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## Pell appeals to higher authority on stem cells

Alexandra Smith and Linda Morris

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THE Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell, remains hopeful the stem cell bill will be defeated in the NSW upper house, after lower house MPs yesterday voted 65 to 26 to support it.

In a conscience vote, the Premier, Morris Iemma, and his deputy, John Watkins, supported the bill while ministers Kristina Keneally, Graham West, Kevin Greene and Barbara Perry voted against it.

The Opposition Leader, Barry O'Farrell, a Catholic, supported the bill, while his deputy, Nationals leader Andrew Stoner, voted against the lifting of the ban on therapeutic cloning.

If it passes the upper house later this month, it will mirror federal legislation. It is expected to be a tighter vote because of the Christian Democrats, right-wing MPs Charlie Lynn and David Clarke and several Catholic Labor MPs, including the Education Minister, John Della Bosca.

Dr Pell said he regretted yesterday's result, but remained hopeful it would be defeated in the next session of Parliament.

The cardinal has faced both criticism and support from within the Catholic Church after he warned MPs faced "consequences" in their religious life if they supported the bill.

The Minister for Science and Medical Research, Verity Firth, said Dr Pell was entitled to express his views, but said he declined two offers to be briefed on the bill.

The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, also expressed "profound regret", saying the destruction of human embryos and the cloning of human beings was a step too far.

Drawing on comments he made to a gathering of church leaders last week, Dr Jensen said he believed MPs were wrong to vote in favour of embryonic stem cell research. But he adopted a less strident tone than Dr Pell, saying he could "honour" those MPs if their decision to support this research was made in good conscience.

Dr Jensen conceded his opposition to therapeutic cloning could ultimately be proved wrong and recognised that "in the end it is to God that we give account".

"For myself, I think that the politicians who vote in favour of embryonic stem cell research are wrong to do so," he told the church's NSW Provincial Synod.

"Naturally, I am heartily in favour of stem-cell research as such, and also, like everyone, long for the day when disease will be able to be treated successfully as a result of research.

"But, if I understand the technology correctly, embryonic stem-cell research involves both the destruction of embryos and the cloning of human beings.

"This is a step too far for us to take, even if the results were shown to be marvellous. I believe that I have the right to indicate this."

The president of the Baptist Union of NSW, John Taylor, said there would be a degree of

disappointment in his church at the outcome of the lower house vote.

The bill was well-meaning, but immoral: "The opportunity is there to create a human embryo with one genetic parent or mixing the genetic material of three or more genetic parents."

Asked if he held out hope that the churches could be more persuasive in the upper house, Mr Taylor said: "I would have to be a prophet."

The Prime Minister, John Howard, yesterday defended Cardinal Pell and said it was an exaggeration to suggest the church was directing politicians.

"I find it rather ironic to hear a string of Labor Party members of the NSW Parliament complaining about alleged direction by Cardinal Pell when on a daily basis they are directed by trade union bosses how to vote," he said.

**with Mark Metherell**

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