

[Print this page](#)

## Scientists pan uni's stem-cell study ban

Lisa Macnamara  
07feb07

THE Academy of Science has slammed Sydney University's decision to ban human stem-cell research at its new state-of-the-art medical institute, warning that Australia will earn a reputation where the "religious views of the landlord" take priority over the research.

The prestigious body publicly criticised the university's plan for the health and medical research institute, to be built on vacant land released by the nation's oldest Catholic college, warning it could damage Australia's scientific community.

"If Australia gets a reputation for being a country where the religious views of the landlord are more important than the scientific principles of the researcher, it will do us no good internationally," the chair of the academy's Committee for Medicines, Bob Williamson, said.

"Medical researchers in every country are aware of the need for academic freedom and for the ability to continue to carry out ethical research in a way which is not fettered by religious views or political views."

Under the \$11 million land deal struck between the campus and St John's residential college, academics who work in the new Sydney Institute would be forced to use alternative facilities at the campus for embryonic stem cell research.

The academy said it was possible to carry out medical research on stem cells ethically within the Australian healthcare framework.

"Parliament just passed laws that agree with this position and these agree with the laws in the United States and United Kingdom," the academy said in a statement.

"It seems unreal that a religious group can pursue their minority views and stop medical research at one of our top universities from taking advantage of every means to help prevent and treat diseases like motor neuron disease, cancer and cystic fibrosis."

At most risk was the international reputation of Australian scientists.

"It is the principle that a major university is actually going against the wishes of parliament and the majority of Australian people and putting restraints on the research freedom in medicine, which will mean in practice that we are more likely to lose people overseas and projects overseas," Professor Williams said.

"The health of medical research is really the issue."

Sydney University senate member Rose Jackson, who did not support the vote to approve the new facility, said there was concern about the plans when the university hierarchy discussed it on Monday night.

"There was definitely concern," said Ms Jackson, who is the undergraduates' representative in the senate.

"People were asking questions and asking, 'Can we analyse data?'

"The university did feel the heat and certainly the (senate) fellows were very

inquisitive and, I think, altogether not too pleased at what happened."

Sydney University biochemistry academic Tony Weiss said he felt the decision was of little concern to medical academics at the university.

"It's a very pragmatic decision because they got the space and the land and they can still do a range of science," he said.

[privacy](#)

[terms](#)

© The Australian