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Split on cloning

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A DIVIDED Senate committee has filed a majority report in support of the cloning of human embryos for scientific research.

The committee came down five to three in support of a private member's bill to legalise somatic nuclear cell transfer - commonly referred to as therapeutic cloning - in a result that points to a close conscience vote in the Senate on the legislation to be introduced next week.

Two Liberal, two Labor and one Democrat supported the legislation while two Liberals, including the committee chairman, Gary Humphries, and a Labor senator came out against.

The majority said that "the overwhelming weight of evidence" presented to the committee led them to accept the recommendations of the Lockhart committee of experts which recommended lifting the ban on therapeutic cloning last year.

The supporting senators said that scientists had been accused of "peddling hope to vulnerable people" but said they found those favouring the research "to be measured and candid about the uncertainty of the outcome of the research".

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