

Queensland Institute of Medical Research Bill 2025

Sandy Bolton, MP for Noosa

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This Bill is to modernise the legislation supporting the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, also known as QIMR Berghofer, by repealing the old 1945 Act and substitute this new reformed bill in its place.

The Institute was established 80 years ago to investigate diseases common to the climate of Queensland and has grown to be a world respected medical research body, researching into cancer, mental health, dementia and infectious diseases. Our committee visited there in May this year, and it is impressive in size, as well as scope.

A large organisation with 1000 staff and 67 laboratories funded mostly by grants, with the largest, in the most recent reporting year, coming from the National Health and Medical Research Council and Queensland Health, plus some substantial philanthropic grants such as the \$50 million from Clive Berghofer that gave the Institute its new name.

This bill mostly deals with updating the appointment and operation of current the Institute Council, its governing body, the

appointment of the Institute Director, staff and researchers, and managing intellectual property.

The bill attracted only four submissions (one of which was from the Institute itself), all in support.

Three main issues arose during the Committee's examination of the legislation.

The first are the reforms relating to integrity and accountability — with the bill providing more detail than the original Act, such as Council members being required to notify the Minister of matters that may significantly affect the financial viability or the administration or management of the institute, and clear circumstances where a Council member would lose their qualification for membership, such as bankruptcy, and when the Minister can remove an member, such as misconduct in office.

These changes were unopposed and supported by the committee.

Second, the Bill adds a new function for the Institute Council, which is to exploit commercially, for the institute's benefit, a facility or resource owned by the Institute Council, such as intellectual property.

The Institute, in its submission, supported this amendment, saying that in a very competitive grants environment commercialisation supports alternative revenue streams.

The Committee however did question this commercialisation, as it could create incentives to focus on commercially profitable

research rather than the kind of public research that the institute was set up originally to undertake.

The institute responded that commercialisation is not in opposition to public research as commercialisation is a necessary step toward ensuring that research comes to fruition.

The third issue was the appointment of 9 Council members and staff, appointed or removed by the Minister, with specified qualifications such as experience in corporate governance, health research or funding. Previously this was done by the Governor-in-Council.

The Institute argued that Ministerial appointments would be more streamlined and efficient, however it is not clear why this would be the case.

The report stated that the Committee were satisfied with the appointment process in the Bill, however two members lodged a Statement of Reservation regarding the removal of the Governor-in-Council oversight for appointments, because in all similar governing bodies that the Queensland Government is responsible for requires Governor-in-Council approval for appointments. They stated that rather than promote efficiency or transparency it calls into question the integrity and transparency of the appointment process for this governing body.

In the public briefing Queensland Health, in describing the design of the institute's arrangements, referred to 'contemporary standards and expectations' and 'modernising' the institute.

To see if these are common, contemporary standards we looked at three other organisations set up by this government in legislation in the last six months – the Queensland Productivity Commission, the Institute of Sport and the Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority.

Is ministerial appointment a contemporary standard? All three of these other organisation's boards are appointed by the Governor-in-Council.

What about the fixed number of Board members which the Departments described as providing “greater clarity and consistency moving forward”. The Academy of Sport, set up a few months ago, has between 5 and 8 members, the Olympic authority probably 12 to 15 (depending on a few factors), and the Queensland Productivity Commission 1 to 4.

Does this mean these other organisations are actually “less modern”?

No, it just means that the different departments writing these bills have made their own decisions and there isn't actually a single standard for “modern”.

This points to an opportunity for the government – to establish a modern standard for corporate governance of public sector bodies in Queensland.

A review that brings together expertise from academia, senior public servants, and the Institute of Company Directors or similar body to establish the principles of modern public sector corporate governance and provide a template for future work on

this kind by departments that could be applied uniformly to new bodies. It would make sense for this work to proceed under the auspice of the Public Sector Commission, and I commend the Premier to consider this proposal.

Thank you to the Committee and the Secretariat for their work on preparing the report on this Bill, I commend it to the House.

(850 words)