of the multipotency of adult stem cells.

I believe that there is ample scientific and common sense evidence that human life begins as soon as a human egg is fertilised and the genetic endowment of the new human being is evidenced by cell division. A human embryo is a living developing changing human person requiring respect for that person's dignity and potential to develop and change continually throughout life.

Recommendations of the Lockhart review, that allow the creation and use of human embryos for research etc provided that they are not allowed to develop for more than 14 days, still allows for the killing of 14 day old human embryos.

I oppose capital punishment for convicted criminals, whatever their offence, so I must oppose the killing of innocent and defenceless human embryos for any purpose. It is important that society recognises when human life begins and respects and protects that human life. Conscience has to be formed on the understanding of when human life begins.

There are serious ethical and moral values involved in the proposals of these Bills although the proponents cite the Lockhart Report without acknowledging that the Committee did not duly consider ethical concerns. There is a parallel in respect of human organ donation: It is ethical for one human being to donate willingly an organ to help another human being. It is not ethical to kill any human person to get human organs for others, yet this happens in our world. It would be against the consciences of most of us to allow this "harvesting of human organs" to happen, so it should be against our consciences to allow the destruction of human embryos to help other human beings. Human beings are not commodities.

I understand that the Lockhart Committee recommended changes in the legalisation in support of the attempted production of cloned human embryos, animal-human crosses and other experimentation that I, and I believe, most Australians would find abhorrent. Any legislation which removes the current ban from therapeutic cloning would open the door to sorts of experimentation that could exploit and devalue human beings.

I understand that it was the unanimous view of the Australian Parliament in 2002 that therapeutic cloning should be banned and that a similar view was expressed in a United Nations resolution in March 2005. I submit that the Committee should examine carefully what has changed ethically or scientifically since then?

I submit that the Committee should examine carefully the extent to which there are there well proven scientific developments that show any significant limitations on prospective advances from adult stem cell research. I submit that there needs to careful assessment of the extent to which some experts, with commercial interests and/or ideologies that argue that some human life is expendable, are supporting the proposed legislation. I submit that we should always give the benefit of any doubt in unproven experimentation or legislation to preserving the dignity and value given to human life from the moment of its conception.

Yours sincerely

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