



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Kate Lawrence  
Clerk  
Joint Committee on Draft Human Tissue and Embryos Bill  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 1AA

20<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Dear Ms Lawrence,

I attach a submission to the Committee which is being made jointly by the Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics and the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. I am grateful to you for allowing us a few extra days to submit this.

Given the nature of the embryo as an early human life, and thus a human moral subject, we remain opposed in principle to destructive experimentation on human embryos. We set out our objections to a number of the specific proposals in the Draft Bill concerning experimentation and testing, as well as the creation of genetically modified and interspecies embryos. We welcome the proposed ban on the social sex selection of embryos, but call for a far higher level of protection for the embryo in the Bill. We draw particular attention to the proposals to remove the requirement to take account of the child's need for a father in providing fertility services. We believe this is a dangerous and unprecedented step. Deliberately to sanction the conception of children who will be deprived of both a genetic and a social father is to place the wishes of adults above the human rights of the child. In addition, our submission questions the Parliamentary process for deciding this and other issues of profound consequences. We believe there has been far too little time for public consultation and discussion before legislation is to be voted on in Parliament. This is not a criticism of the scrutiny committee itself, but rather of the government's rush to the statute book.

In addition to the points made in the joint submission I would on behalf of the Bishops Conference also urge the committee to consider one additional idea which is not in the Draft Bill (or commented on in our joint response) but which has been publicly advocated recently by a number of people, including Cardinal Murphy O'Connor. This is the proposal to establish a Statutory National Bioethics Commission, separate from any new regulatory body.



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Looking ahead 10-15 years the volume and complexity of bioethical issues requiring consideration at national level is bound to increase. Questions will need revisiting in the light of new research and new ethical dilemmas. There is a crucial gap at the heart of this Bill which needs addressing if we are to be ready for this as a society, and there is an excellent opportunity for Parliament to consider afresh how best to ensure that our society is better equipped with effective ways of ensuring thorough public engagement and open deliberation on major ethical issues before decisions are made.

The public need greater assurance that these big issues are being given adequate attention and not decided by unaccountable bodies. In a multicultural society a sense of public ownership of important ethical decisions cannot occur given the proposed arrangements. While it would be impossible to represent every particular view on every particular subject, the overt, transparent and publicly reported involvement of representatives of the major faith groups and secular philosophical positions within our society would help enormously. It would mean that most people in the community could feel that their position, on particular ethical issues, had at least been formally considered and appropriately represented by a member of such a Commission even if it was not agreed with. And such ethical debates would be conducted by a body that was at arms length from relationship with industry or regulation.

The aim would be to establish a single objective and authoritative forum which draws together bioethical issues common to different specific areas, and which brings together those with expertise in the field together with others from a public policy, academic and ethical background who also have an interest and wisdom to contribute in addressing profoundly human not technical questions. A statutory National Bioethics Commission would ensure that government and parliament have access to well informed argument and advice when considering legislation in the field. It would bring UK practice into line with best practice in the United States, Australia and most of the rest of Europe. I urge the Committee to support the creation of such a Commission by statute.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter" with a small cross to the left.

+Peter Smith

Archbishop of Cardiff

Chairman, Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship