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Pell 'regrets' stem cell approval

07jun07

AUSTRALIA'S senior Catholic cleric, Cardinal George Pell, says he regrets that a bill overturning a ban on therapeutic cloning has passed the lower house of NSW parliament.

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In a rare conscience vote, the bill allowing stem cell research, also known as somatic cell nuclear transfer, was today approved by the lower house 65 votes to 26.

Cardinal Pell said he remained hopeful the bill would be defeated in the upper house when it is introduced later this month.

"The Catholic Church supports adult stem cell research, especially for health cures, and remains opposed to the destruction of human life," Cardinal Pell said in a statement to AAP.

"In our democracy, parliament legislates.

"I regret the vote of the NSW legislative assembly on cloning and hope that the legislative council will be better informed."

The cardinal said the Sydney Catholic Life Office was prepared to offer information to "any person who wishes to understand the pro-life position better".

Cardinal Pell has come under attack by MPs after he said Catholic politicians who voted in favour of the bill could expect consequences for their place in the life of the church.

Emergency Services Minister Nathan Rees said yesterday the cardinal should apologise to Catholic MPs or risk comparisons to controversial Muslim leader Sheik Taj Aldin Alhilali.

A number of high-profile MPs, including Premier Morris Iemma and his deputy John Watkins, are Catholic.

Both Mr Iemma and Mr Watkins voted in favour of the bill.

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