



HFE Bill Report Stage October 22nd 2008 Amendment (no. 73) on the purposes of GM embryo research

David Drew, Michael Meacher

Page 58, line 42 [Schedule 2], at end insert—

- () A license under this paragraph may not authorise any activity the purpose of which is to develop techniques for creating a child by germ line genetic modification.*
- () Regulations made by virtue of paragraph 3A (1)(c) may not provide for activities the purpose of which is to develop techniques for creating a child by germ line genetic modification.*
- () For the purposes of this paragraph and paragraph 3A, “germ line genetic modification” means*
- (a) altering the nuclear genetic material of an embryo, or of a gamete used to create an embryo, by –*
 - (i) recombinant nucleic acid techniques which change the DNA sequence of nuclear chromosomes of one or more cells of the embryo or of the gamete, or*
 - (ii) the introduction into one or more cells of the embryo or into the gamete of a stably-maintained artificial chromosome, virus or plasmid, and*
 - (b) placing the embryo containing the genetic alteration in a woman, so that any resulting child could transmit the genetic alteration to its descendants.”*

This amendment is narrowly drafted to prohibit a very specific category of research: that aimed at the development of technologies for creating a child by germ line genetic modification (GLGM). The amendment does not affect basic biomedical research, involving genetic modification of embryos, which has been legalised for the first time in this Bill. For the past year, the Government has claimed that the purpose of legalising research using GM embryos is purely to allow basic biomedical research, and it should therefore have no objection to this amendment.

The Government has consistently said that the Bill should and does provide a permanent ban on GLGM. Speaking in the debate on the Bill on May 19th, the Minister said: ‘The Bill... prohibits the transfer of such embryos to a woman. That is underpinned by an international consensus that prohibits such practice and the Bill also reinforces the point’. GLGM is banned in many countries because it is seen as just as dangerous as reproductive cloning by the international community, since it would inevitably be used to create ‘enhanced’, ‘designer’ babies (1). **But if there is to be a permanent ban on GLGM, it makes no logical sense and would be a waste of taxpayers’ money to allow the development of technology which can never be used.** There should therefore be no objection to the amendment which prevents this specific type of research, without affecting basic research. The EU has taken this approach in its last two Framework Programmes, by banning research which aims to develop GLGM and cloning. Parliament should follow the international consensus and show firmly that it does not wish to go down the road towards the creation of GM children.

Despite its public position that it only wishes to allow basic biomedical research using genetic modification, there is reason to believe that the Government does wish to allow the development of GLGM technology. In the 2005 Consultation Document which prepared the way for this Bill, the only reason given for allowing the creation of GM embryos was to develop GLGM, and it even proposed to create a power to legalise the creation of children using GLGM through regulations. Since then, its public position has changed. **If the Government genuinely only wishes to encourage basic biomedical research, it will support this amendment. However, if it also wants to see the development of GLGM, it will oppose the amendment.**

1. See www.hgalert.org/GMembrs/GM_Embryos_Background_Docs.html