




Speech By
Barbara O'Shea

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL 2025

 **Dr O'SHEA** (South Brisbane—ALP) (4.39 pm): I rise today to address the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025. In addressing this bill, I would like to first acknowledge the work of the Primary Industries and Resources Committee, the submitters who provided contributions and the hard work of the secretariat in supporting the committee in its review of this proposed legislation. This bill repeals and replaces the 80-year-old Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945 to introduce new governance and operational frameworks and remove redundant provisions in the act.

The Queensland Institute of Medical Research, QIMR, was established in 1945 to conduct research with a focus on diseases of significance to Queensland. As the member for Bulimba mentioned, Tom Foley, the Queensland state secretary for health in 1945, pointed out the risks research workers at that time subjected themselves to in order to advance medical knowledge including infecting themselves with a virus to study its effects and therefore risking their lives. Referring to those researchers, Tom Foley went on to say—

We must see that they are well paid and that they have the necessary facilities to carry out their work.

Those words are as true today as they were 80 years ago.

As a number of speakers have mentioned, QIMR started out as seven staff working out of a disused World War II US Army hut in Victoria Park. Over the years it has grown to over 1,000 scientists, staff and students researching hundreds of diseases and conditions. In the past 80 years, the institute has researched a wide variety of diseases. Researchers have worked on malaria control, collected mosquitoes from the Ross River near Townsville and discovered a virus that caused painful joints and muscles, fatigue and fevers. This virus was subsequently named the Ross River virus.

QIMR also established the link between viruses and certain blood cancers like lymphoma and leukaemia, the genetic basis of some breast cancers, how sunscreen prevented certain skin cancers and has done leading-edge research on cellular therapies where living cells are given to the patient to use the power of the body's immune system to fight disease. In fact, QIMR was the first manufacturing facility in Australia to receive Therapeutic Goods Administration approval for manufacturing cellular therapies for human use. Researchers at the institute also worked on drugs to prevent and treat COVID-19 in the recent pandemic.

QIMR is recognised internationally for its groundbreaking research which has not only improved the health of Queenslanders but also had profound effects on the lives of people around the world. Thanks to the generosity of philanthropists Clive Berghofer and Chuck Feeney and the support of the state and federal governments, the institute now occupies 60 specialised laboratories in the Herston Health Precinct in Brisbane. The Health, Environment and Innovation Committee was invited earlier this year to attend QIMR and we had the pleasure of meeting director and CEO Professor Fabienne Mackay and her staff and touring the institute's impressive facilities.

The institute's research work continues today with a focus on cancer, malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases, mental health conditions including schizophrenia and dementia and chronic diseases such as liver disease and asthma. QIMR is a clear testament to what public funding into medical research can accomplish.

The QIMR Act 1945 is an 80-year-old piece of legislation and has become outdated. This bill aims to modernise legislation, increase transparency and integrity for the managing council, support commercialisation of intellectual property and provide fairer incentive payments to enable QIMR to remain competitive in the international medical research sector. In their submission to the committee, QIMR endorsed the bill's aim to support the commercialisation of intellectual property. It noted that it is a constant struggle to find money to attract the world's top scientists and give them an environment to work. The institute stated that commercialisation helps bridge funding gaps and enables QIMR to reinvest in new research, infrastructure and talent.

Another important aspect of this bill is the provision for fairer and more equitable commercialised bonuses. Under the current legislation, incentive payments can only be paid to employees of QIMR. This bill would ensure that any individual who contributed to the development of intellectual property, whether they are an employee of the institute or not, is recognised and rewarded.

This bill increases transparency for QIMR by requiring the council to immediately notify the minister of matters that significantly affect the financial viability, administration or management of the institute or council. The new proposed legislation also contains clarifications surrounding dealing with gifts and bequests to the institute and declarations of personal interest by council members.

The Labor opposition supports the majority of the changes proposed by this bill. However, we do not support the removal of Governor in Council oversight of appointments to the council of QIMR. We believe allowing the minister to appoint and remove council members without Governor in Council oversight jeopardises the integrity and transparency of appointments to the council.

Medicine is a continually evolving field requiring ongoing research to ensure Queenslanders have the best opportunity to lead long and healthy lives. Medical professionals in my electorate of South Brisbane and across the state rely on innovations developed by organisations such as QIMR to provide better health outcomes for Queenslanders.

I would like to thank all the scientists, researchers, staff and students at the institute for their hard work and dedication to improving the lives of Queenslanders. We all owe so much to medical researchers and we need to ensure that institutions like the Queensland Institute of Medical Research receive the funding and facilities they require to continue their life-changing work.