

FROM THE MINISTER FOR INNOVATION

DATE: Monday, October 16, 2006

GOVERNMENT WELCOMES INPUT FROM VICTORIAN SCIENTISTS

The Bracks Government today welcomed a communiqué from Victoria's leading scientists calling for the implementation of the Lockhart Review Committee recommendations including the lifting of legislative bans on somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Innovation Minister, John Brumby, welcomed the communiqué which was released after an all-day Scientific Leaders Forum on Stem Cells in Melbourne hosted by the Bracks Government.

“The Bracks Government wants to ensure Victoria remains an international leader in stem cell research which is why as a government we are strongly advocating easing current restrictions to allow scientists to take the next step in embryonic stem cell research,” Mr Brumby said.

“This is the strongest indication yet of the direction that Victorian science leaders believe is necessary to the future of stem cell research in this country.

“Their view supports the Victorian Government's long-held determination that the current regulatory environment must be reformed to ensure our scientists can continue to progress this important work, which provides great promise to patients suffering serious diseases.”

The forum chaired by former Australian of the Year and Victorian Chief Scientist, Sir Gustav Nossal, agreed legislative changes were required to enable stem cell science to continue to succeed in Australia.

The communiqué called for:

- Somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) to be allowed under licence with severe penalties to apply for any misuse of SCNT;
- The maintenance of an open and transparent regulatory licensing and monitoring regime for SCNT;
- The establishment of a national stem cell bank;
- The establishment of a regulatory framework comprised of overarching Commonwealth legislation and complementary State and Territory

legislation; and,

- Continuing the ban on human reproductive cloning.

Mr Brumby said the document was a considered approach and would form part of the Victorian Government's submission to the Senate Committee public hearings on stem cell research in Melbourne on 24 October.

The forum discussed the issues directly with Professor Loane Skene, University of Melbourne Law School and Deputy Chair of the Lockhart Committee and Robert Klein, Chairman, Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee, California Institute for the Regenerative Medicine.

Mr Klein highlighted the importance of SCNT to the future of stem cell research that could be accelerated through existing and future partnerships between Victoria and California.