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3rd October 2006

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Mr Humphrey

Re: Inquiry into the Legislative Responses to the Lockhart Review

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) opposes the cloning of human embryos and is therefore opposed to the bills proposed by Senator Natasha Stott Despoja and Senator Kay Patterson.

ACL believes the cloning of human embryos is both wrong and unnecessary. In 2002, Parliament unanimously passed the Prohibition of Human Cloning Act. Barely four years later, Senator Patterson wishes to dilute this important legislative safeguard into the Prohibition of Human Cloning *for Reproduction*. The Bill would be better titled, "Permission for Human Cloning," since that is its intended effect. Cloning is cloning – the distinction between 'reproductive' and 'therapeutic' cloning is a false one. The technique of somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) is exactly the same whether the cloned embryo is destroyed after 14 days or provided with the right environment, nutrition and time to develop until birth.

Whether the embryo is destined for research or for birth is irrelevant. In both cases, a living human embryo has been created by SCNT. This embryo is no different in itself to one created by natural conception or by IVF. It is a human being with potential for further development. Harvesting its stem cells means destroying this human life after 14 days. However, if it was left intact it could be brought to birth. This has been done with cloned animals, most famously Dolly the Sheep, who was created by SCNT. So-called 'therapeutic' cloning creates a human embryo solely for research with its destruction intended. The deliberate creation of life for the purpose of its destruction is wrong. This utilitarian approach to life will lead to negative consequences for the treatment of other vulnerable groups including the disabled, elderly, mentally ill and those without a voice in society.

The ethical problems do not stop there. Cloning requires large numbers of eggs per clone. There are two possible sources for these eggs: women or animals. Hyper-stimulating women's ovaries carries associated risks to their health. Altruism alone is unlikely to result in enough donated eggs and, whilst payment for eggs is usually forbidden, overseas experience shows clinics are skilled at getting around these laws: one clinic in Newcastle, England now offers discounted IVF to women willing to donate eggs for research as part of their assisted reproductive therapy. Given the high costs of IVF and the desperation of many couples to conceive, it is likely that many will find this 'discount for donation' offer hard to resist.

The Australian Christian Lobby is one of Australia's fastest growing political organisations with a vision to see the Christian constituency influencing the way we are governed, do business and relate to each other as a community.



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The alternative to commercializing women's ovaries is to use animal eggs, as proposed in the Lockhart Report and in both cloning bills. The DNA of the animal egg donor is present and functioning in the animal-human hybrid embryo. In animal cloning studies, this DNA has been present in sufficient amounts for the resultant 'tailor-made' stem cells to suffer immune rejection as 'foreign.' This surely creates unacceptable practical issues with the process, in addition to the obvious ethical standards that such a procedure violates.

The cloning of human embryos is being sold to the public on the grounds that it is necessary to relieve the suffering of those with terrible diseases. There is little evidence to support this view. In fact, all the treatments found to date have resulted from the use of non-embryonic stem cells. Embryonic stem cells have delivered absolutely nothing. Research into cloning squanders funds which could otherwise be spent on high quality research into techniques which are both ethical and of proven effectiveness. Therapies derived from non-embryonic stem cells are now used in 72 conditions whilst no cure has yet been found from embryonic stem cells.

Much is being made of the risk of a 'brain drain' to countries that do permit such flawed and unethical research. Rather than sink to the low standards of other countries, Australia has an opportunity to raise the bar and become a world leader in ethical stem non-embryonic stem cell research. ACL would like to see both proposed cloning bills abandoned in favour of a new bill which would maintain the 2002 ban on human cloning and legislate for a significant increase in funding and infrastructure to support research into non-embryonic stem cells.

Yours faithfully,

JJA Wallace AM
Managing Director