



Speech by

Michael Choi

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

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BIODISCOVERY BILL

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (4.55 p.m.): I rise also to speak in support of the Biodiscovery Bill 2004. Biodiscovery, being the search for active compounds in plants, animals and micro-organisms that can be developed into commercial products including medicine, is vitally important to Queensland. That is because nearly 50 per cent of Australia's plant species are found in this great state of ours, including more than 8,000 non-flowering plants and plant species.

I can still remember when I was very young that if I felt sick my mother would go to the herbal clinic and bring home some really weird looking herbal medicine for my consumption. I have eaten a lot of unnamed and untested plants and parts of animals. When I queried the effectiveness of those unorthodox treatments, my mother would reply, 'Mother knows best.'

An honourable member: As they do.

Mr CHOI: Yes. But I had to draw the line when she gave me a tonic made from rhino horn. Not being able to imagine how a rhino horn could be made into a drink, I flatly refused. I now deeply regret my rejection of her offer. It seems mother did know best. In fact, she was able to foretell the future as I have since found out that the rhino horn is very good for hair growth.

Plants, animals and micro-organisms have massive potential for medicine and other commercial products and we have only touched the surface of this massive industry. I believe that this bill will not only encourage a new industry in Queensland but will also improve our health and our quality of life. One of the potential problems of research into the biotechnology industry is the certainty of the origin of the biological material. This is critical when one considers that the average drug discovery and development times are between 10 years and 15 years. The cost varies considerably, but estimates generally lie between \$US200 million and \$US500 million and the odds of a product having commercial success range from one in 5,000 to one in 10,000. A lack of clear procedures for gaining access to genetic resources presents a major deterrent to those entities undertaking biodiscovery. That is why this bill, as presented by the minister, is absolutely critical to ensure that the supply is authentic and its origin is clearly defined.

This bill splits the responsibility of environmental and commercial issues between the two relevant portfolios. The authority to collect native biological material will be administered by the Hon. John Mickel, while the portfolio headed by the Hon. Tony McGrady will ensure that an equitable share of the benefits arising from biodiscovery is captured on behalf all Queenslanders.

The compliance, codes and collection protocols provided for in the bill that will govern the collection of native biological material for biodiscovery purposes will not only provide guidance to those collecting samples but will also support best practice in the industry. The bill requires that duplicate specimens of native biological material collected are returned to the states. This will increase the state's knowledge of its biodiversity.

In my electorate of Capalaba wildlife preservation is a significant issue. This bill provides an avenue for the wildlife within our bushlands and waterways to be better understood and consequently better preserved. Finally, the bill makes provision for biodiscovery plans so that the government will be apprised

of the use planned for all samples collected, enabling it to negotiate a fair and equitable share of benefits for the Queensland community.

In closing, this bill does provide a very balanced approach to conserving nature and its responsible use. I take this opportunity to thank the smart minister of our government for his leadership in this regard. I am looking forward to the provision of a rhino horn tonic for the consumption of the honourable member for Sandgate and me.