

## Jail risk to keep cloning ethical

AFNR000020061020e2a10003m

News

Adrian Rollins with AAP

495 Words

21 October 2006

Australian Financial Review

First

6

English

© 2006 Copyright John Fairfax Holdings Limited. www.afr.com Not available for re-distribution.

Report

The threat of jail sentences will ensure embryonic cloning researchers do not stray into ethically unacceptable areas such as human or animal cloning, scientists have told the first day of a Senate inquiry.

Controversial legislation to drop the existing ban on stem-cell research is being considered by the Senate's community affairs committee and a rare and potentially divisive conscience vote is expected within weeks on private member bills proposed by former Liberal minister Kay Patterson and Democrat senator Natasha Stott-Despoja.

Loane Skene, deputy chairwoman of the Lockhart review that earlier this year recommended overturning the ban on therapeutic cloning using embryonic stem cells, told the committee on Friday that no other areas of scientific research would be governed by such tough penalties.

"You'd face the risk of criminal prosecution, 15 years' imprisonment, losing your research funding obviously, your reputation, your job, just everything that is worth living for if you are a scientist," Professor Skene said. "So it's the strongest prohibition that the community can place on particular activities."

Fellow Lockhart review member Peter Schofield said that under recommended controls scientists using cloning techniques would need to satisfy "exceedingly high" regulatory standards and obtain the approval of research ethics committees, licensing authorities and other bodies including the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

"If parliament is to give scientists the privilege of engaging in this research for noble ends, then the consequence is that those scientists also must accept that there is

regulation and very strong regulation in this area," Professor Schofield said.

The assurances respond to warnings by the chief scientist, Jim Peacock, that cloning techniques involving the insertion of human cell nuclei in animal eggs to create chimera should not be allowed.

Opponents of stem-cell therapy told Friday's hearing that it was unnecessary because significant advances were already being made under existing legislation that permits cloning of adult stem cells.

Tasmanian Liberal senator Guy Barnett said proponents of therapeutic cloning had failed to make their case for legislative change.

Griffith University's Peter Silburn said the successful cloning of Dolly the sheep using adult stem cells showed there was no need to use embryonic stem cells for research.

Professor Silburn said false and irresponsible claims were being made about what could be achieved using embryonic stem cells, which he said were only available in limited quantities.

"When you have limited resources, I don't think that embryonic stem-cell cloning is going to achieve the results people are demanding from science because the cells are unstable genetically and the resources are not there."

The committee is due to report to the Senate by the end of the week.

key points

\*Controversial legislation to drop the existing ban on stem-cell research is being considered.

\*Opponents of stem-cell therapy say big advances are already being made under existing laws.