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## Flip-flop claims as Iemma backs cloning changes

Jonathan Pearlman and AAP  
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THE Premier, Morris Iemma, has pledged to support any changes required to ensure NSW law is consistent with the Federal Government's decision to allow therapeutic cloning.

Earlier this year, Mr Iemma publicly split with his predecessor, Bob Carr, and insisted NSW should not ease restrictions on stem cell research without a national framework.

Mr Carr said federal opposition to the science was "bewildering" and the research had the most "remarkable potential of any scientific discovery ever made in human health".

But Mr Iemma said yesterday that if elected next year he would allow a conscience vote for any amendments to NSW law and would support the changes.

The Opposition Leader, Peter Debnam, said he would also allow a conscience vote and support any changes, but accused Mr Iemma of a "flip-flop".

"I thought it was a good decision [by the Federal Government]," Mr Debnam said. "I was very pleased to see it go through. I would be suggesting to my colleagues to support any legislation that is required ... I'm a little bit surprised to see that Morris Iemma has flip-flopped."

The NSW cabinet office is examining the federal bill and is expected to find that mirror legislation is required. The bill would not be introduced until after the election as Parliament does not resume till after the poll next March.

Western Australia also plans to introduce complementary legislation with a conscience vote.

Associations of doctors and scientists largely welcomed the federal decision, but the Australian Society of Medical Research sounded a note of caution.

"The research is now in a position to be able to see whether or not this mystical technology actually has legs and can genuinely offer avenues of meeting unmet need," its president, Dr Levon Khachigian, said.

The Australian Academy of Science said the decision would stem the country's brain drain.

"Because of uncertainty .. several of our best stem cell scientists left for the United States," Professor Bob Williamson said.

The Australian Medical Association said the vote recognised the diversity and strength of moral opinion on the issue.

"I think most people feel comfortable with medical science being allowed to use cloned embryo cells ... to try and cure incurable diseases," , a spokesman said.

However religious groups were largely opposed. Anglican Bishop Rob Forsyth felt "deep regret" over the decision, while the Catholic Church remained opposed to experimenting on human embryos.

It is funding research with adult stem cells in a bid to provide a viable alternative when the legislation comes under review again, Bishop Julian Porteous said.

Right To Life Australia singled out the bill's provision for harvesting cells from aborted female foetuses that grow into eggs, labelling them horrendous. "It's really sick ... aborted female babies becoming mothers, so to speak," a spokeswoman said.

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