

Submission to the Senate Inquiry

Dear Inquiry,

Introduction: About me.

I am a born and bred West Australian who has grown up playing rugby union in the local competition against the backdrop of WA being a traditional AFL heartland.

My wife is a convert from AFL having grown up in Victoria. We are club volunteers with four sons all who play rugby union. Rugby is our “family” activity: playing for our club, watching our club and supporting the Force. We are rugby at its grass roots in WA.

We realise our concerns are small fry compared to some of the big issues before this Inquiry but wish to advance a grass roots perspective that the Inquiry may not have fully considered.

The impact of the decision to reduce the number of Australian teams on national participation in rugby union / Whether there continues to be a truly national rugby union footprint in Australia.

The ARU appear to have adopted a position that the monies saved by the reduction of teams would be diverted back to grassroots rugby, including in WA so that the ARU would maintain its commitment to keeping pathways in WA open notwithstanding the reduction in the “national (professional) footprint” by the removal of the Force.

My concern as a parent is that with a potential disjoint between the local club competition and the intended IPRC there is no in-season footprint for local players to access or aspire to (Junior club rugby usually ending by August). This robs those playing of much of an incentive to engage with rugby in the local season.

By the time any identifiable “local” competitions commence many folks will be thinking about their summer sport options.

In our opinion it is imperative that the timing of any footprint/on the ground professional presence (whether in terms of games or local access to professional players (i.e. at club training)) marry up with the local playing season.

- Can the ARU explain what its specific plans for developing grass roots rugby in WA were prior to the intervention of Andrew Forrest’s proposal to keep an international presence in Perth via the IPRC (albeit with an apparent if unavoidable disjoint between the local junior paying season)?
 - For example, is this monetary figure only?
 - What is this being used to fund?
 - What does this relate to/equate to on the ground?
 - Who is intended to controlling this money/resource?
- Can the ARU explain what its plans for developing grass roots rugby in WA are now (i.e. at this given moment)?
- Can the ARU explain what its plans for developing grass roots rugby in WA in the event that the IPRC is established (i.e. in conjunction with the IPRC)?

- Did the ARU consider options to retain or redeploy the Force to another competition (similar to the Cheetahs and the King's competing in Europe)?
 - For example, why was dissolution the only option?
 - Why did it take Andrew Forrest to come up with a plan to create an alternate option?
 - Is the NRC the ARU's new position for a national footprint?
 - What are the ARU's plans for the NRC and in particular the Perth Spirit?
- What are the ARU's plans to keep an aspirational pathway present in Perth year round now that WA no longer has a Super Rugby presence that aligns with the local club season?
 - For example, will the ARU consider the equitable distribution of high performance programmes throughout the country in order to better and more equitably maintain a national footprint?
 - Specifically, will the ARU relocate the National 7's programme to Perth in order to utilise the Force's (now underutilised) high performance facilities and maintain a high performance pathway in WA, albeit in 7's? This would at least maintain a high performance pathway in each major rugby state (4 Super Rugby franchises on the East Coast, 7's HPU on West Coast), albeit without a Super Rugby presence in WA.

The Australian Rugby Union Board deliberations leading to the decision to reduce Australian teams from five to four in the national competition.

It seems common sense that if there is a (supposedly equitable) review process in place that the status quo prevail until the conclusion of that review so the correct and preferable outcome could be arrived at rather than such outcome be prejudiced by independent manoeuvring to frustrate the outcome of that process. This would be consistent with the ability (and indeed obligation) to conduct the review in "good faith" as the peak body responsible for the overall stewardship of the game in Australia.

Did the ARU place a moratorium on all trade in franchise property (including the franchises as property) during the deliberation process and if not why not?

Was such a moratorium considered? If so, why was it not put in place to preserve the integrity of the process?

Did the ARU consider that the mere approval required to transfer a licence was sufficient protection to ensure a level playing field allowing the ARU to purchase back any (other) franchise if that franchise did not meet the relevant criteria (apparently) established by the ARU in determining which franchise should be retained?

In short, how was the ARU "blindsided" by the sale of the Rebels to the VRU in circumstances where it did not require its approval to do so?

The corporate governance arrangements and composition of national and state-based rugby union bodies, including community representation on those bodies.

I understand that when the Force sold their IP and licence back to the ARU under the Alliance Agreement it was on the basis that centralisation of common functions would be eventually ceded from all state unions/franchises to the ARU to reduce the duplication of costs experienced by each franchise and the ARU.

This makes sense (provided the ARU acts equitably) and provides of the ARU to engage in a centralised talent and resource distribution process.

Was this ever in fact the case?

Did this process occur or upon securing the Force's licence and IP did that process cease?

The role of national and state-based bodies in encouraging greater national participation in rugby union.

The ARU is promoting the future of its development based on "Project Greenshoots" research (which I understand the ARU has first access to) and the way in which rugby union as a sport must keep itself relevant to new generations of (local) players in order to attract and retain players in a competitive sporting landscape and indeed, where people are disengaging from organised sport.

What role is the ARU (and state based unions, in particular with reference to RugbyWA) playing in diversifying local rugby competitions and attracting (and retaining) youth to rugby?

For example, PSA schools in Perth generally do not approve of club engagement during the school aged years. Accordingly, many players are lost to clubs in the school aged years which robs many local clubs of player talent or dissociates players from their local clubs such that players do not necessarily return to club rugby after school.

Is there any opportunity to promoting integrated or combined school/club competitions to better integrate the open club competition rugby with the rather insular "private school" model to better ensure school players are exposed to clubs they can return to/play for upon leaving school or do we just "hope" that these players are retained in the sport and come back of their own accord?

Any other related matters.

The Black Swan Logo / IP Rights

What is the ARU doing with the Force IP and logo given that the logo itself has been adopted by RugbyWA and RugbyWA Juniors as the aspirational symbol of rugby in WA?

If this no longer has commercial value given the dissolution of the Western Force will the ARU release this IP to RugbyWA as WA's governing state union so that this can be used by Perth's IPRC team, state based representative teams and rugby in WA can keep its traditional State-based Black Swan logo identity?

If so, will this be gifted to RugbyWA or if not, on what terms will that property be returned to RugbyWA / Western Force?

Player welfare

The ARU has repeatedly reported concern for player's welfare as a result of this process? How much money has been allocated for and / or what counselling or support services have been afforded to Western Force players, staff or their families as a result of the dissolution of the Force?

Ticketing prices

In the recent Rugby Championships ticket prices were reduced for the Sydney and Canberra tests in the weeks leading up to the test matches. However, no equivalent reduction was released in relation to the Perth test against South Africa pricing many families out of the ability to attend the test match.

Why did this disparity occur?

Did this occur as a result of any ARU directives?

Junior representation at the test match in Perth

The ARU was heard to encourage spectators to wear Force colours to the test match against South Africa at NIB rather than boycott the game, a sentiment echoed by such people as Matt Hodgson. Representatives from local under 6 and under 7 teams were selected to attend the match and stand with the players during the national anthems. They were meant to wear their club jerseys.

Instead, the players were allocated Force jerseys to wear in a show of solidarity which was publicly being encouraged by the ARU. However, the children were prohibited from walking out with the players and standing with / in front of, during the anthems, despite this being their reason for attending.

Why were the children denied the opportunity to participate on the terms they were told they would participate in? Was it because they were wearing Force jumpers that the ARU had encouraged everyone else to wear?

Kind regards,

Sam & Michelle Nunn