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## PM, Rudd won't support stem cell bill

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Prime Minister John Howard says he will not support a bill to overturn a ban on therapeutic cloning.

The bill will allow scientists to create embryos through therapeutic cloning and extract their stem cells for use in medical research.

Mr Howard said as a mainstream protestant Christian he recognised Christian people of good conscience could reach different conclusions on the legislation.

"It has been a difficult issue, I've indicated publicly in the past I was unresolved in my own mind how to vote," Mr Howard said.

"I don't think the science has shifted enough to warrant the parliament changing its view (since the 2002 vote to ban therapeutic cloning)."

Mr Howard was speaking in parliament ahead of a conscience vote on Liberal senator Kay Patterson's private member's bill.

Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile will also not support the bill.

Mr Vaile said the bill's provision to allow human embryo clones to be created that were marked for destruction after 14 days would create two classes of human beings.

"I believe the object of this bill is morally wrong," Mr Vaile told parliament.

"It is an example of how good people can be seduced by the prospect of miracles into making terrible mistakes."

Mr Vaile said he is a cancer survivor but medical research is already finding cures for previously incurable disease.

New Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd said he would not support the bill, and expressed concerns about parliament crossing a moral boundary.

"I find it very difficult to support a legal regime that supports the creation of a human life for the single and explicit purpose of experimentation on that human life," he said.

He described himself as one of the most reluctant supporters of the 2002 bill that allowed research on embryonic stem cells extracted from spare IVF embryos.

His mother, a Catholic and Parkinson's disease sufferer, told him during the last debate she could accept experimentation on the surplus embryos.

"Mum died two years ago, so she's not here to ask for this one," he said.

Mr Rudd said he had spent a long time wrestling with the bill.

"This is a debate where no side should be arguing any absolute moral position as if they have a monopoly on moral conscience," he said.

He said his principles were based on the equal worth of all humanity, the protection of the weak from the strong and the minimisation of suffering.

Federal Treasurer Peter Costello won't be supporting the legislation either.

Mr Costello predicted that in future years parliament would be asked to extend the growth time of a cloned embryo beyond 14 days.

"I do not find this time limit of 14 days a convincing one," he said.

"In fact I suspect it will prove to be shifting, and a shifting line is not one I would anchor legislation upon."

Mr Costello, a committed Christian, also disagreed with arguments by supporters that a cloned embryo did not have the same value as one developed to grow into a full human.

"This appears to me to be rather a self-serving argument," he said.

"And it dodges the underlying question - was it right to create a cloned embryo for this purpose in the first place?

"I find this a very troubling proposition."

He said he believed the bill was put forward with the best of motives, from a desire to reduce human suffering, but he could not support it.


"This was not something I supported in 2002 and I have not been persuaded to change my mind in the interim.

"I will not be supporting this legislation."

The House of Representatives will consider an amendment that would stop stem cells being extracted from the eggs of late-term aborted female fetuses.

Another 40 MPs have spoken against the bill, 59 MPs are supporting it and another 50 have not spoken.

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