




Speech By
Charis Mullen

MEMBER FOR JORDAN

Record of Proceedings, 11 August 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

BIODISCOVERY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (12.41 pm): I am pleased to speak in support of the bills. Like the previous two speakers, I will focus my comments on the Biodiscovery and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019, which I was involved with through the previous parliamentary committee.

As has been stated, this bill will amend the Biodiscovery Act 2004 and the Right to Information Act 2009 to improve the business environment for biodiscovery and support economic opportunities for First Nation communities in Queensland. This bill reflects three core objectives. Importantly, the first of these is to recognise and protect the use of traditional knowledge in biodiscovery. The bill will also simplify approvals under the Biodiscovery Act and clarify the relationship between the Biodiscovery Act and relevant international protocols including the Nagoya protocol.

We know that the biodiscovery industry has evolved since the introduction of the act and the international regulatory context for access and benefit sharing has changed, particularly with the introduction of the Nagoya protocol in 2014. The Nagoya protocol provides a framework for the equitable sharing of benefits derived from the utilisation of genetic resources. This includes the use of traditional knowledge associated with these genetic resources. Currently, biodiscovery entities in Queensland are unable to demonstrate compliance with the Nagoya protocol and are at risk of failing international checkpoints and not having access to global markets. Without being aligned to the Nagoya protocol, the growth of Queensland's biodiscovery industry will be limited just as it begins to gain momentum. By providing for access and benefit sharing for the use of traditional knowledge, the Biodiscovery Act will align with the protocol and enable greater international research and commercialisation opportunities for Queensland's biodiscovery industry.

First Nation representatives have described being discouraged from sharing their knowledge without adequate legal protection in place. With these amendments in place, it is hoped that First Nation peoples will feel more confident to share their knowledge about native plants and animals, some of which could lead to new drugs, therapies and bioproducts that attract international investment and benefit all Queenslanders. That is a very exciting thing.

Mr Colin Saltmere from the Myuma Group explained to our parliamentary committee the importance of the proposed reforms to the act for Indigenous people and industry alike. He said—

It should be our decision-making process, in accordance with custom law, that determines who we divulge this to so we can trust the people we sell it to or those who invest in this to make sure it is not exploited.

Queensland's biodiscovery industry is expanding, with 90 per cent of current benefit-sharing agreements entered into since 2017. By way of example of the huge potential for biodiscovery, the partnership formed in 1993 between the British based company AstraZeneca and Griffith University illustrates just one instance where overseas investment has helped to commercialise innovative new

products. This partnership represented a multiyear, \$100 million investment that built the capacity of Griffith University to screen flora and fauna extracts to identify bioactive molecules that could have potential pharmaceutical applications. Over 14 years the partnership led to benefits, including collection and preservation of information about Queensland's biodiversity including endangered species and discovery of new species including 37 new plant species; the creation of 43 full-time jobs; the publication of 140 scientific articles on natural product drug discovery; and training in natural products research for 113 staff. The benefits of this partnership continue to accrue through Compounds Australia and the Griffith Institute for Drug Discovery.

Griffith University told our committee during the public hearing on the bill of the high potential and benefits of the biodiscovery industry to Queensland. As Dr Jens Tampe, Deputy Director of Griffith Enterprise, said—

There is immense potential, but it is hard to get there. In each field only one out of several thousand makes it. It is a high-risk activity, but the key is that the more it is used, the more success we have and the more success is coming back to Queensland, to universities, to our Indigenous partners, to traditional knowledge holders. It is really about enabling easy, clear deal flow in a certain sense. The more that is happening and the more results that are used, the more benefits there are.

Other biodiscovery activities that are operating in Queensland also involve international collaborations across regions including North America and Asia.

This bill's reflection of Nagoya principles will help to attract further overseas investment and raise Queensland's profile as a biodiscovery partner of choice, creating opportunities and Queensland jobs and opening up economic opportunities for our First Nation communities. I commend the bills to the House.