

# What a difference a day makes in embryo campaign

David Rose, Mary Bowers

A couple spoke of their joy and renewed desire to have children last night after ministers allowed them to keep frozen embryos that otherwise would have been destroyed.

Melanie and Robert Gladwin, from Gloucestershire, were among dozens of British couples who faced losing stored embryos before a change in the law that extends the time that fertilised eggs can be kept for future pregnancies.

The change came only 24 hours after the Gladwins delivered a petition to the Prime Minister in an attempt to

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keep their embryos, stored six years ago when Mrs Gladwin was found to have cervical cancer and was told the treatment would render her infertile.

Ministers said yesterday that they would make a supplementary provision to the forthcoming Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, ruling that such "out of time" embryos need not be destroyed.

The Act, which comes into force in October, will extend the time limit on storing embryos for the purposes of surrogacy from five years to ten.

But the Gladwins, and others who stored their embryos more than five years ago, had faced losing their em-

byros in the remaining weeks before the change.

The couple already have a three-year-old son who was born via surrogate pregnancy from one of their frozen embryos, but said they were absolutely desperate for another child.

Mrs Gladwin, 28, said yesterday that she was "ecstatic" that she would not lose the chance to expand her family.

"We're absolutely over the moon. It's a huge weight off our shoulders and totally unexpected," she said.

"People were telling us it wouldn't happen and that it would take years — we've done it within 24 hours. At the moment we're unsure whether we'll be allowed to apply for an extension. But four years is better than three weeks.

"When I think of the number of people who have fought this leg and lost ... There were other people who wanted to come forward but were too frightened and this will benefit them."

Her husband added: "I'm stunned. It's an amazing honour if there are other people out there who are benefiting. I am honoured to have achieved that for others."

More than 48,000 couples had embryos frozen in Britain in 2007, the latest year for which figures are available. But the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), which regulates fertility treatment, said that only a minority of couples would previously have faced having their embryos destroyed after the five-year deadline.

The authority added that most cou-



SAM RIDDING / SWINS

**Robert and Melanie Gladwin with son, Thomas, had faced losing embryos**

ples could extend the time embryos were stored with fertility clinics, and a time limit only normally applied to those who were not able to have a subsequent pregnancy and instead required a surrogate mother.

reached the five-year limit before October 1 and without the action we are taking, would have had their embryos destroyed. They will now be able to store them for longer.

"Their circumstances are morally straightforward but legally very complex. We have been urgently seeking ways to help them and I am very pleased to be able to give them hope by taking this common-sense action."

Natalie Gamble and Louisa Chav-aert, solicitors for the Gladwins, added: "While the announcement gives much-needed hope to men and women whose precious embryos have already reached the end of their five-year storage term, we need to make sure that the proposed changes go far enough to give them the time they need.

"For young women who suffer infertility prematurely, these embryos in storage often represent their last chance of having a child of their own. We will be looking very closely at the proposals to confirm that couples like Robert and Melanie will be able to extend their chance of having a much-wanted child for as long as possible, and not just for a few more years."

Professor Lisa Jardine, of the HFEA, said: "This will be an enormous relief to all of those people who faced the heartbreak of seeing their embryos destroyed, all because of a matter of timing. We will be contacting clinics immediately so they can inform the patients concerned and make appropriate arrangements for the continued storage of their embryos."

Announcing the decision, Gillian Merron, the Health Minister, said: "We are updating the law to allow women to store their embryos for longer than the current five years. A small number of women will have