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## Clerics blast cloning vote

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CHURCH leaders have condemned the Senate's vote in favour of the human cloning bill, claiming the narrowness of the margin vindicates their view the community is split on the issue.

Sydney Anglican Archbishop Peter Jensen said if Australians understood the legislation they would be appalled. President of the Australian Bishops Catholic Conference, Philip Wilson, said the closeness of the vote, 34-32, was a "reflection of the way people are pondering these issues in the community".

Sydney's Catholic Archbishop, George Pell, praised senators who led the fight against the bill, saying they had done "better than expected".

The bill clearing scientists to clone human embryos for research was passed by the Senate on Tuesday night and will go before the House of Representatives later in the month.

"The fine print of the bill now needs to be scrutinised closely and the advocates of change asked what is up their sleeve for the next stage," Dr Pell said.

Dr Jensen said he was deeply disappointed and called the manufacture of human embryos for experimentation "a moral affront and a failure to appreciate the God-given value and dignity of human life".

Australian Christian Lobby managing director Jim Wallace urged MPs to "reflect on the senators' confusion", while Assemblies of God in Australia national president and Hillsong Church senior pastor Brian Houston asked MPs to consider the narrow majority and added that it was a "highly emotional issue with serious ethical implications".

Baptist Union of Australia national president Ross Clifford said he was disappointed over the vote, while acknowledging it was a "very complex" issue.

Politicians on both sides of the argument remained confident the private member's bill introduced by Kay Patterson would attract strong support in the House of Representatives.

Senator Patterson said she was pleased with her success but unwilling to assume anything about the House of Representatives debate. "I won't be counting my chickens before they hatch," she said.

John Howard continued to agonise over his position, saying he would find it difficult to tell a crippled person he would block research that might deliver them a medical breakthrough.

"On the other hand, if someone says to me: 'You are going a step too far and interfere in fundamental concepts of the beginning of life', that's quite a challenging thing as well."

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley said he expected to support the bill but would listen to the debate and examine the ethical constraints on the research.

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