

[Home](#) » [National](#) » Article

## Stem cell research gets green light

Katharine Murphy and Annabel Stafford  
November 8, 2006

AUSTRALIAN scientists are set to create cloned embryos for stem cell research after the Senate last night passed a bill legalising the controversial practice.

Defying predictions of a clear majority, the bill scraped through by just 34 votes to 32, with several senators absent for the historic conscience vote.

The narrow win came after substantial amendments were made to Liberal senator Kay Patterson's bill to legalise therapeutic cloning.

The changes included a ban on the use of animal eggs to create human-animal hybrids and an increase in jail terms for illegal practices such as implanting a cloned embryo in a woman.

The legislation still has to be passed by the House of Representatives to become law, but the margin in favour there is expected to be wider.

Therapeutic cloning advocates last night hailed the vote as a victory for science and hope, while opponents warned it was the first step towards a brave new world in which life is created for functional purposes and then destroyed.

Senator Patterson said last night that the vote was a tribute to people with debilitating diseases who had fought for the research that could produce treatments, not for them, but for future generations.

Democrats senator Natasha Stott Despoja, who had earlier proposed her own private member's bill together with Labor senator Ruth Webber, also hailed the vote. "(Therapeutic cloning) provides an important tool for our scientists in researching possible cures for some seemingly intractable conditions."

But Liberal Gary Humphries, who chaired a parliamentary inquiry into the bill, said the Senate had accepted the principle that "one human being ... (could) be used and destroyed for the therapeutic benefit of another".

The Nationals' Ron Boswell, whose wife Leita and grandchildren Tom and Sophie watched the vote from the gallery, said the Senate had given "sanction to distinguishing between two kinds of embryo — one born to live, the other created to die".

Senators on both sides of the debate had been unsure of whether the bill would be passed. A definitive call on numbers was made difficult by the absence of several senators on leave and the failure of 11 to turn up for the first important vote on the bill.

And some — including Greens leader Bob Brown and Labor's Nick Sherry — were still undecided hours before voting in favour.

Senator Brown said there was "a huge responsibility to keep a very close watch on what happens with stem cell research and make sure it stays within the bounds and spirit of the legislation".

Senator Sherry said he voted in favour "without a great deal of confidence and with a great deal of

worry".

Family First's Steve Fielding said the narrow win reflected community uncertainty about therapeutic cloning and urged the lower house to take note of that and vote against the bill. With

**MICHELLE GRATTAN**

### **Science bid for hybrid embryo**

BRITISH scientists have applied for a licence to create hybrid embryos using human cells and animal eggs for stem cell research to develop new treatments for diseases such as Parkinson's, stroke and Alzheimer's.

If approved, the hybrid embryo will be 99.9 per cent human and 0.1 per cent animal. By using animal eggs, the scientists from Kings College London and the North East England Stem Cell Institute hope to overcome the shortage of human eggs left from IVF treatments, which have been used for stem cell research.

The director of the Stem Cell Biology Laboratory at Kings College, Dr Stephen Minger, said he was optimistic of a favourable ruling from the regulatory body.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority said the application will be peer-reviewed by a panel of experts. A decision could take several months. REUTERS

[Subscribe to The Age for your chance to win a new Saab!](#)

Copyright © 2006. The Age Company Ltd.