



MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement on the Lockhart Report

The Report of the Lockhart Committee's statutory review of the 2002 legislation banning cloning and prohibiting the creation of human embryos for the purpose of experimental destruction is out of step with human values.

The report takes it for granted that human embryos are merely a "resource" to be exploited like an inferior animal or plant.

1. The Re-Definition of the Human Embryo

It is unusual that a report from an eminent group of specialists such as the Lockhart Committee can seriously propose to re-define the human embryo. This has been done for the sole purpose of expanding experimental destruction of early human life for dubious medical purposes. To adopt unilaterally "an independently developed definition of a human embryo" lacks scientific and philosophical respectability.

It is not permissible to acknowledge that there is little community support for creating embryos for purposes other than clinical assisted reproductive technology (ART), and then try to overcome this by changing the definition of the embryo. We hope the report has not been written with this as a predetermined objective.

2. Creating a New Sub-class of Humans

Under existing legislation, a group of living human beings in the stock of frozen human embryos created for ART purposes has been designated as biological material for research. This is bad enough. But the Lockhart Report urges us to push beyond this limit established by parliament to the even more objectionable stage of *manufacturing* a specific sub-class of living human beings solely for use as research material.

These human lives will be created not only by fertilizing human eggs with human sperm, but also by a variety of other abhorrent and currently prohibited practices such as:

- crossing humans and animals (so-called "interspecies fertilisation")
- human cloning
- parthenogenesis (developing an embryo from an unfertilised egg)
- cloning using human genetic material and animal eggs
- combining the genetic material of more than two different people
- combining precursor cells (cells from which other cell lines arise) from a human embryo or human fetus

There is no evidence of community support for any of these practices, for crossing human and animals, or for combining the genetic material of two or more people.

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3. Cloning

How can a report to parliament recommend that human cloning should be both banned and allowed? It is misleading, or at the very least incoherent, to propose that cloning of humans for reproduction should continue to be prohibited, but that cloning of humans for “research, training and clinical applications’ should be allowed, even if only for a life span of 14 days!

There is a strange logic at work in the report which prohibits cloning when it is reproductive but allows it when it is destructive.

All human cloning is reproductive because all human cloning creates new human life. It is never “therapeutic” to destroy human life, and creating human life for the sole purpose of killing for disputed scientific reasons makes a mockery of the therapeutic purpose of medical science.

Practices surrounding the creation and destruction of human life which were unthinkable 3 years ago are now being dressed up as necessary and acceptable.

Yet studies show that 85% of Australians consider human cloning unacceptable.

There is no evidence to suggest that Australians who supported research on “left over” embryos in 2002 will now support the creation and destruction of human embryos solely for use in cell therapies, drug testing, or creating human-animal hybrids.

The commodification and commercialization of human life the Report advocates is unacceptable and regrettable.

4. There is an alternative.

After expending millions of dollars, and the destruction of countless human embryos, human cloning and embryonic stem cell research are yet to deliver any treatments for human diseases. This only adds to the ethical and scientific arguments against these practices.

Repudiating human cloning does not mean that we abandon care and concern for people suffering from injury and illness. Human stem cells can be taken from umbilical cord blood and the body tissues of children and adults. This harms no one and has repeatedly yielded good results for treatment. The Archdiocese of Sydney earlier this week awarded a \$100,000 grant to a researcher in Melbourne who is using adult stem cells to research the accelerated regrowth of skin for burns victims (see attached).

The Lockhart Report points the way to a destructive dead-end and provides no compelling reason for parliament to change the existing law. We call on the Australian community and its legislators to reject it.

✠George Cardinal Pell
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY

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For more information, contact Marita Winters, Catholic Communications on 0419 243 957.



ATTACHMENT – COPY OF MEDIA RELEASE OF 16 DECEMBER 2005

**CARDINAL PELL ANNOUNCES WINNER OF \$100,000
ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH GRANT**

Cardinal George Pell announced today that Dr Pritinder Kaur of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne has won the Archdiocese of Sydney's \$100,000 grant to support adult stem cell research.

Dr Kaur, who is Head of the Epithelial Stem Cell Biology Laboratory at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, was awarded the grant for her research into the use of adult stem cells in improving the regeneration of the skin. The formal title of the research project is "*Improving adult skin regeneration for therapeutic purposes: the role of stem cells and the extra cellular matrix protein laminin-10/11*".

Dr Kaur's research is aimed at determining whether adult skin stem cells can be made to expand rapidly for transplantation to patients who have sustained severe injuries as a result of fires, bomb blasts or accidents and who urgently need regeneration of their skin to prevent dehydration and susceptibility to infection, both leading causes of patient mortality (death).

Cardinal Pell praised the work being done by Dr Kaur and other researchers in Australia on therapeutic applications for adult stem cells.

"Dr Kaur's work is emblematic of the remarkable progress being made in the field of adult stem cell research", Cardinal Pell said.

"The success and continuing promise of Australian work on adult cells, as represented by Dr Kaur's research and the research of the seven other applicants for the grant, casts doubt on the persistent claim that without relaxation of the restrictions on embryonic research and cloning, our best scientists will leave the country.

"Adult stem cell research is advanced, safe, productive and morally incontestable – a strong contrast with its embryonic stem cell counterpart".

Eight applications from researchers around Australia were made when the grant was advertised in August. Applications were considered by an independent selection panel, which sought referees' reports from a referee nominated by the applicant and a referee identified by the panel and its scientific advisors.

The selection panel, comprising Dr Peter McCullagh, a retired medical researcher, Professor Colin Thomson, Professorial Fellow in the Faculty of Law at the University of Wollongong and Dr Bernadette Tobin, Director of the Plunkett Centre for Ethics at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, unanimously recommended Dr Kaur's project for the grant.

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Dr Tobin, the Chair of the selection panel, said that while all projects which were submitted by the applicants met the selection criteria and reflected very high standards of scientific excellence, Dr Kaur's project stood out for a number of reasons.

“Dr Kaur's project has the considerable strength of being a direct development of research she has already conducted”, Dr Tobin said. “If her research shows that adult skin stem cells can be encouraged rapidly to expand and be transplantable to a patient with severe skin injury, it may become possible to diminish the very high mortality rate which is associated with extensive and severe burns.”

The referees who reviewed Dr Kaur's application confirmed the importance of this research, with one referee describing the project as unique to Australia and at the international forefront of scientific knowledge in this area.

This is the second time the Archdiocese of Sydney has offered a grant to support adult stem cell research. A first grant of \$50,000 was awarded in 2003.

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