




Speech By
Hon. Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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QUEENSLAND INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH BILL

Introduction

 **Hon. TJ NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (11.58 am): I present a bill for an act to provide for the administration and operation of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, to repeal the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945, and to amend this act and the legislation mentioned in schedule 2 for particular purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025 [530](#).

Tabled paper: Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025, explanatory notes [531](#).

Tabled paper: Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025, statement of compatibility with human rights [532](#).

The Crisafulli government is committed to reducing red tape and ensuring statutory bodies operate with the efficiency, integrity and agility required to serve the needs of a modern health system. The Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025 replaces the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act 1945 with a contemporary legislative framework that better supports the Queensland Institute of Medical Research and its governing council.

QIMR is Queensland's homegrown and globally respected medical research institute. From humble beginnings in 1945 with just seven staff working from an ex-military hut in Victoria Park, it has grown into a research powerhouse. Today around 1,000 scientists, clinicians, students and support staff work in the world-class facilities in Herston, tackling some of the most serious health challenges facing Queenslanders. This year marks a major milestone. In November, QIMR will celebrate its 80th birthday. That is eight decades of groundbreaking medical discoveries that have improved public health outcomes in Queensland and around the world.

The institute continues to lead research addressing the most pressing health issues of our time. QIMR is working on cures and treatments for some of the most difficult diseases, including cancer, heart disease, dementia, asthma and mental health conditions. And they are not just studying problems; they are solving them!

Just this year, Professor Sudha Rao launched a clinical trial for metastatic triple negative breast cancer, one of the most aggressive and difficult-to-treat cancers, as you may know, Madam Deputy Speaker. Professor Bryan Day and Dr Michelle Li are developing promising new therapies for childhood brain cancer, and Dr Brittany Mitchell led the Australian arm of a global study that identified nearly 300 previously unknown genes linked to depression, earning international attention for her work.

These examples show why strong legislative support matters. While the current act has been significantly amended over the years, it no longer reflects the scale and sophistication of QIMR today. It must be modernised to support the institute's ability to attract investment, deliver world-class research and remain competitive on the national and global stage. This bill ensures QIMR has the legal and governance foundations it needs to continue this vital work into the future.

It deals with a number of matters, and one that I want to raise is commercialised incentive payments. At the heart of QIMR's success is collaboration. Research breakthroughs are rarely achieved by one person working alone. They are made possible by teams of experts, often working across disciplines and project areas.

Despite this collaborative nature, the current act only permits bonuses for employees who are classed rigidly as 'discoverers' or 'inventors'. This definition excludes many people, including collaborators working under non-traditional employment arrangements, who meaningfully contribute to the institute's work.

The bill addresses this by updating the language and scope of these provisions. It replaces references to 'bonuses' with 'commercialised incentive payments' and broadens the eligibility criteria. This change ensures the council can recognise and reward all contributors to successful, commercialised research, not just those who fit a narrow legal definition. This reform will support QIMR in its ability to attract and retain leading talent, foster innovation and encourage high-impact research that improves health outcomes.

To ensure these payments are managed responsibly, the bill also clarifies how they must be funded. Payments must be made from net commercialisation revenue, meaning income generated from the research itself rather than from core operational or public funding. It must generate the revenue in order for the commercialised payments to be made.

The bill also modernises the approval framework for these payments, ensuring a more practical and balanced approach. Governor in Council approval will be required if payments for a single piece of intellectual property exceed \$10 million in one financial year or if an individual contributor is set to receive more than \$5 million for a single piece of intellectual property in a financial year. These approval thresholds align with existing thresholds and government policy.

This is a fairer and more streamlined system. It maintains appropriate oversight of large payments while giving the council the flexibility it needs to reward excellence, encourage innovation and retain the world-class research talent that drives QIMR forward.

I will also deal with the appointment of people to the council and council size. Good governance starts with strong leadership. It is essential to the success of any statutory body, particularly one as significant as QIMR. Currently, all QIMR Council appointments are made by the Governor in Council. While that process may have been appropriate at the time the act was drafted, it can now lead to unnecessary delays and affect the council's ability to remain responsive and effective. To address this the bill transfers this responsibility to the Minister for Health, enabling swift appointments without compromising integrity or transparency.

The bill also refines the size of the council. While the current act provides for a council of between seven and 11 members, the bill sets a cap of nine members. This aligns with the council's current structure. This will support more focused and efficient decision-making while still ensuring a diversity of experience and expertise is maintained.

Integrity is not optional. Public confidence in research institutions like QIMR depends on strong ethical standards and transparency. The bill includes important integrity reforms. It requires the council to notify the minister immediately of any matter that could significantly impact the council or the institute's finances, operations or management. For example, if QIMR were involved in legal proceedings that could result in a substantial financial liability, the minister would be informed without delay.

To further strengthen accountability, the bill allows the minister to request a criminal history report from the Police Commissioner before appointing a council member. Existing members will also be required to notify the minister if they are charged with, or convicted of, an indictable offence during their term. Together, these reforms improve transparency and help ensure that only fit and proper individuals are entrusted with governing the institute.

The bill also provides the minister with clear powers to remove council members who engage in misconduct or fail to meet the standards expected of a public body. This includes behaviour that is improper or inappropriate in an official or private capacity. In addition, the bill introduces new disqualification provisions to ensure only fit and proper individuals can be appointed to, or remain on, the council.

These provisions cover a range of adverse behaviours; for example, a person will be disqualified if they have a conviction for an indictable offence unless that conviction is spent. There is no room for conduct that undermines public confidence. Queenslanders have every right to expect that statutory bodies like QIMR are governed with integrity, professionalism and transparency.

The bill also deals with council subcommittees and the issue of conflicts of interest. It modernises the structure of council committees. What are currently referred to as 'advisory committees' will be renamed 'council subcommittees' to reflect their role more accurately. These are not simply advisory bodies. They actively assist the council in carrying out its responsibilities.

The bill also introduces standard conflict of interest provisions which are currently missing from the act. These provisions will require council members to declare any material personal interests in matters being considered and remove themselves from related decision-making. For example, if a council member's relative or business associate could benefit from a contract or research funding decision, that member must be restricted from voting on the matter. This is basic good governance and long overdue.

The bill also makes important improvements to how the institute's leadership is appointed and managed. The director of QIMR plays a critical role in guiding the institute's research strategy and ensuring operational excellence. This is a specialised position that requires both scientific expertise and strong leadership skills.

Under the current act, the director is appointed by the Governor in Council. This process is slow and inflexible, limiting the institute's ability to recruit world-class candidates in an increasingly competitive field. To address this, the bill allows the council to appoint the director subject to ministerial approval. This strikes the right balance between council autonomy and maintaining appropriate government oversight.

The bill also allows the council to appoint an acting director for up to six months if the director is absent and unable to perform their functions or there is a vacancy in the office. This ensures leadership continuity during periods of absence or transition. To further strengthen accountability, the bill requires the director to immediately notify the council if that person has been charged with an indictable offence or becomes insolvent. Failing to do so, without a reasonable excuse, will be an offence with a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units.

The bill also ensures that decision-making can be done efficiently and at the right level. While the council brings together a wealth of expertise, some responsibilities are best handled by the director or the staff of QIMR who have day-to-day oversight of the operations of the institute. Currently, the act does not allow the council to delegate functions to the director, which can limit the flexibility and responsiveness of the institute. The bill addresses this by allowing the council to delegate functions to the director and enabling the director to subdelegate those functions or their own responsibilities to appropriately qualified institute staff.

Finally, the bill makes a simple but important improvement to how the institute handles donations. In the 2023-24 financial year, QIMR raised more than \$17 million in donations, bequests and philanthropic support. These contributions are vital to advancing research and driving innovation. However, while the current act allows the council to accept gifts, it does not clearly allow them to deal with those that may be inappropriate or impractical. This bill fixes this. It gives the council the authority to manage donations responsibly, in line with financial legislation and public expectations. This ensures contributions are used in the right way, for the right purpose and in the best interests of the institute and its work.

QIMR is one of Queensland's most valuable institutions. For almost 80 years, it has contributed to global breakthroughs, fostered international collaboration and, most importantly, improved the lives of countless Queenslanders. The institute sits at the cutting edge of medical science and is a driving force in our state's health and innovation future—as anyone who has taken the time to visit QIMR will know. The bill gives QIMR the strong, modern legislative foundation it needs to keep doing what it does best—delivering world-class research, attracting global talent and turning discoveries into real health outcomes. I have no doubt QIMR will continue to lead in areas like immunology, genomics and public health innovation as it enters its next chapter after its first 80 years.

I want to thank the many individuals and organisations who engaged with Queensland Health throughout the development of the bill, including the QIMR council and its chair and all those who have sought to make an improvement. Their input has helped shape the reforms that are included in this bill and that will support the institute's ongoing success. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. TJ NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services)
(12.11 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to Health, Environment and Innovation Committee

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr O'Shea): In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Health, Environment and Innovation Committee.