

**Peak Biotech Body calls For Bipartisan Support of Recommendations to extend Stem Cell Research**

*AusBiotech, Australia’s peak biotechnology industry body, today welcomed recommendations to allow somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) and called on State and Commonwealth Governments and federal parliamentarians to accept the outcomes of the independent Lockhart Committee.*

*AusBiotech CEO, Dr Anna Lavelle, says that any continued prohibition of SCNT will mean Australians – despite having some of the world’s best stem cell scientists – will not be among the first to benefit from any treatments that may arise from this research.*

*“The recommendation of the Lockhart Review is effectively ensuring that Australians will now have early access to some of the clinical applications that will arise from the study of SCNT including identifying and developing therapeutics for diseases such as diabetes and Parkinson’s Disease,” Dr Lavelle said.*

After six months of hearing submissions on Australia’s stem cell legislation, former Federal Court judge John Lockhart QC, has released his findings on the future of the laws covering embryo research.

Australia’s peak biotechnology body, AusBiotech, supports the Lockhart Committee’s recommendation to continue the ban on human reproductive cloning and to amend the current legislation to allow SCNT.

“The Lockhart Committee recommendation provides the opportunity to create a transparent and stringent legislative framework under which Australian scientists can lead the world in using SCNT to gain a better understanding of how certain diseases develop and in doing so identify new therapeutics for these diseases,” Dr Lavelle said.

“Members of the public and their elected representatives need to keep in mind that the Committee’s recommendation was based on consideration of more than 800 submissions and many public and private face-to-face consultations that presented views from across the full ethical and scientific spectrum.

“The establishment of an independent body was undertaken by the Commonwealth Government with the support of the States to ensure that the outcomes of the legislation review were based on fact, taking into account ethical and cultural considerations, not on partisan positions based on emotion and misinformation,” she said.

Dr Lavelle called on the Council of Australian Governments to support SCNT and said that AusBiotech would be active in lobbying the State and Commonwealth governments to do so. “We would then ask that in keeping with the recommendations of the independent Lockhart Review, there is bipartisan support for appropriately amended legislation when it comes before the Parliament,” she said.

According to Dr Lavelle allowing Australian scientists to use SCNT under strict legislative conditions will benefit Australians by facilitating early access to the technology through clinical trials and fast-tracked listing of treatments. Equally importantly it will provide reassurance that the work will be undertaken within a regulatory framework that reflects the high ethical standards expected by the community.

SCNT involves taking the nucleus of a cell from a patient, transferring it into an egg from which the nucleus has been removed, growing the resultant cloned embryo in the laboratory for about five days and then extracting the embryonic stem cells. It is important to note that the process does not involve the use of sperm so the embryos in question are not fertilised – unlike excess IVF embryos that are currently used to derive embryonic stem cell lines. The other important factor that differentiates SCNT

embryos from excess IVF embryos, is there is no intention to implant them or allow them to develop into a human being.

SCNT is permitted in many countries, including UK, Singapore, Israel, Sweden and parts of the USA.

Dr Lavelle also welcomed the Lockhart Review recommendation supporting the establishment of a Stem Cell Bank in Australia.

“Stem Cell Banks are an effective means of minimising the number of excess embryos required to derive stem cell lines by making existing cell lines more widely available.

“An Australian-based bank will allow easy access to stem cell lines – both tissue and embryonic – for Australian researchers, decreasing the costs of research and improving efficiency. It will also ensure the ethical heritage of the stem cell lines stored in the Bank and used for research,” she said.

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