



29 September 2017

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe
Secretary
Standing Committee on Community Affairs References Committee

By Online Submission

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE OF RUGBY UNION IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Ms Radcliffe

Thank you for your letter of 11 September 2017 inviting a written submission from RUPA with respect to the Inquiry into the Future of Rugby Union in Australia by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs References Committee.

On behalf of its members, Australia's professional Rugby players, RUPA has in 2017 been particularly vocal in advocating for the retention of all five Australian Super Rugby teams as being in the best interests of Rugby in Australia. Throughout the Australian Rugby Union and SANZAAR's protracted process to reduce the number of Australian teams competing in the Super Rugby competition beyond 2017 from five to four, RUPA has been more prevalent in our media presence and commentary than has been our recent nature. We have expressed our organisational views and those of players' collectively in numerous media articles and interviews this year.

Central to our publicly articulated positions has been eight statements which RUPA distributed publicly between February and September of this year which we provide for the purposes of the Inquiry. Each of those statements are attached and in summary their details are:

Item	Date	Title of Release
1	16 February 2017	Players united in support of five Australian Super Rugby teams
2	30 March 2017	RUPA launch "Stronger as Five" online petition
3	9 April 2017	RUPA responds to Super Rugby restructure
4	17 May 2017	RUPA supports VRU in calling for ARU General Meeting
5	21 June 2017	RUPA response post General Meeting
6	5 July 2017	Battle only between the white lines
7	11 August 2017	RUPA response to ARU decision
8	5 September 2017	RUPA response to dismissal of Rugby WA appeal

Please feel free to contact me should you wish to discuss the contents of this letter further.

Kind Regards,

Ross Xenos
Chief Executive Officer
RUPA

MEDIA RELEASE

Players united in support of five Australian Super Rugby teams

16 February 2017

Australia's professional Rugby players are staunch in their opposition to any mooted alternative models which would reduce Australia's representation in the Super Rugby competition for 2018 and beyond.

In reference to next month's SANZAAR Executive Committee meeting which will consider a preferred model for Super Rugby beyond this season, RUPA CEO Ross Xenos said that "This is a great opportunity for the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) to continue to advance the interests of Australian Rugby at the SANZAAR table.

"There is no denying that the current 18-team model has posed challenges that are real and which merit the consideration of alternatives. The breadth of time zones, the lack of tribalism, and fewer home fixtures for each team to commercialise has perpetuated the economic pressure that the new broadcast deal was hoped to eliminate.

"Professional Rugby is the economic engine of the game in Australia and we need more local content, not less, generating a larger revenue base to reinvest into premier and community Rugby. The ARU has a vision to 'inspire all Australians' but there is nothing inspirational for any of the game's stakeholders in voluntarily going backwards."

RUPA President Dean Mumm endorsed the players' commitment.

"The players are engaged in ensuring that any new competition model genuinely remedies the current competition's strategic failings and delivers more relevant, local derbies for Australian Rugby fans to enjoy," Mumm said. "Other codes in this country are growing their domestic competitions and fixtures at significant pace, and we simply can't do the opposite in an attempt to shrink our way to success.

"It is vital that we preserve all opportunities for players and coaches to enter the professional Rugby pathway all across the country; the game needs to inspire the next generation to play Rugby and a successful national shopfront is paramount to that effort. Maximising elite opportunities for players and enhancing our state programs is the best strategy to fight the

international player drain and develop our depth for Super Rugby and Wallaby competitiveness.

“By retaining five teams throughout the remainder of the current broadcast agreement, we allow time for a robust professional competition to be mapped out, and for World Rugby global season discussions to conclude, in order to develop a highly competitive and lucrative model to support Australian Rugby for all.”

Mumm and Xenos’ statements come amid speculation that the ARU Board may on Monday endorse the Australian position to be advanced at the SANZAAR Executive Committee in March. For that SANZAAR meeting to implement any changes to the current competition structure, a unanimous vote among the four joint venture partners is required.

Therefore, regardless of other nations’ views, if the ARU were opposed to any reduction in the number of Australian teams then the status quo would be retained for the remainder of the broadcast agreement.

In 2016, after just one season of a four-conference, 18 team competition, SANZAAR undertook a formal review process to investigate all number of different competition structures ranging from 15 teams to an expanded 24 team competition. Of the current 18 teams, only teams from within Australia and South Africa are believed to be under threat to being excluded from the competition moving forward.

If an Australian team was removed from the competition in 2018, the position of players contracted to that team beyond the end of this Super Rugby season is uncertain. The costs saved by hypothetically removing a team are unclear and may not be significant depending on many variables.

RUPA Chief Executive Officer Ross Xenos will be available for further comment this afternoon; for all media enquiries, please contact:

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MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA launch Stronger as Five online petition

30 March 2017

The Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) have today launched an online petition, empowering Australian Rugby's stakeholders to show their support for five Australian teams continuing to play in the Super Rugby competition beyond this year.

[Click here to view the Stronger as Five petition.](#)

"Current players, former Wallaby greats, corporate supporters, governments and past Rugby administrators have spoken out in recent weeks backing the long term retention of all five Australian Super Rugby teams. RUPA launches the Stronger as Five petition today to constructively bring together that support from all over the country." RUPA CEO Ross Xenos said.

"Without a final decision having been made by SANZAAR and the ARU, we encourage the Rugby community to show their support for the vibrant, aspirational and successful five team future that Australian Rugby deserves."

The micro-site also details concerns that RUPA has regarding the impacts of any reduction; weakened economic potential, decreased playing and coaching opportunities and the protection of expansion teams in Argentina and Japan at the expense of Australian teams, amongst other things.

All of Australia's Rugby players remain staunchly united in their opposition to any mooted alternative models which would reduce Australia's representation in the Super Rugby competition for 2018 and beyond, a point [made last month](#) prior to the SANZAAR Executive Committee meeting in London.

This petition provides a genuine opportunity for fans, coaches and administrators to join with the players and influence one of the most critical decisions in the game's history in Australia.

It's time for Australian Rugby to make a comeback; not a cut back. We are Stronger as Five.

Official Announcement from RUPA

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MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA responds to Super Rugby restructure

09 April 2017

In response to this evening's SANZAAR announcement confirming the future of Super Rugby, RUPA Chief Executive Officer Ross Xenos said:

"Australia's professional Rugby players are incredibly frustrated and deeply disappointed by today's confirmation that the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) has voted to axe an Australian team from Super Rugby in 2018 and beyond.

"Having signed Australian Rugby up to a competition which reduced local content, diluted tribalism and disrespected fans with its lack of integrity, ARU have now agreed to a new model which has protected the expansion teams in Argentina and Japan at the cost of one of our own.

"Despite receiving \$30 million of additional annual broadcast revenue from 2016, the financial challenges of Australian Rugby will likely be used to justify today's short-sighted and ill-conceived decision which will limit the growth of Rugby in Australia for generations to come.

"It is tomorrow's players, coaches and fans who will now pay the price for this strategic mismanagement. This decision will be the catalyst for an irresponsible human cost without any genuine remedies to the real strategic issues that the game faces."

RUPA has taken a strong public position, on behalf of the interests of its members and Australian Rugby more broadly in recent weeks. With today's announcement confirming the game's redacted future, RUPA will work hard to ensure that the contractual rights and wellbeing of all contracted players, their partners and their children are supported from this point onwards amidst the ongoing uncertainty about which four Australian teams will continue in the competition.

ENDS

Out of respect for the players at the three Clubs under threat, RUPA will not be making any further comments this evening.

Pete Fairbairn

Official Announcement from RUPA

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MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA supports VRU in calling for ARU General Meeting

17 May 2017

The Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) Board has today voted unanimously to support the Victorian Rugby Union (VRU) in requesting the convening of a special General Meeting of all Australian Rugby Union (ARU) Voting Members as soon as practicable.

RUPA's support of the VRU request comes after months of protracted speculation regarding Australia's future in Super Rugby and is seeking that the ARU provide all Voting Members with a transparent, comprehensive update on the ARU's review process to date along with the financial implications of various rationalisation models. Moreover, the General Meeting will bring together key elected and appointed representatives from around the country to collectively determine the best course for the future of Rugby in Australia.

"The ARU's intent to axe an Australian Super Rugby team has lacked transparency and consultation with key stakeholders. Today's unanimous RUPA Board resolution illustrates the commitment of players from all across the country to take action towards a constructive solution to this ongoing fiasco," said RUPA CEO, Ross Xenos.

"The ongoing uncertainty and secrecy of this process continues to do unprecedented damage to the reputation of the game and has placed unacceptable distress on players and their families.

"In every Australian team there are players and staff whose livelihoods and wellbeing have been compromised through this protracted process.

"If there is no clear way forward for Australian Rugby that provides the necessary cost savings to justify altering our current professional Rugby footprint in the middle of this broadcast cycle, then it's about time we stopped uppercutting ourselves, backed the retention of five Super Rugby teams and got on with fighting our common enemies outside the tent."

Responding to reports that the ARU may seek to buy-back the Rebels license from private owners to then shut the franchise down, Xenos questioned the appropriateness of such mooted financial management.

"The most consistent narrative we hear from the ARU is about the financial challenges the game faces and how tough times are. Axing an Australian team and disenfranchising a Rugby community was justified five weeks ago by the ARU based on financial savings. Now, anywhere between six to ten million dollars promised to be invested into the game, including at the grassroots level, could be burned so that the ARU can cull a team and save face around the SANZAAR table.

"Why are we are cutting a team at all and limiting Australian Rugby's future if there are such discretionary funds within the game that ARU can afford to buy a license, only to scrunch it up and throw it away?"

Today's RUPA Board decision is consistent with RUPA's vehement and public opposition to any reduction to the number of Australian Super Rugby teams which began at first suggestions that the ARU might jettison a team. RUPA has presented various competition models to the ARU for consideration by SANZAAR which support the retention of all five teams.

For further comments or queries, please direct all media requests to:

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MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA response post-General Meeting

On 17 May 2017, the Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) supported a call from the Victorian Rugby Union (VRU) for a General Meeting of the Voting Members of the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) which was held yesterday.

Reflecting on the Meeting, RUPA CEO, Ross Xenos provides the following statement:

Given the uncertainty and ambiguity that has existed as a result of the ARU's decision to eliminate an Australian Super Rugby team, it was necessary for RUPA to support this Meeting in order for all ARU Voting Members to be afforded a forum to better understand the ARU's position and to discuss the best means forward for Super Rugby in Australia.

VRU and RUPA jointly put three resolutions forward to the Meeting strongly believing that the best interests of Rugby in Australia are promoted by the retention of all five Super Rugby teams through to the end of the current broadcast cycle. We continue to contend that vacating professional rugby from any State is a strategy that should not be pursued.

Yesterday's Meeting did not guarantee any certainty of cost savings and there were no commitments from the ARU as to where any extra funds, if realised would be allocated. There remains no clear legal path or timeframe for when a final decision will be made.

The support from Voting Members for the third of our resolutions proposing the establishment of a Super Rugby Commission is an important step for Australian teams to have a stronger platform to collaborate and promote the future of the competition that they participate in.

RUPA was represented at yesterday's Meeting by Chairman Bruce Hodgkinson SC, who addressed the Meeting in support of the resolutions proposed. Also in attendance were RUPA President Dean Mumm, Melbourne Rebels Player Director Tom English, Western Force Player Director Matt Hodgson and CEO, Xenos.

RUPA will be holding its Annual General Meeting later this afternoon and providing all players in attendance with a further update on the next steps for Super Rugby from this point.

No further public comment will be made until after the RUPA AGM.

For more information please contact:

MEDIA RELEASE

Battle only between the white lines

As the Melbourne Rebels and Western Force prepare to meet in Perth on Friday evening, leaders from both teams have joined forces to address the uncertainty clouding both team's futures in Super Rugby.

Western Force legend and RUPA Board Member Matt Hodgson said his side have no intention of the match being an "us against them" battle in any aspect other than what happens on the field.

"We've put in a lot of hard work over the June break and we're really looking forward to ripping in on Friday night to do the Sea of Blue proud against the Rebels," Hodgson said.

"We really want to take the points, but we know that whoever wins takes bragging rights only and that this game won't decide if either team still has a future in the competition. I'm very grateful that the media this week has focused on the game itself and not the ARU's attempts to cut a team.

"All players remain united in our belief that the best interests of Rugby in Australia are best served by the retention of five teams and maintaining our national footprint with both Western Australia and Victoria."

Rebels centre Tom English, also a RUPA Board member, echoed Hodgson's sentiments.

"We can't wait to get back on the field this Friday night and finish the season as strongly as we possibly can. That 80 minutes is our time to escape the ongoing uncertainty and stress that this dragged-out process has created.

"All of us at the Rebels have a great deal of empathy for what the Force players have been put through this season, having experienced it ourselves and I'm sure we'll all catch up post-game to support each other.

"I'd like to thank all players from around the country for their solidarity in these hard times. The welfare of all affected players and staff is paramount, and we've all really appreciated your phone calls and support. We will continue to prepare and play as best as we possibly can while our futures are decided at a Boardroom level."

For more information please contact:

MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA Response to ARU Decision

Friday 11 August 2017

Following today's arbitration decision in favour of the ARU, and the subsequent announcement from ARU to discontinue the Western Force, RUPA CEO Ross Xenos has released the following statement:

"Today's is the darkest day in the history of Australian Rugby with the custodian of the game confirming their desire to end the tenure of the Western Force and abandoning the game's national footprint."

"The future of professional Rugby in Western Australia will now be the collateral damage of the decision making of the ARU and SANZAAR to expand Super Rugby to a convoluted and complicated 18 team structure against various advice and modelling received which explained the associated risks."

"Players, staff and their families at the Western Force have been put under unprecedented and, quite frankly, completely unreasonable duress throughout this ridiculous and destructive process."

"RUPA has and will continue to provide any support that is necessary for all players affected by the ARU's decision. We have staff in Perth and are in regular contact with all contracted players at the Force and their respective agents. RUPA will do whatever it takes to ensure that players' contractual rights are honoured and no player is unfairly disadvantaged by the ARU's decision."

"The people of Western Australia have campaigned fairly, passionately and with integrity in order to show that the Western Force deserve to have a place in Super Rugby. That campaign has fallen on deaf ears. We understand that Rugby WA are considering their legal position from this point forward and we respect their rights to explore such avenues."

Out of respect for the players and staff at the Western Force, RUPA will not be making any further comment at this time.

MEDIA RELEASE

RUPA response to dismissal of Rugby WA appeal

MEDIA ALERT: Ross Xenos will be available to speak to media at 1:30pm AWST (3:30pm AEST) at RugbyWA Headquarters this afternoon.

STATEMENT:

Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) Chief Executive Officer Ross Xenos has this morning voiced the players' disappointment that the NSW Supreme Court has dismissed the appeal of RugbyWA.

RugbyWA took the ARU to the Supreme Court of NSW, appealing an arbitrator's decision which ruled that an Alliance Agreement between the parties gave the ARU the legal right to remove the Western Force from the Super Rugby competition at the end of this year.

"Today's ruling is an enormous setback for Rugby in Western Australia and in RugbyWA's legitimate and understandable fight to retain the Western Force's place in Super Rugby," Xenos said. "It is incredibly unfortunate that the future of professional Rugby in Western Australia is being dictated by the precised wording of an Alliance Agreement signed with the intention of strengthening and continuing the Western Force, not facilitating their premature ejection from Super Rugby.

"Australia's Rugby players remain united in their belief that not only can Australia sustain five professional teams from both a commercial and high performance perspective, but that it is in fact imperative that we do so in order to reverse the significant decrease in relevance Rugby is suffering from within a crowded sporting landscape.

"As it has been throughout the entirety of this drawn-out attempt by the ARU to discontinue the Force, RUPA's principle priority is and will continue to be ensuring that the rights and wellbeing of all Western Force players are protected and supported.

"It is our understanding that RugbyWA and the Western Australian Government are continuing to explore the legal options at their disposal, including a potential High Court appeal as proposed by Mr. Andrew Forrest this morning."

MEDIA ALERT: Ross Xenos will be available to speak to media this afternoon.

When: 1:30pm AWST (3:30pm AEST)

Where: Rugby WA Headquarters, 203 Underwood Avenue, Floreat WA

For more information please contact:

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