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MEDIA STATEMENT

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No Catholic could in good conscience vote for Cloning Bill – NSW Bishops

The Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, on behalf of the Bishops of the 10 New South Wales dioceses, today called upon all Members of the NSW Parliament to reject the cloning of human embryos for experimentation and destruction.

“A matter of such dramatic ethical and social import should not be rushed through Parliament in a week,” Cardinal Pell said. “The general public and our parliamentary representatives have been given little or no information or warning about this legislation. We should not blindly follow the lead of other parliaments in passing such unethical legislation. We can do better in New South Wales.

“All of us wish to find cures and treatments for disease or genetic conditions. Many Australians are afflicted by terrible suffering and we share their hope for effective treatments.

“The Catholic Church in NSW, through grants and through its hospitals and research institutes, is a promoter of ethical stem-cell research on adult and umbilical cord stem cells.

“But allowing scientists open slather on human embryos for unethical research is not the best way forward.”

The bishops are advised that tomorrow there will be a truncated debate and a ‘conscience vote’ in the NSW Legislative Assembly on a bill introduced only last week to mimic similar Federal and Victorian legislation.

It will legalise the following practices:

- Human embryo cloning (so-called ‘somatic cell nuclear transfer’ or ‘therapeutic cloning’) – which makes a human embryo with only one genetic parent
- Mixing the genetic material of more than two persons – which makes a human embryo with three or more genetic parents
- Fertilizing immature eggs taken from aborted girls with adult male sperm – which makes a human embryo with an aborted baby girl as its genetic ‘mother’
- Creating human-animal hybrids as a test for sperm quality – which makes an embryo with a human and an animal genetic parent.

All these practices are currently illegal in NSW. Under this bill they would be permitted in NSW under licence provided that the embryos are killed in experiments within 14 days of their manufacture.

It would be forbidden to do anything to 'save' these embryos such as placing them in the body of a woman.

"We were all embryos once. That is how we started and from there we developed. The human embryo cannot develop as anything other than a human being. Therefore, it has intrinsic human dignity and should be afforded that most basic of human rights – the right to live, to grow, to prosper.

"This Bill would result in there being two classes of human embryos: those created to live and those manufactured to be eliminated in research. To produce a human embryo with the express purpose of destroying it for research – as if it were a lab rat – is a perverse new direction for human experimentation.

"This Bill proposes that the NSW Parliament join the Federal and Victorian parliaments in demonstrating a new disregard for life by creating embryos purely for destruction, thereby further dehumanising the human embryo. Rather than repeating the mistakes of other jurisdictions, New South Wales should be giving the ethical lead," Cardinal Pell said.

"After allowing 'a little bit' of destructive human embryo research in national and state legislation in 2002/3 – on the older 'left-over' embryos from IVF – and then allowing some of these limits to lapse in 2005, governments are now being asked to allow 'a little bit' of cloning and hybrids for stem-cell research. Who is naïve enough to believe that the few remaining limits will last?

"We are now well down the slippery slope. What is there to stop further slippage?

"To prevent a further slide in ethical and legislative standards, a complete ban on all forms of human cloning – even that labelled 'therapeutic', 'SCNT' or with any other deceptive label – must be maintained.

"No Catholic politician – indeed, no Christian or person with respect for human life – who has properly informed his conscience about the facts and ethics in this area should vote in favour of this immoral legislation.

"If this bill is passed, the enemies of human life will soon be back with further proposals, disguised with sweet words and promises of cures, to roll back the few remaining barriers to the regular destruction of early human life."

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