



Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL 2025

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.51 pm): I rise to support the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025. This bill is not simply a legislative update; it is a recognition of 80 years of world-class medical research and it ensures that one of Queensland's most valued institutions has the governance it needs to continue saving lives for generations to come. The QIMR Act provides for the establishment of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research council. This council is a statutory body established under the act to control and manage QIMR.

In addressing appointments—I will not do it five times in a row—and the council makeup, currently all council appointments are made by Governor in Council. This may result in unnecessary delays and affect the council's ability to remain responsive and effective. In transferring this responsibility to the health minister we will see quicker appointments, ensuring integrity and transparency are maintained.

I was the chair of the committee that had the privilege of looking at this bill, and I learned that the history and legacy of the institute are amazing. The Queensland Institute of Medical Research—now known as QIMR Berghofer—was founded in 1945, born from the vision of then premier Frank Nicklin and the determination of Dr Charles Kerr. It was established in the wake of the Second World War, when infectious diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and polio posed enormous threats to Queensland communities. The institute's founding mission was clear: to carry out medical research that directly improved the health of Queenslanders.

Over the decades, QIMR has lived up to that mission. In the 1960s, its scientists identified the Ross River virus, which causes debilitating joint pain and fatigue. This was an enormous contribution to tropical medicine. In the 1970s and 1980s, the institute expanded its work on mosquito-borne diseases, malaria and virology, becoming one of the leading centres for tropical health research in the Asia-Pacific region. In the 1990s and 2000s, it emerged as a global leader in cancer research—especially in melanoma and leukaemia—contributing to breakthroughs in diagnosis and treatment.

More recently, QIMR Berghofer has been at the forefront of immunotherapy, genomics and mental health research, working on cutting-edge treatments for cancer, Alzheimer's and other complex conditions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, QIMR played a crucial role in modelling the spread of the virus and developing potential vaccines and treatments, showing once again how deeply it serves the community in times of crisis. In 1986 it found that regular sunscreen use reduces the risk of skin cancers, providing a scientific basis for clinical and public health advice around the world about skin cancer prevention.

From a small postwar laboratory to a globally recognised research powerhouse employing more than 1,000 scientists, students and support staff, the institute has contributed to not only the health of Queenslanders but also Queensland's reputation as a leader in medical science. However, while the science has advanced, the legislative framework has not. The Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945, under which the institute still technically operates, was drafted for another era. It

does not reflect the modern governance standards, accountability measures or administrative flexibility required by an organisation that now manages multimillion dollar research programs, collaborates globally and commercialises life-saving discoveries.

The bill modernises this framework by strengthening governance, including clear obligations for council members and enhanced integrity checks; providing flexibility in leadership and delegation so the institute can operate more efficiently; encouraging commercialisation and innovation by creating fair incentive arrangements for researchers; requiring greater transparency and oversight, ensuring both the minister and the public can have confidence in the institute's management; and clarifying rules for the acceptance of gifts and bequests, which is an important safeguard given the institute's reliance on philanthropic support.

The issue of commercialisation was of particular interest to the committee during our hearings. We heard that in Australia the opportunity for research funding has become increasingly competitive. The submission from QIMR highlighted the demand on sources of grant funding, with the institute's success rate in obtaining major grants often falling below 15 per cent. This heightened competition means that even world-class research projects may struggle to secure sufficient funding through grants alone. The committee heard about these constraints. The ability to commercialise research is more important than ever for the sustainability of institutes like QIMR Berghofer. The Queensland Institute of Medical Research has stood for nearly 80 years as a guardian of public health and a beacon of scientific discovery—from the days of combating polio and tuberculosis through to the battles against tropical diseases, cancer and now global pandemics.

It is important to talk about some of the fellowships as these allow researchers to pursue their long-term, high-impact research projects without the pressure of obtaining long-term and short-term grants. In 2024-25 the following researchers achieved fellowship recognition in the Investigator Grants scheme: Professor Rachel Neale, who was awarded \$3 million for two distinct research programs; Associate Professor Tracy O'Mara, who was awarded more than \$2 million to continue her groundwork research in endometrial cancer genetics; and Dr Daniel Rawle, who was awarded \$600,000. In addition to that, QIMR offers Higher Degree by Research programs. In 2024-25, there were 16 people who did a Doctor of Philosophy, 12 people who did a Master of Philosophy and 19 people who did their honours degree.

Effective legislation is essential to safeguard the operation and future success of the institute. This bill honours that history by ensuring the institute's governance is as strong and forward-looking as the science it produces. In doing so, it secures the future of an organisation that has served Queenslanders so well.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank the committee for its work. The committee was honoured to accept the role and responsibility of considering this bill. Our committee received some great submissions and we were very pleased to see that everyone was in support of QIMR's research projects. The detailed responses were very welcomed. The committee was able to understand their medical research and what the future of medicine in Queensland looks like. More importantly, we are pleased to update the legislation. In conclusion, happy 80th to the institute as we pass this legislation through the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Bennett, adjourned.