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Historic cloning law passed in Victoria

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Historic legislation to allow therapeutic cloning for stem cell production could spark a flood of medical research in Victoria, says Health Minister Bronwyn Pike.

The legislation, an amendment to Victoria's Infertility Treatment Act, passed the Upper House of the state's parliament in a historic conscience vote, 23 votes to 16.

Victoria is the first state to pass legislation mirroring federal therapeutic cloning laws.

The new law allows excess human embryos from IVF treatment to be used to create stems cells for medical research.

The law would bolster Victoria's reputation as a leader in medical research, Ms Pike told AAP.

"What this does is continues to position Victoria as the leading state in Australia on medical research, because it now allows us to continue our work with stem cells and really potentially be world leaders in some of the work that will lead to discoveries in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and other previously intractable diseases," she said.

"The licensing provisions are still very stringent and there do have to be strong ethical boundaries on this kind of research.

"But now having the capacity to undertake this work does mean that Victoria's very high profile as a medical research centre in the region has been enhanced.

"It means people will stay, good people will come back and new people will find that it is a great place for medical research."

The legislation was put together with care because of the "profound ethical considerations" governing such research.

"We're talking about experimentation on human eggs, and some people do have concerns, but I weighed it up on a personal level as did most other MPs, and I came to the conclusion that I think this is a good way forward."

Ms Pike, as health minister, introduced the bill to the parliament a month ago.

Right to Life Australia president Margaret Tighe said Victorian MPs had allowed the production of "a class of human beings to be used for the benefit of others - the slaves of science".

"As one MP said, in the history books of the future this step will be the one that will be remembered over and above all other achievements (of the government) in relation to roads, schools and health care," she said.


"It will be remembered as a black day in the history of this state."

The law must now be approved by Victorian Governor, Professor David de Kretser.

Professor de Kretser is a former medical researcher, foundation director of the Monash Institute of

Reproduction and Development at Monash University and associate dean of Monash's biotechnology development medical facility.

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