



[Print this page](#)

Vote boost for stem cell Bill backers

07nov06

AN initial conscience vote on the future of stem cell research using cloned human embryos shows the Australian ban on therapeutic cloning is likely to be overturned.

Parliamentary debate on former health minister Kay Patterson's controversial private member's Bill seeking to legalise the practice began less than 24 hours ago.

But in the first vote on the Bill in the Senate today, senators voted 34 to 31 in support of the legislation before moving to discussion of proposed amendments.

The vote followed an emotive and intense debate in the upper house last night and this morning which showed politicians were fairly evenly divided on the issue.

Senator Patterson's Bill would allow researchers to clone human embryos to extract their stem cells in the hope of one day finding cures for debilitating diseases.

Cloned embryos would have to be destroyed within 14 days and could not be implanted in a woman.

Existing laws allow stem cells to be harvested from surplus IVF embryos, but prevent them being cloned.

In the lead up to the vote, some senators were staunchly in favour of overturning the ban, others warily supportive, and some absolutely opposed.

Of the 76-strong chamber, 25 said they approved of the bill, 23 opposed it, and one - Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett - remained undecided.

Liberal senator Julian McGauran warned of an horrific future peopled with bizarre human-animal mongrels.

"We should not even be creating this array of embryo types listed in the Bill in the first place," he said.

"Under these sets of beliefs ... once it is created, all becomes a horror story.

"It has all the pride equal to a Nuremberg rally - a rally of Dr Strangeloves chanting for such weird experiments as the creation of hybrid embryos, mixing humans with animals," he said.

But Democrats senator Andrew Murray had no such fears.

"I do not fear that the rule of law is so eroded that the safeguards and penalties that prevent human cloning in Australia will prove useless.

"I do not fear that I will live to see centaurs, minotaurs or satyrs. I do not fear mad scientists will pervert the intention of this legislation."

Others, like Ageing Minister Santo Santoro, said there was simply not enough evidence that stem cells from cloned human embryos would produce the expected medical breakthroughs.

But his Liberal colleague, senator Patterson, reached into history to argue for courage in medical research.

"Maybe (opponents of the bill) would rather take us back 200 years when Edward Jenner produced a cowpox vaccine against smallpox," she said.

His work had been ridiculed amid fears people would grow the horns and tail of a cow, and dismissed as loathsome, dangerous and immoral, she said.

But his vaccine was one of the most effective public health advances of its time.

Some politicians would not be swayed, however.

"I don't believe you can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear and this is certainly a sow's ear," Nationals senator Ron Boswell said.

"I will not be moving any amendments. I will be strongly against the third reading. I don't think you can improve this bill. You might do it at the margins but it is still cloning."

Debate on Senator Patterson's Bill and possible amendments continued in the upper house this afternoon.

After a final conscience vote in the Senate, the legislation will move to the House of Representatives.

[privacy](#)

[terms](#)

© The Australian