

Three-parent babies risk future of human race, say Italian MPs

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Fifty-five Italian MPs have called for the House of Lords to reject a law to allow three-parent babies, calling it “a dangerous intervention” whose consequences “cannot possibly be contained within the confines of the United Kingdom”.

In a letter to *The Times*, the politicians said that mitochondrial donation, which the UK is on course to be the first country to legalise, “could have uncontrollable and unforeseeable consequences, affecting future generations, and modifying genetic heritage in an irreversible way, inevitably affecting the human species as a whole”.

The Commons voted earlier this month to legalise the procedure, in which a very small proportion of a third person's DNA is used in creating an embryo in order to prevent certain inherited diseases. This technique would only affect the mitochondria, whose DNA is separate from the DNA in the nucleus that is believed to affect people's characteristics. However, the change will represent a permanent alteration to the

genetic line that will be passed down to future generations.

The letter argues that “the greater part of the scientific community maintain that the scientific data currently available is insufficient to even consider intervention on human subjects, and there cannot therefore be any guarantee for the safety of any eventual offspring”.

Nancy Lee, senior policy adviser at the Wellcome Trust, the charity that has supported much of the research into mitochondrial donation, rejected the claim. “It is not true that the global scientific community is opposed to mitochondrial donation,” she said. “In fact, 40 of the world's leading scientists and ethicists in the field, from 14 countries, recently urged the UK to back regulations allowing the technique and a different expert group including five Nobel laureates have written to *The Times* to express their support.

“While it is never possible to be 100 per cent certain that any new medical procedure is safe when first used in humans, three expert scientific reviews have found no safety reasons not to

proceed. It is hard to think of another medical technique that has had such detailed scrutiny.”

The House of Lords will debate the regulations on Tuesday, including considering an amendment by Lord Deben, the former Tory environment secretary, a Roman Catholic, that would effectively kill the legislation. The law is expected to be passed, however.

Italy has some of the strictest reproductive regulations in the world, meaning that in practice many couples travel abroad for IVF treatment.

The Italian MPs, among them Daniela Santanchè, a far-right fan of Mussolini, and Paola Binetti, an Opus Dei member who wears a spiked metal garter, said if the Lords rejects Lord Deben's amendment it would be a decision that could have consequences for the rest of the world. “We ask you to reflect again on the possible consequence of such an important decision, which does not concern just the citizens of your country, but the genetic patrimony of future generations,” the MPs said.

Letter, page 25