

[Home](#) » [National](#) » Article

Stem cell bill 'sick', top National says

December 7, 2006

Most Australians would be absolutely horrified if they knew the real detail involved in a decision to overturn a ban on therapeutic cloning, Nationals Senate Leader Ron Boswell said today.

Federal Parliament last night lifted a ban on therapeutic cloning, which will allow researchers to clone embryos using donor eggs and cells without sperm and extract their stem cells for medical research.

"It certainly doesn't reflect the community that I live in," Senator Boswell told reporters.

"I would think if people knew the details of it they would be absolutely horrified."

Prime Minister John Howard and new Labor leader Kevin Rudd both spoke against the bill before it passed the House of Representatives last night.

Senator Boswell said the true details were not able to be released.

NSW Liberal senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells said today was a sad day for Australia.

"I think this debate has been led in a very misleading and deceptive manner," she said.

"I think the Australian public have not really been told what precisely is in this bill.

"What sort of science now wants us to take cells from aborted female foetuses, where we are going to take eggs from dead women?"

"I really think that the Australian public when they do understand, and when the smoke and mirrors and some of the deceptive language that has been used is taken away, will realise that this is sick legislation and not the sort of legislation that they would expect reasonable and decent members of Parliament to have supported."

Most of the more than 100 MPs who spoke on the bill were in favour of changing the law.

Senator Fierravanti-Wells said it was very complicated legislation.

"It's about multinational companies that one day will gain a lot of benefit out of this," she said.

Liberal Tasmanian Senator Guy Barnett said it was a result he had feared.

It certainly doesn't reflect the community that I live in



Ron Boswell ... says the true details were not able to be released.

He said there should have been much more public debate on the issue.

"I feel deeply, deeply disappointed and saddened that we're now creating a life for the purposes of research, and that's destruction," he said.

"I don't think the community has any idea of the significance of the legislation which we are debating today."

Parliament was given only its second conscience vote of the year on the legislation, following a vote on the abortion drug RU486 in February.

But after an emotional four-day debate, the final vote was an anti-climax, with MPs electing not to call a division and have their choice recorded.

An earlier conscience vote, on whether debate should continue to a third reading, returned an 82 to 62 result.

The House of Representatives also voted down an amendment that had threatened to scuttle the legislation.

The change would have prevented stem cells from being extracted from the eggs of aborted late-term female foetuses, but this procedure will remain acceptable under the bill.

Australian Democrats senator Natasha Stott Despoja said she was always hopeful of such a result, describing it as a "historic bill".

"[It] will give scientists and researchers the tools they need to understand diseases and hopefully one day cure them," she said.

"So I'm very proud of the role the Democrats played in this debate. It's a good piece of policy and it deserved to pass."

Australian Democrats leader Andrew Bartlett said the issue would be reviewed again in a few years' time, but said more debate was necessary.

"It's still a difficult issue and that's why I think it needs more debate," he said.

"I'm comfortable with what the legislation will allow, [but] I'm concerned about where the legislation might lead if there's not more debate."

AAP

When news happens: send photos, videos & tip-offs to 0424 SMS SMH (+61 424 767 764), or [email us](#).

[SAVE 33% on home delivery of the Herald - subscribe today](#)

Copyright © 2006. The Sydney Morning Herald.