

Local

`Clone threat to women'

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WOMEN'S groups and federal MPs have warned that legalising therapeutic cloning will endanger women's lives and create pressure for them to become "egg factories" to supply the dreams of scientists.

And they have accused cloning advocates of playing down the risks in their enthusiasm to convince parliament to scrap a ban on the research procedure.

A coalition of women's groups including Women's Forum Australia yesterday launched the Hands off our Ovaries campaign to pressure MPs to reject a private member's bill, to be debated next month, which would allow cloning.

The procedure involves injecting adult genetic material into an egg that has had its nucleus removed and then harvesting stem cells from the resulting embryo for research and the creation of disease treatments specific to the individual who provided the genetic material.

Speakers at yesterday's launch said women represented a forgotten element in the cloning debate because scientists would have to inject them with hormones to produce hundreds of thousands of eggs for the research. The hormones had been shown to cause organ failure, respiratory distress and even death.

"Our lives are not collateral damage on the biotechnology superhighway," WFA spokeswoman Katrina George told the forum. Ms George said egg extraction should be banned until it was shown that eggs could be obtained without risking the health of women.

Ms George also rejected the idea that animal eggs could be used to avoid the need for harvesting eggs from women. While animal eggs might be used in research, human eggs would be needed to produce treatments for humans.

"Because cloning is impossible without women's eggs, then the health impact on women is absolutely central to this debate," she said.

"It's not a side issue."

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