

Wednesday, 6 June 2007

[Print](#) | [Close](#)

No MPs swayed by Pell's threats: Iemma

NSW Premier Morris Iemma says he doesn't believe Catholic MPs have been swayed by Cardinal George Pell's threat of consequences from the church if they support a bill overturning a ban on therapeutic cloning.

Mr Iemma reaffirmed both he and his deputy John Watkins, both practising Catholics, would vote in support of the bill.

"I've already thought seriously about this legislation and it passes all the ethical and moral issues that I need passed, and gives people hope," Mr Iemma told reporters.

"I haven't met any MP yet who has been dissuaded from supporting the bill as a result of (Cardinal Pell's comments). He made a contribution to the debate, I don't believe what he said.

"He won't be dissuading me from doing what I believe is the right thing and that is supporting the bill and voting for it."

Labor MP Tony Stewart says he will go to hell before he votes against the bill.

The Member for Bankstown lashed out at Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell, who warned all Catholic MPs to vote against the bill.

MPs from both sides of politics are being allowed a conscience vote on the bill, which would bring NSW in line with the Commonwealth, which overturned a ban on therapeutic cloning last year.

Mr Stewart, who is a Catholic, said he will risk his shot at the afterlife if it will make a difference to people with life-threatening diseases.

"Maybe I'll go to hell but if I go to hell I'm going to do so by saving a lot of lives, because that's what this bill is about," he told Southern Cross Broadcasting.

Health Minister Tony Abbott, a devout Catholic, tried to calm the furore.

Mr Abbott suggested Cardinal Pell had simply urged Catholic MPs to consider church teachings before deciding which way to vote.

"Cardinal Pell is entitled to say his piece. He is the leader of the Catholic church here in Australia," Mr Abbott told reporters in Sydney.

"To do Cardinal Pell justice, I think what he was trying to do was to say to people who happen to be Catholics that this is not a trivial issue.

"What politicians do on this issue is entirely up to them."

Mr Abbott rejected the suggestion that Cardinal Pell had threatened MPs with excommunication.

"I am not sure that's what he said. I've only read a news report but certainly that wasn't what he appeared to be saying," he said.

"What he appeared to be saying, to me, was that this was a serious matter and people need to carefully consider the traditional teaching, they should not lightly dismiss it.

Mr Hockey said Cardinal Pell should use his position to educate Catholics, not threaten them.

"What he's doing is his position, which is to remind Catholics of what their conscience should be," Mr Hockey told the Nine Network.

"I don't object to him expressing that opinion, but I do object to any suggestion that there are consequences."

Mr Hockey said he received advice from the Catholic Church when a similar bill faced parliament last year, but he had voted with his own conscience.

"I'm a Catholic and I voted in favour of stem cell research. I looked into my heart and thought carefully about it and made that decision," the minister said.

Mr Stewart said Cardinal Pell was entitled to his views but should keep out of the political process.

"We don't need a religious leader telling members of parliament what should be done," he said.

The bill is currently being debated in the Legislative Assembly, with a conscience vote for all lower house MPs expected later on Wednesday.

Brought to you by AAP



© AAP 2007

The Canberra Times

Copyright © 2007. Rural Press Limited