

## 'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

### Girlie gets the baby blues



#### Infertility laws

Infertility laws have been in the news a lot lately. This is partly because in Victoria the first children affected by the *Infertility (Medical Procedures) Act 1984* (Vic) turn 18 next year. Therefore, in just over a year's time sperm donors will be able to contact their offspring even where the children are unaware of their origins. It appears only 30% of couples tell their children of their sperm donation origins (*The Age*, 1 June 2005) and some of these may be in for a shock when they receive the truth about their origins. Some doctors have asked the Victorian government to change fertility laws to prevent sperm donors from being able to contact their children.

#### Perfect babies

Meanwhile at a Seminar called 'Making Perfect Babies', Dr Sam Tormey expressed amazement that the Australian Health Ethics Committee had curtailed the 'freedom' of parents to select the gender of their babies through IVF. Sex selection is unlawful in Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia but artificial insemination is lawful in New South Wales. Prospective parents have been able to nip over the border to ensure they can have embryonic selection using artificial insemination.

#### Assisted reproduction

The Law Reform Commission of Victoria has released a Position Paper on Assisted Reproduction, which makes child-centred recommendations for legislative changes including:

- requiring a treating doctor or clinic to obtain the advice of a clinical ethics committee where a doctor or counsellor believes a child who might be born is at risk of abuse or neglect
- introducing a presumption against treatment where a person seeking treatment or their partner has had sexual offences proven against them, has been declared a serious violent offender, or has had a child protection order made against them
- removing the 'marital status requirement' for eligibility for treatment.

The Commission is also about to issue another paper addressing the legal parentage of children born of assisted reproduction and surrogacy arrangements.

Tony Abbott, Federal Health Minister, has 'blasted' the reform proposals because it would support single women and lesbians having access to IVF services (*The Age*, 13 May 2005). He is quoted as saying, '[t]he commission's apparent dismissal of the traditional notion that children should ideally have male and female parents and apparent acceptance that unborn children can be used for their body parts invites deep scepticism about

the judgements of expert committees, especially if their reports are couched in emotive language designed to intimidate the public'. Well you should know Tony!

#### Mamma mia!

Italy has the most restrictive medically assisted fertility laws in Europe. The law bans donation of sperms and eggs, defines life as beginning at conception and allows fertility treatment only to 'stable heterosexual couples' (*The Age*, 1 June 2005). A referendum held on 12–13 June 2005 aimed at repealing restrictions on artificial insemination and embryonic research and was designed to give the Italian people a say about this law but, in a remarkably democratic gesture, the referendum was opposed by Catholic Bishops and the Pope. This opposition has been blamed for the low turnout of voters which invalidated the referendum.

#### Si!

Two famous Italian movie stars, Monica Bellucci and Sabrina Ferilli and the wife of the Prime Minister took on the Catholic Church by supporting the 'yes' campaign in the referendum. Bellucci had her first child last year and posed pregnant and naked for *Vanity Fair*. She describes Italy's current law as, 'creat[ing] an absurd situation, as if Italian science should stop and leave us trailing behind other countries ... If I asked a priest or a politician how my body is made, how my ovaries are made or how ovulation works he wouldn't know what I was talking about ... This is an issue for scientists and women.' Veronica Lario, wife of Italy's Prime Minister supported the 'yes' campaign and revealed she had an abortion because the embryo had severe defects (*The Australian*, 6 June 2005).

#### Gas story

Congratulations to Jo Chandler on her story in *The Age* (3 June 2005) celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Victorian Gas Association. The Association was formed in 1955 and included women in the gas industry whose job it was to support housewives to cope with gas appliances. Most women up until then had only cooked on wood stoves. The Association used to be called the Victorian Women's Gas Association but President Marjorie Williams told members that equal opportunity put an end to all that. Performing at the 50th anniversary meeting were Beth Wilson, Victoria's Health Services Commissioner who played 'Oh Suzannah' on her harmonica and her blues harmonica teacher Justin Brady (*Things of Stone and Wood*). Justin told the meeting, 'I don't often get to play a gig like this — all women. I just wish I was a few years older.'

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