

# THE Daily Telegraph

## Stem cell report 'was a farce'

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**OPPONENTS of embryonic stem cell research have labelled a bipartisan federal parliamentary committee that has backed therapeutic cloning "biased".**

The committee examined the expert Lockhart review, which earlier this year recommended changing the law to allow cloning for stem cell research, and two bills that would give it legislative effect.

The committee's report, tabled yesterday, outlined arguments supporting and opposing the technology to help MPs who will have a conscience vote on the issue next month.

The two authors of private member's bills seeking to overturn legislation, Democrats senator Natasha Stott Despoja and Liberal senator and former health minister Kay Patterson, were members of the committee.

A majority of committee members recommended voting for Senator Patterson's bill.

"The Senate committee.... was just as biased as the Lockhart committee," Australian Federation of Right to Life Association president Kath Woolf said today.

Ms Woolf said the Lockhart committee was stacked, with three of its six members previously on the record in support of human cloning.

Similarly, the two authors of the bills were on the supposedly independent Senate committee, she said.

"It is a farce that they were able to sit in judgment of their own bills," Ms Woolf said.

"If their votes were not counted, the committee would have been evenly split."

The committee voted five-three in favour of overturning the 2002 ban on therapeutic cloning for the purpose of embryonic stem cell research.

Scientists hope stem cell research eventually will lead to treatments or cures for conditions ranging from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases to spinal cord injury, diabetes and arthritis.

In a conscience vote in 2002, parliament passed legislation that allows scientists to extract stem cells from spare IVF embryos, but prevents embryos being created for their stem cells in a process known as therapeutic cloning.

But Catholic Health Australia (CHA) said the report demonstrated the scientific community was far from settled on the need to clone embryos.

"Parliamentarians will struggle to find a convincing case to expand the licence in embryo experimentation or to justify legalised human cloning," CEO Francis Sullivan said.

CHA told the Senate committee during its public inquiries that potentially life-saving treatments developed using embryonic stem cells would be banned in Catholic hospitals on ethical grounds.

The Catholic Church, which operates a network of private hospitals around the country, is opposed to therapeutic cloning, believing it creates a new human being specifically to be killed.

Thirty-six hours have been set aside for debate on the bills in the Senate, beginning November 6, with a free vote expected at the end of that week.

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