



BEFORE / BEYOND

ANNUAL REPORT 2017





## 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

**HIGHEST RATING TV PROGRAM**  
in Australia in 2017

**HISTORIC COLLECTIVE  
BARGAINING AGREEMENT**  
delivering the best deal to the players  
in the game's history

**\$2.3B COMMITTED TO NEW  
RUGBY LEAGUE STADIA**  
by NSW, Qld, NT and Federal  
governments

**NEW CLUB FUNDING MODEL**  
guaranteeing the clubs more support  
than ever before

**LANDMARK INTERNATIONAL  
RIGHTS DEAL**  
with Fox Sports Australia

**THE CLOSEST TELSTRA  
PREMIERSHIP SEASON  
IN OVER A DECADE**  
with an average game margin of 13 points

**MACKLEMORE GRAND FINAL  
ENTERTAINMENT REACHED  
OVER 8 MILLION**  
on social media

**MORE AUSTRALIANS FOLLOW  
THE NRL ON FACEBOOK**  
than any other sporting code or team

**343,000 NRL CLUB AND  
STATE MEMBERS**  
more than ever before

**NEW SCHEDULING SYSTEM  
IMPLEMENTED**  
under new rights regime in preparation  
for 2018 season

**HARVEY NORMAN JILLAROOS  
PLAY AND WIN A RECORD  
10 INTERNATIONAL MATCHES**  
including an historic double-header  
World Cup Final

**A TRIUMPHANT RUGBY LEAGUE  
WORLD CUP**  
with Australian men's and women's teams  
returning as the number one international  
teams respectively



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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

JOHN GRANT

Performance of the company in 2017 is detailed in this Annual Report in the 2017 Highlights section, the CEO's report and associated commentary.

**Suffice to say, overall performance in 2017 was exceptional.**

Financial performance led the way with revenues of \$354 million, \$1.4 million ahead of budget; operating expenses of \$135 million, \$13.2 million lower than budget, distributions of \$223 million, and a resultant deficit of \$3.7 million (before consolidation and the impact of impairment of club loans), \$14.2 million better than budget.

Given loans and advances provided to clubs of \$60 million, cash has been very well managed with the closing cash balance of \$90 million up on budget by \$38 million. Net Assets ended at \$51 million, up \$11 million on budget.

On field in 2017 the Telstra Premiership continues to be the closest major sporting competition in Australia with 35% of games decided by 6 points or less, average margin at 13 points

being the lowest over the last 15 years, and State of Origin once again recorded the highest ratings for all shows on television for Game III. Declines in television audiences of 3% over the record 2016 result when simulcast was introduced, and in attendances of 2% were offset by increases in social media audiences of 8% to 2.4 million, in subscriptions to Telstra's NRL app up 350% on the prior year to over half a million, and in club memberships by 5% to 316,000. State memberships added another 27,000 and Macklemore's pre-game performance at the NRL Telstra Premiership Grand Final reached 8 million people and elevated the match and the game's approach to inclusiveness on to the global stage.

Overall participation numbers excluding Touch Football rose in 2017 and the game secured government funding totalling over \$2.3 billion for new rectangular stadia in Townsville and in Sydney at Parramatta, Sydney Olympic Park and Moore Park. In addition, the New South Wales Government has committed to provide funding towards new Centre of Excellence facilities for a number of NSW clubs.

Off field, achievements were also substantial with a final agreement reached on a funding distribution model for clubs and states for 2018-22 and details of significant Constitutional reform being finalised by the Commission's members. In addition, plans were finalised for implementation of new elite pathways and participation strategies in 2018, a new strategic plan incorporating a revised brand strategy endorsed for 2018-22, a new Collective Bargaining Agreement for 2018-22 struck with players, a Football Department cap on expenditure agreed with clubs for implementation in 2018, and the sale of the two NRL-owned clubs completed shortly after close of the financial year.

2017, capped off with success for both our Kangaroos and Jillaroos in their respective World Cups, was an exceptional year – one that we can all be proud of.



WE HAVE MADE ENORMOUS PROGRESS IN THE SIX YEARS SINCE FORMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE COMMISSION

## REFLECTING ON THE FIRST SIX YEARS

2017 marks the end of the 2013-17 broadcast cycle and the first phase of development of the game under an independent Australian Rugby League Commission (ARLC).

While the objectives of the company are set out in the ARLC Constitution, the Commission's core responsibilities distil to:

- » Ensuring rugby league is the most entertaining, engaging and respected of sports
- » Ensuring revenues flowing to the game are maximised and can be sustained
- » Administering the game as cost effectively as possible mindful of the need for continuing innovation
- » Maximising distributions to stakeholders and ensuring all our endeavours are in unison.

From leading the Commissioners' due diligence in late 2011, and then as Chair from formation in February 2012 through to the 2017 AGM, I can confidently say we have made significant progress in each of these areas and the game is strongly positioned to continue to grow into the future.

As predicted on formation, this has not been without its challenges and meeting these responsibilities has led to periods of volatility, some of which have been particularly difficult. But I can assure you that, in spite of this, **the Commissioners have always taken the view that we must do what is best for the whole game**, not best for any particular stakeholder no matter how loud their voice.

As the game enters its next phase of development, it is appropriate to reflect on the progress that has been made against each of these core responsibilities over the period, how it is now positioned, and the challenges that must be addressed if it is to reach the heights it should aspire to.

## ENSURING RUGBY LEAGUE IS THE MOST ENTERTAINING AND ENGAGING OF SPORTS

Ensuring rugby league is the most entertaining and engaging of sports at the elite level is absolutely vital as it is this that drives almost all revenues to the game. Achieving this has been a continuous effort with the ultimate measures of success being more people engaged with and more people playing rugby league in all its formats.

Since 2012 there have been **major changes to the on-field game at the elite level**, many of which have also been adopted in the competitions administered by state and regional leagues. These include:

- » Changes to the structure of the Finals series to reward club success over the course of the premiership
- » Rule changes aimed at making the game more appealing to a wider cross section of fans, players and parents and improving the safety of players by eliminating unacceptable violence and unsafe practices in the form of the punch, the shoulder charge, and the head high, lifting and 'cannonball' tackles
- » Introduction of the NRL Bunker, the most significant technology advancement in 20 years and one whose benefits will continue to flow over years to come with more video angles available more quickly to reduce officiating error and create moments of suspense for fans
- » Introduction of the shot clock, a tap for a 40/20 kick and a seventh tackle for in-goal kicks to reduce unnecessary delays and to keep the action flowing
- » Reduction in the interchange to introduce fatigue and create opportunity for spontaneous attack
- » Introduction of new processes for head injury assessment aimed at changing the culture of acceptance of head knocks as part of the game to one that recognises the danger



- of concussion and identifies and addresses symptoms quickly and appropriately
- » Streamlining of match review and judiciary processes to quickly and consistently address on field offences
- » Increasing the average turnaround time between matches to ensure players have the greatest opportunity for recovery, and
- » Changes to eligibility rules for State of Origin to remove ambiguity and, working with the Rugby League International Federation (RLIF), for international rugby league to ensure the best players are able to represent their country.

Off field, our NRL clubs' increasing investment in their football programs - at times for some has been ahead of their financial capacity - has ensured their athletes have been at their best for longer periods throughout the season. This investment has also seen significant improvement in professionalism and access to advanced equipment and facilities within our clubs' football departments.

And the salary cap has been increasingly more stringently monitored. This has been a key factor in ensuring our fans believe their team can win every week. Over the period, we have seen the effect of this play out as increasing unpredictability in results. In 2017, the Telstra Premiership was the closest of all sports and the closest rugby league has seen in the last 15 years with 35% of games decided by 6 points or less and the makeup of the eight teams for the Finals not being decided until the last match.

We measure entertainment of and engagement with the elite game through television audience ratings and audience share, our game's digital footprint, and how these translate to revenues. Clubs also measure memberships and match day attendances.

Total television audiences for the premiership have increased by 2.45% between 2013 and 2017 with the broad structural shift in viewing behaviour seeing free to air viewer (FTA) television numbers declining 21% offset by a 69% increase in subscription television numbers.

FTA audiences for State of Origin have fared better but over the same period have still declined by 11%.

While this structural shift plays out, there are four very positive signs that point to revenue growth beyond 2022. Firstly, the premiership's **share of television audience has increased** over the 2013-17 period and, as in previous years, in 2017 rugby league matches retained four out of the six top spots for all shows on FTA television.

Secondly, digital subscriptions to Telstra's NRL app increased 350% in 2017 over 2016 to over half a million as Telstra bundled the app with the mobile subscription and improved the sign-on journey for its customers.

Thirdly, the NRL's social media audience, which has grown year on year since 2013, ended 2017 up 9% on 2016 at 2.45 million, the largest of any Australian sport.



And finally, in 2016, guided by the view that digitally safeguarding our key revenue streams is critical, the Commission endorsed investment of over \$150 million in the period 2017-22 in new digital platforms.

Between 2013 and 2017 we invested with our NRL Clubs to grow memberships through a centralised telesales team. As a result, **club memberships have increased year on year** from 203,000 in 2013 to 316,000 in 2017. From 2018, the centralised facility will be replaced by in-house teams in our clubs who will take over the responsibility for continuing to grow membership.

Attendance at NRL Premiership matches has effectively 'plateaued' since 2013 averaging around 15,000 -16,000 per match. In broad terms, attendances have been lower for Sydney-based clubs. There have been many reasons attributed to this, all of which have some part to play - difficult travel, old stadia and generally poor facilities, watering down of local derby matches, match scheduling, little capacity to invest in marketing, poor weather, and expensive tickets and food.



For the Commission's part, we have worked with our clubs where we can on improving the match-ups, marketing the premierships, improving the match day experience and lowering costs to fans but, given hiring agreements with the stadia operators rest directly with the clubs, this has primarily been their responsibility, one that they have devoted as much focus to meeting as capacity has allowed.

Working with our clubs and government we have been able to make a difference however by securing **over \$2.3 billion for new and improved stadia** in Sydney at Parramatta, Moore Park and Sydney Olympic Park and in Townsville, and for Centres of Excellence for some of our NSW-based clubs.

This investment is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to give our fans a world-class entertainment experience. Our sincere thanks go to the Federal and Queensland governments for their

commitment to Townsville and to the NSW Government for its commitment to Sydney. While rugby league is a beneficiary of these investments, the full benefits will flow to the broader community.

In 2012 at the elite international levels, enthusiasm for our national teams, the Kangaroos and the Jillaroos, was languishing. The Commission fundamentally believes that international rugby league is a clear differentiator for our game and that growth at this level will bring both financial and non-financial benefits to the domestic game.

**With this in mind it has sought to:**

- » Restore **representation for Australia as the aspirational pinnacle for our elite male and female players** while maintaining State of Origin as the tribal heart of our representative agenda
- » Seed new markets with elite broadcast content, and

- » Work with the Rugby League International Federation (RLIF) to ensure there is **more international rugby league** through a long-range calendar that balances player enthusiasm and workload and NRL and English Super League Club imperatives.

An important step in this was the appointment of Mal Meninga as head coach for all international representative teams in 2016 and the cultural reinvigoration he has nurtured embodied in the RISE (Respect, Inspire, Selfless and Excellence). This, together with more funding for coaching, elite performance and administration of the international programs, and elevation of the Jillaroos to the main stage with the Kangaroos in double-headers has seen considerable success - World Cup wins by both the Kangaroos and Jillaroos in 2013 in the UK and 2017 in Australia,

New Zealand and PNG, success in the men's Four Nations in the UK in 2016, and achievement of number one world ranking for both teams in 2017.

The international broadcast agreement for the NRL Premiership and State of Origin for 2013-17 did not contribute significantly to either the growth of the international game or in revenues to the ARLC. In November 2017, we announced a new international broadcast agreement with Fox Sports that will see all ARLC matches broadcast in Australia also available internationally over 2018-22. This deal will deliver substantially more revenue to the ARLC and will see elite rugby league content accessible through FTA television and new streaming subscription services in all key markets globally. Over time we expect more people watching rugby league around the world can translate to increased value of our NRL broadcast rights and growth in domestic competitions in the 71 nations that currently play rugby league.

In terms of more international rugby league, work is currently under way on a Rugby League Nines World Cup in 2019, a British Lions tour to Australia and New Zealand in 2019, a Kangaroos tour to the UK and France in 2020, more Pacific Tests, and World Cups in 2021 in the UK and 2025 in the USA. Finalisation of the specifics of these will provide an international calendar for the RLIF that for the first time ever can be commercialised.

In December 2017, we announced **a new women's elite program** for 2018-22 that redefines the landscape for women's rugby league. It will be seen by women and girls who want to participate in sport as aspirational and we believe will grow female participation, build out the elite pathways that lead to the Jillaroos and expand women's engagement more broadly with rugby league. It provides for 40 players contracted centrally, a new Women's State of Origin, a club competition that will expand over this period, and more international matches.

Future proofing the elite game relies on **attracting and retaining the best players** and putting their welfare to the fore. Key to this is participation numbers, both in the contact and non-contact forms of the game. Prior to 2012, a separate business, ARL Development, had taken responsibility for participation. Its operations were not integrated with the development activities of any of our Leagues or NRL Clubs and, while all parties operated with good intent, the overall outcome was piecemeal. On formation, ARL Development and the state League based development activities were integrated under the Commission. The high-level numbers show declining participation in registered male contact rugby league club competitions - 2% each year 2014-17 - and annual churn in club competitions of 30%. Even given a minor increase in total participation in 2017, these numbers indicate the challenge the game is facing.



During 2015, we started work with the state Leagues and NRL Clubs on **a new integrated participation strategy**. This was approved in 2017 and will be rolled out in 2018 with state Leagues and clubs. Its key objective is to attract young people into non-structured participation aimed at building confidence in and following of rugby league, and to provide transition pathways to structured competitions in formats and at times that suit their development and their desire. It will include an infant program, an optimal non-contact format, one single national junior participation program and a player development program that will make certain that the best players transition to elite representative pathways. It will be accompanied by an overarching marketing and promotional program using registration data that aims to ensure consistent messaging and to help participants identify the best alternatives for them.

We have concluded that, for many, the **pressure on young players rising to the main stage is too much too early**.

In response, 2018 will see the Under 20 National Youth Competition replaced by regional Under 20 competitions that will keep young players at home longer.

New rules will also come into effect to restrict the age at which players can be contracted to 18 and the number of 'rookies' able to be included in NRL Club development beyond the senior top 25 squad programs to a maximum of four. There are also limits on the amount of money they can be paid.

Under this model, the Intrust Super competitions will become the elite pathway to the NRL and will be expanded in coming years to up to 32 teams across Australia and into New Zealand and the Pacific. Relationships of these clubs with NRL clubs will be formalised through affiliation agreements to give certainty in player pathways and game development.

These are big changes that will see teams and athletes from all regions of Australia and the Pacific with logical pathways that keep them in development programs for the right period of time, don't thrust players into the elite limelight too early, and give them the greatest opportunity for success.

## ENSURING RUGBY LEAGUE IS THE MOST RESPECTED OF SPORTS

The need to ensure our game is the most respected of sports should be self-evident, but the propensity both on and off field for **a very few to damage the prospects for the very many** has been one of the greatest frustrations for the Commission and, I'm sure, all who have an interest in our game.

In the last six years, we have seen a litany of issues ranging from regrettable misdemeanours to very serious corruption and fraud by players, football staff and administrators. While there is specific evidence of sponsors withdrawing support as a result, it is not possible to measure the full damage such issues have done. But it is reasonable to conclude it is considerable, particularly with those we seek to attract to our game.

The Commission's response to these issues has been purposefully strong and, with the reality that no two issues are the same, as consistent as it can be.



Our belief has been that all administrators of the game at Commission, Club and State levels will be **judged not only by what happens but how we respond**. Responding in a timely manner consistently, fairly and cognisant of the facts is critical to improving the respect in which our game is held.

If our game is to be the most respected of sports, it is critical to acknowledge how it is really seen by others. In 2012, in aspirational terms, we defined the vision for the game as 'the greatest game of all'. In 2017, we undertook a major project to understand rugby league's brand i.e. what it is remembered for most. **The findings of the brand research are sobering and indicate a need for change**. They will be the subject of detailed presentations to all stakeholders early in 2018 but, suffice to say, they find that if we do not tackle the culture of self-interest, divisiveness and negativity that seems

ever present and do not understand how our fans truly perceive the game, we will not maximise value from the significant opportunities the research also highlights.

Some of the research's findings were echoed by Richard Hinds in 2017 when he wrote "There might be no sporting competition in the world where the gap between the excellent action on the field, and the bleak way the game is portrayed, is wider than in the NRL... It's all about the drama, you see. Rugby League thrives on controversy. Greenberg spoke for everyone who loves Rugby League this week when he said **it's time for the game to grow up**."

In response to the research, the Commission has approved a brand strategy and a set of action plans. But for this is to be successful, it will require a change of culture across the game, one that would see all stakeholders agree we have a joint

problem and that we all need to work together to fix it. This will be confronting for many but disunity will undermine its success.

None of this denies the terrific work being done in our rugby league communities by our Clubs, by the Men of League Foundation and through our Indigenous, Community and Welfare programs. Adding to this, one of the most pleasing changes that has occurred is the attitude our elite players have to their responsibility as role models. In 2012, I was struck that it was not a responsibility that was accepted readily. While there have still been transgressions in behaviour, in 2017 there are very few players who do not accept this responsibility.



## ENSURE REVENUES FLOWING TO THE GAME ARE MAXIMISED AND CAN BE SUSTAINED

Following the Super League war in 1997 and the uneasy peace that existed with News Limited as a 50% owner of rugby league through the NRL Partnership from 1998 until 2012, it could reasonably be argued that, with broadcast revenues over 2008-12 of \$500 million, the game had been underpaid for its rights.

The Commission's first broadcast deals in 2012 delivered over \$1 billion for the period 2013-17. It was a breakthrough which not only brightened the game's financial future but also ensured rugby league was televised widely on FTA and subscription television, as well as mobile. But the money was not the most important aspect of these deals. **The most important aspect was removal of the first and last rights** held by News Limited and Channel 9 over future broadcast deals until 2027, a condition put by them on formation of the Commission.

Removing this condition was the Commission's major objective going into the negotiation. To have both maximised income and removed the constraint on future negotiations was an outstanding outcome.

The second broadcast deal for the period 2018-22, secured in late 2015, will deliver \$1.8 billion for the game. This is an exceptional result in an increasingly fractured and competitive media environment. It will allow significant financial restructuring and lay very solid financial foundations for future growth. It will also ensure rugby league reaches more fans than ever before providing at least three live games a week on FTA television and all eight games live on subscription television from 2016 to 2022. In addition, from 2018 it includes FTA broadcasts of 100 'other matches' at the Commission's discretion each year. This will allow more Intrust Super matches, more women's matches, and perhaps even non-contact matches to be broadcast on FTA and subscription television.

Accompanying broadcast revenues, growth in commercial revenues – sponsorship, advertising, betting, merchandise, digital and major events – has been and is forecast to be very strong. The table below puts revenue growth over the period into context.

Total revenue in 2012 was \$181 million. Over the 2013-17 period, average revenues per year were \$333 million, an increase of 84%. Our projections for the 2018-22 period are for average revenues per year of \$497 million, an increase of 49% on 2013-17. In summary, under the Commission **revenues are projected to increase 175% in the ten years from 2012 to 2022.**

Suffice to say there has been plenty of demand from stakeholders within the game for those funds. I deal with this further in discussing distributions to stakeholders below. Some of this demand was not easy to foresee with a number of clubs entering financial distress over the 2013-17 period. In response, the ARLC provided short and long term loans to varying degrees to most clubs, took ownership of two, and negotiated a new funding model for 2018-22 that will ensure the long-term sustainability of all clubs and more funding than ever before to grassroots.

Revenue \$m	2012	Aver 2013-17	% increase over prior period	Fcast Aver 2018-22	% increase over prior period
Broadcast	101	205	103%	324	58%
Commercial	75	122	53%	148	21%
Digital	5	6	-	25	317%
Total	181	333	84%	497	49%



To accommodate this, the Commission's cash flow is projected to tighten through to 2019 before strengthening through to 2022. This has been incorrectly and unhelpfully reported by some sections of the sports media. In fact, as the results for 2017 have shown, the Commission has demonstrated a capacity for balancing the imperative to grow revenue at lowest cost, maximise distributions to stakeholders and manage cash well, a capacity the Commission trusts will soon be evident in all areas of our game.

Turning to revenue sustainability, I mentioned earlier that the Commission sees **digitally safeguarding our key revenue streams as critical.**

This is why the Commission has committed to invest over \$150 million between 2017 and 2022 in the game's digital presence and capabilities. Under the new broadcast agreements from 2018-22, we have taken back responsibility from our partner Telstra for our digital presence. We have hired some of the best people in Australia as developers, engineers, writers and producers, and in December 2017 we launched our own NRL.com together with websites and apps for all 16 NRL Clubs and the State and regional Leagues.

Our digital strategy is not philosophically complex but executing it well is vital. Our objective is to provide engaging content that allows us to build a data-based 'one on one' relationship with our fans and to monetise that relationship through existing and new products and services.

There have been initial concerns expressed by our media partners that we may become competitive to them. This is not our intent. Rather we see an opportunity to construct a more integrated relationship with them that delivers benefits to all and reduces our concentration risk. However, we are also intent on ensuring we 'cut through' when necessary as a trusted and relevant voice – a capability we have lacked to date.

Our projections for digital revenues are that they will increase each year over the 2018-22 period reaching \$26 million in 2022 and continuing to grow thereafter. Early signs give us confidence these projections will be achieved.



## ADMINISTERING THE GAME AS COST EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE MINDFUL OF THE NEED FOR CONTINUING INNOVATION

In terms of administering the game, the Commission's focus over the 2012-17 period was on securing the CEO with the right skills for the stage of the ARLC's development, and strengthening governance across the game.

**The period 2013-15 was one of significant change** with some degree of experimentation for the NRL organisation. Fuelled by additional broadcast revenue and the Commission's intent to move quickly and expansively, the NRL quickly built out its capability and capacity and undertook a series of projects that changed the nature of the organisation and what it did.

During this period, aside from the elite football-related initiatives including introduction of the Bunker detailed earlier, the key outcomes were:

- » A whole of game strategic plan, The Game Plan, was launched to bring focus and create aspiration across the game
- » Branding across the game was consolidated to focus on 'the shield' and the colours as the core brand
- » Broadcast rights deal in excess of \$1 billion for 2013-17
- » Both the Gold Coast Titans and the Newcastle Knights were recapitalised as new companies with new boards and CEOs



- » St George Illawarra and Wests Tigers NRL Clubs were provided with mid-term funding to transition to different ownership and move matches from suburban grounds to larger stadia
- » The centralised membership sales organisation was created to pursue the membership targets implicit in The Game Plan
- » The partnership with Touch Football Australia was created as part of an overall objective to provide alternative formats for our participants and bring more highly engaged fans to the game
- » The Men of League Foundation was provided with funding to support its transition to a better governed entity
- » Following the 'drugs in sport' crisis of 2013, the NRL Integrity Unit was created boosting the NRL's capacity to monitor and investigate breaches of NRL Rules. This also led to the registration process that now sees every person involved with

servicing our elite athletes having to formally apply for and maintain registration with the NRL

- » A new Statistics business was established in-house, delivering higher quality and more consistent statistics to clubs and fans, as well as additional commercial revenue
- » Work commenced to move away from the outsourced sales model for sponsorship that had marked the previous administration to an in-house sales team. This has been a key contributor to the very strong growth in commercial revenues
- » The Commission acquired photo and video libraries and "The Immortals" trade mark as part of an overall objective to take back ownership of what it saw as the game's intellectual property
- » With a paucity of whole of game data available on formation of the Commission, an annual club benchmarking study was undertaken.

In the hands of NRL Club administrators, it has proven invaluable as a guide to better operating their businesses

- » The game's first 'Stretch' Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan was developed and implemented under a reconstituted ARL Indigenous Council (ARLIC)
- » A Pacific Strategy was developed and implemented to deliver community programs into our Pacific neighbours
- » Regular meetings of NRL and state League Chairs, CEOs, CFOs and NRL Coaches were put in place to improve collaboration and communication across the various entities that administer rugby league
- » The Affiliate Leagues in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory were restructured to bring them under the direct control of the Commission, which has provided a platform for consistent game development programs and competition structures

- » A new Rugby League Central in Queensland was opened to provide modern facilities under one roof for the QRL, The Men of League Foundation, the state-based NRL functions and Touch Football Australia
- » More women rose to leadership positions across the game, led by two female Club Chairs and by the game's first female CEO
- » A more expansive community strategy was implemented
- » With financial support from the Australian and Queensland Governments, NRL Cowboys House, a facility that provides significant benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Far North Queensland was opened in March 2017 in Townsville
- » Grassroots infrastructure funding was provided in combination with state governments
- » The Auckland Nines was launched
- » The ARLC in partnership with the New Zealand Rugby League successfully bid for the 2017 Rugby League World Cup

- » Broadcast rights deal in excess of \$1.8 billion for 2018-22
- » Negotiations with NRL Clubs on increased funding commenced.

Inevitably there were some false starts over this period and the transition to an era of financial and operational accountability caused many to struggle. But this period necessarily challenged the status quo, delivered significant outcomes, and appropriately signalled the change likely under one independent and diligent governing body.

**The period 2016-17 has been marked by extremes** – from tumultuous negotiations with NRL Clubs on funding and intellectual property and approval of the largest ever single investment by the game in its digital business in 2016, to consolidation, operational excellence and fiscal restraint in 2017.

Again, aside from football-related initiatives and investment in the digital business, the key outcomes this period saw were:

- » A new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the game's elite players that will see significant increases in player payments and the potential to share on above plan profits matched by increased contribution by players to marketing and supporting the game's development and growth, and increased responsibilities to maintaining integrity
- » New Elite Pathways and Participation strategies and development of detailed implementation plans
- » A landmark International Rights Deal with Fox Sports Australia



These have required funding and the table below shows actual average NRL administration costs over the periods 2012, 2013-17 and forecast average over the period 2018-22:

NRL Opex \$m	2012 Actual	2013-17 Act Average pa	% increase over prior period	2018-22 Fcast Average pa	% increase over prior period
Total	37.4	59.6	59%	88.6	49%
Elite Football and player benefits	15.0	25.7	71%	31.1	21%
Community	5.6	5.8	4%	5.7	0%
Digital	2.0	5.7	185%	24.2	325%
Legal and Integrity	0.4	2.9	625%	4.7	62%
Corporate Services	14.4	19.5	35%	22.9	17%

- » A new NRL match scheduling system implemented under new rights regime in preparation for 2018 season
- » A new framework for reward and recognition across the game incorporating and reinvigorating the NRL Hall of Fame and The Immortals
- » Agreement to transfer the ownership of NRL Club intellectual property from the game to clubs with a licence back to the NRL and provisions to protect the game's rights in such property in the event of club failure or default
- » Finalisation of the new funding agreement with the NRL Clubs incorporating club contributions to a distressed club fund and the digital business

- » Agreement on an NRL Football Department spending cap within clubs to stop the 'arms race' and improve fiscal diligence
- » Extension of the current NRL Club Licences to 2023 with a commitment to work with clubs to develop a perpetual licence agreement
- » Transition of the NRL-owned Clubs, the Gold Coast Titans and the Newcastle Knights, to private ownership with deep roots in their respective communities
- » Planning for implementation of an 'Elevate' Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan in 2018 was completed. The NRL will be the first national sporting organisation to do so
- » Completion of the brand review and development of a new brand strategy as a subset of an overall strategic plan for 2018-22.

As a percentage of revenue, total NRL operating expenditure is forecast to decline to 12.7% in 2022 from 19.5% in 2012 while still delivering considerable innovation across all aspects of the game - an excellent result.

The basis for the Commission's governance practices is set out in the ARLC Constitution. It has used its own experiences and the expertise of its directors to provide advice where requested, or has appointed directors where necessary to improve governance practices across the game. In the 2013-17 period, **there has been considerable improvement in governance practices** within many clubs driven either out of necessity in response to crises, or out of intent to improve. Some clubs have yet to make progress in this area but as community pressure builds, old practices will become more difficult to justify and sustain and change will occur.

At the Commission level, members are currently contemplating changes to the ARLC Constitution. These are aimed at providing direct representation of Clubs and State Leagues on the board while still retaining the independence of the Commission. The current Commission has indicated its support for change but has warned against complicating governance unnecessarily. It has also indicated that the decision to change is as significant as was formation of the current Commission and is one for every director or every member. There will be no going back, so thorough diligence by every member is required.



## MAXIMISING DISTRIBUTIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS AND ENSURING ALL OUR ENDEAVOURS ARE IN UNISON

The stakeholders the Commission serves in terms of distribution of funds are the NRL Clubs, the elite players, and the grassroots represented by the State Leagues (QRL, NSWRL, CRL and the Affiliate States) and NRL Game Development.

### The Commission's overarching objective is to maximise total distributions to stakeholders.

I mentioned earlier that with new broadcast agreements struck in 2012 and 2015, there was understandably significant demand from all stakeholders for increases in funding. The Commission's responsibility under the ARLC Constitution is to balance the demands of all stakeholders and serve the whole game. In determining an appropriate distribution model for 2018-22, the Commission was cognisant of:

- » The deterioration in NRL Club financial performance over the 2013-17 period. Combined losses across clubs totalled \$45m in 2015 and \$56m in 2016. While Leagues Club grants for some clubs of \$25m in 2015 and \$39m in 2016 improved this situation, the average loss per club after these grants was near to \$1m in both years and was unsustainable
- » Expenditure on club football departments ex-players grew at an average rate of 35% each year over the period - more than the increase in total losses
- » Commission ownership of two NRL Clubs, a necessary but undesirable scenario to be avoided in the future
- » Deterioration in male contact participation numbers over the 2014-17 period
- » The need to fund development of the game's digital future
- » The demands on the Commission's cash flow particularly in the 2018-19 period

- » The need to streamline NRL operations and ensure funds available are directed appropriately
- » The right for players to be appropriately rewarded for their significant contribution to the game both on the field and off the field.

**The journey to reach agreement on funding for clubs and states was tumultuous** and for much of the time, unnecessarily public. It is also not an exaggeration to say that over 30% of the resources and time available to the Commission and the NRL executive team in the 2013-17 period has been applied to doing so.

In finalising this funding there was a great deal of misinformation spread, at times to damaging effect. This was exacerbated by the lack of an ability for the Commission to 'cut through' with the facts. For the record, I outline below the more significant events that led to the final agreement in December 2016:

- » In mid-2015 it had been decided in principle that the Commission should move early on its broadcast rights for the period 2018-22
- » In expectation of this, a Club Funding Working Group was established to negotiate NRL Club funding for the period 2018-22
- » In August 2015, FTA broadcast rights with Nine Entertainment Group for the 2018-22 period were announced by then CEO, Dave Smith. The absence of an announcement on subscription and digital rights simultaneously was met with significant angst within mainstream media for a considerable period of time

- » In October Dave Smith resigned
- » In November 2015, the FTA rights were restructured and a final agreement with Channel Nine, Fox Sports and Telstra was announced
- » A Chairs meeting on 2 December 2015, while informed by incorrect information provided to clubs prior to it and conducted at times under duress, resulted in an in-principle agreement on a funding model that included significant increases to clubs and a complementary commitment they would be financially sustainable for the long term requiring no more funds from the game; significant increases in funding to grassroots; and retention of ownership of the NRL digital business by the ARLC
- » This package was subsequently documented in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in May 2016 and the Club Funding Working Group was tasked with resolving the detail implicit in the MoU and

finalising a perpetual Club Licence Agreement for participation in the NRL Competition by end of July 2016

- » In March 2016 Todd Greenberg was appointed as CEO
- » The Club Funding Working Group for reasons on both sides did not complete the detailed negotiation by the targeted date of 31 July 2016 and the MoU lapsed. Discussions however continued for some time thereafter
- » In August 2016, the Commission endorsed a recommendation from Todd Greenberg and his executive team to invest in a new digital business as a matter of urgency given the commitment to Telstra to completely take over and build the NRL's new digital presence by December 2017. The associated costs were significantly higher than in the MoU funding model and would necessarily impact on it

- » In November, the Commission endorsed a recommendation from Todd and his team to suspend negotiations on a new licence agreement, no longer pursue the MoU funding and offer funding certainty to clubs for the 2017 year while priority was given to the digital investment, completing a new CBA with the players, and developing a new long term funding model for clubs, the NRL and grassroots
- » The presentation to the Chairs meeting on 23 November was made without the expected and compelling rationale to provide context for the decision and resulted in outrage. Clubs saw it as a massive destruction of goodwill and not in sympathy with the 'good faith' expressed in the MoU – even given its expiration

- » Rather than enter into further negotiations, NRL Clubs and the NSWRL called for an EGM on 20 December to remove the Chair saying it was their only option. They warned they would progressively remove each Commissioner if the terms of the MoU were not met
- » In late November negotiations recommenced and an intensive process ended with a final proposal signed by all Commissioners and the NRL CEO to clubs on 18 December and a Deed of Further Agreement signed by all clubs, the NSWRL and the Commission on 20 December
- » The EGM was postponed until 1 March 2017 or was to be cancelled if a new Constitution was adopted before or on 28 February 2017
- » Discussions by Members on Constitutional change commenced in early 2017 and were informed by a Commission authorised independent report by John Coates AC
- » The EGM was convened on 1 March, but without any attendees, the resolution lapsed

- » A new Constitution is targeted to be adopted at the 21 February 2018 ARLC AGM.

**The agreement reached on 20 December 2016** was a pragmatic one that balanced the needs of clubs and states with the capacity the game has to drive revenue and manage cash flow. All of its requirements were implemented by the end of 2017. Clubs, in particular, will each receive an average of \$3m pa above the salary cap for 2018-22, a very significant improvement on the deficit against the cap of \$400,000 in 2012 and an average of \$400,000 pa above the cap in 2013-17. In the period 2018-22 they will contribute a total of \$3 million pa (\$187,500 per club) to a Distressed Clubs Fund and a total of \$2.8 million pa (\$178,000 per club) towards their individual club digital presences.

In November 2017, an historic Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was settled with the elite players.

Under this agreement, the players will receive \$980 million - 29.5% of forecast game revenue - and, in a true partnership to take the game forward, a share in any financial outperformance at the same time and on the same basis as grassroots and clubs.

The table below shows actual average distributions over the periods 2012, 2013-17 and average forecast distributions over the period 2018-22.

As a percentage of revenue, total distributions will increase 4% to 67% from 2012-22.

In terms of being in unison, the agreement on funding and the potential changes to the ARLC Constitution have removed the significant points of difference between all stakeholders and the Commission. There is now **an opportunity to look forward together**, acknowledge the challenges we all face and work to grow the game as a whole. I'm confident that this will improve each other's lot.



Distributions \$m	2012 Actual	2013-17 Actual Average pa	% increase	2018-22 Fcast Average pa	% increase
Total	116.2	204.8	76%	320.8	57%
Clubs and Players	81.0	152.1	88%	236.5	55%
State Leagues	13.5	26.0	93%	40.5	56%
NRL Development	21.7	26.7	23%	43.8	64%

## IMPERATIVES FOR 2018-22

The foundations that have been put in place during the first phase of development of the game under the Commission have positioned the game to grow strongly into the future.

With funding now completed and Constitutional reform well progressed, I see the key imperative that must be met for that growth to be maximised as **all stakeholders aligning as one in pursuit of the same objectives.**

**In this context, I see the major priorities for 2018-22 as:**

- » Responding to the structural decline in broadcast television by working with its media partners to capitalise on the game's investment in its digital presence

- » Ensuring the Commission has the ability to 'cut through' when necessary as a trusted and relevant voice
- » Clubs operating their businesses in line with the available funding and Football Department cap and focusing on growing commercial revenue and improving governance
- » Agreeing that the challenges defined in the Brand Strategy are real and must be addressed together
- » Implementing the Participation and Elite Pathways strategies that will see more people engaged and more people playing
- » Capitalising on the investment in stadia, particularly in Sydney to significantly grow match attendances

- » Extracting the whole of game benefits that will result from the elevation in the women's game both domestically and internationally
- » Capitalising on the success of the Rugby League World Cup 2017 and the NRL's international rights agreement to grow rugby league internationally. More people in more countries around the world as fans of rugby league will ultimately increase the value of the ARLC's broadcast rights and distributions to stakeholders. In addition, our clubs can capitalise on the opportunity to build global brands that can generate additional returns well beyond those able to be generated domestically.



## IN CLOSING

This is my final report as Chair of the ARLC.

As I indicated in July 2017, I do not intend standing for re-election for a third term when my current term ends in February 2018. I did not reach this decision lightly and, even given some very difficult times, I reflect with enormous satisfaction on the progress that has been made in six momentous years for rugby league since the formation of the Commission.

The role of Commissioner of the ARLC is not like that of a director within the normal corporate environment. We are in the business of sport and we are in the eye of the rugby league media storm. It is a business that many long-term politicians have observed is more political than politics but which simultaneously requires high levels of business expertise.

For the Commissioners, these first six years have demanded more time than typical corporate non-executive roles in order to achieve our goals, goals which you can see realised in the many achievements outlined in this annual report.

The business of sport is everyone's business – unlike the corporate world, absolutely everyone is a shareholder and all have an opinion.

Optimistically I think that the next period can be less tumultuous and that the new and continuing Commissioners, particularly under a new governance structure that brings clubs and states 'into the tent' and one in which neither money nor power will dominate the agenda, can perform their roles in less time and with less pressure. Time will tell.

**I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped make the game so successful over the last six years.**

In particular, I want to thank my fellow Commissioners, both retired and current, who have always acted with the game's best interests at heart and whose application, friendship and intellect have been unwavering. Thank you also to former CEO Dave Smith and current CEO Todd Greenberg and his team, to all the Club Chairs and CEOs, to key executives from our partners and especially to the millions of fans who make the game of rugby league so great.

My gratitude goes to my children who have seen little of me for the last six years and who have had to carry both the burden and the elation that comes with a parent in the public eye.

Lastly, my thanks to my wife Helen who, apart from being at my side every step of the way providing support that has been absolutely critical to me, has also enthusiastically served the game in a range of ways including her directorship of the Men of League Foundation, earning the respect and admiration of all in the process.

It has been a huge privilege to lead the game as its inaugural Chair. In a fortunate business life, it stands as one of my proudest achievements and I will continue to serve the game in any way I can. I am very comfortable that this first phase of the development of rugby league under the independent Commission sees the greatest game of all in excellent shape to continue to grow and prosper in the years ahead.

**John Grant**  
ARLC Chairman

# THE ARL COMMISSION

The ARLC is the single controlling body and administrator of the game in Australia and its responsibilities are set out in its Constitution. They are to:

- » Foster, develop, extend and provide adequate funding for the game from the junior to elite levels and generally to act in the best interests of the game;
- » Liaise with and delegate appropriate functions to governing bodies of the game in the States and Territories of Australia, including the NSWRL and QRL;
- » Organise and conduct all State of Origin and Australian representative games, recognising that the selection and management of the State of Origin teams representing New South Wales and Queensland shall be undertaken in accordance with the ARLC Constitution;
- » Organise and conduct the NRL Competition;
- » Foster the NRL Competition;
- » Liaise with the Rugby League International Federation Limited and organisations controlling the game in other countries in the fostering and control of the game of Rugby League throughout the world;
- » Promote and encourage either directly or indirectly the physical, cultural and intellectual welfare of young people in the community and, in particular, the Rugby League community; and

- » Promote and encourage either directly or indirectly sport and recreation, particularly rugby league football, in the interests of the social welfare of young persons.

## Board Committees

### Risk, Investment and Audit Committee (RIAC)

The key responsibilities of RIAC include:

- » Oversight and review of risk management systems and controls;
- » Monitoring legal and regulatory compliance;
- » Oversight and monitoring of investment strategy;
- » Review of financial statements;
- » Monitoring and reviewing internal audit systems and controls; and
- » Monitoring and reviewing the independence, objectivity and effectiveness of external auditors.

Committee members: Tony McGrath (Chair), John Grant, Dr Gary Weiss, Geoff Knuckey (external appointment).

### People, Workplace Culture and Remuneration Committee (PWCRC)

The key responsibilities of PWCRC include:

- » Overseeing the organisation's policies and strategies relating to people, including workplace health and safety, diversity and inclusion;

- » Monitoring and reviewing the organisation's talent, remuneration, performance and reward framework; and
- » CEO and executive management succession planning, including making recommendations to the Commission regarding recruitment and selection.

Committee members: Chris Sarra (Chair), Cathy Harris, John Grant.

### Nominations Committee

The key responsibilities of the Nominations Committee include:

- » Monitoring and reviewing Commission competencies, performance and skills; and
- » Commission succession planning and advising the Board on the recruitment of new Commissioners.

Committee members: Cathy Harris (Chair), Dr Gary Weiss, John Grant.

In addition, John Grant and Wayne Pearce are members of the NRL Competition Committee.



### Wayne Pearce OAM

Mr Pearce is a former Kangaroos representative who also captained and coached the New South Wales State of Origin side. Mr Pearce is a business consultant and Director of Wayne Pearce Advantage.

### Catherine Harris AO PSM

Ms Harris is the Chairperson of Harris Farm Markets, and a Director of the Sport Australia Hall of Fame, The Australian Ballet, Tyro Payments Ltd and Consul General for Bhutan. Ms Harris is Chair of the Nominations Committee.

### The Hon. Peter Beattie AC (appointed 25 July 2017)

Mr Beattie is Chairman of GOLDOC, Director of the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, Ambassador for Life Sciences Queensland, and joint adjunct professor at the University of Queensland's Australian Institute for Bioengineering & Nanotechnology & Institute for Molecular Bioscience. Mr Beattie served as the 36th Premier of Queensland and Minister for Trade from 1998 to 2007 and Leader of the Australian Labor Party in that state from 1996 to 2007.

### Professor Chris Sarra

Professor Sarra is a Professor at the University of Canberra and founding Chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute. Professor Sarra chairs the People, Workplace Culture and Remuneration Committee.

### John Grant

Mr Grant is a former Kangaroo and Queensland State player and an experienced businessman and advisor to State and Federal Governments and multinational IT companies. He was a founder and for 19 years until December 2015, Managing Director of Australian listed IT company, Data#3 Limited.

### Tony McGrath

Mr McGrath is a former partner at KPMG and is a co-founder of McGrathNicol. Mr McGrath is a Director of QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited and the National Foundation for Medical Research. Mr McGrath is Chair of the Risk Investment and Audit Committee.

### Professor Megan Davis (appointed 25 July 2017)

Professor Davis is Pro Vice Chancellor UNSW, Acting Commissioner of the NSW Land and Environment Court and a member of the NSW Sentencing Council. Professor Davis is a constitutional law professor specialising in constitutional design and constitution-building and one of the nation's leading public constitutional lawyers.

### Dr Gary Weiss

Dr Weiss is Chairman of Ridley Corporation, Estia Health Ltd and Ardent Leisure Group and is Executive Director of Ariadne Australia. Dr Weiss is a former board member of the Westfield Group, Tower Australia, ClearView Wealth and Tyndall Australia.

Graeme Samuel retired from the board on 24 February 2017.

Jeremy Sutcliffe retired from the board on 1 March 2017.

## CEO REPORT

TODD GREENBERG –  
YEAR IN REVIEW



## BY ANY MEASURE, 2017 WAS A BREAKTHROUGH YEAR WHICH WILL SET UP OUR GAME FOR A STRONG, SECURE FUTURE

It was a year in which we negotiated the best deal for players in the game's history through the new Collective Bargaining Agreement.

We finalised a NRL Club funding deal which will deliver every club an average \$13 million a year over the course of the new five-year broadcast agreement.

And, for our fans, we negotiated a new stadium package which will give them the world-class facilities they deserve in the years ahead.

These are all key milestones for the game that will deliver a great outcome for our fans, our players and our game overall.

### ON FIELD

The Telstra Premiership continues to be the closest major sporting competition in Australia.



In 2017, 35% of games were decided by six points or less. And the average margin was 13 points. This is one of the reasons why fans stayed glued to games right until the end – and why the salary cap is so important in keeping all teams competitive.

Our reforms to the shot clock rules – combined with quicker Bunker decisions – means the ball is in play more than ever before. Referees are also making more calls in real time, rather than asking the Bunker for an adjudication.



## TELSTRA PREMIERSHIP

The 2017 Telstra Premiership was a triumph for the Melbourne Storm.

After dominating throughout the Premiership rounds, where they lost just four games, the Storm went on to defeat a gallant North Queensland Cowboys team in the Grand Final.

While the victory was a team effort in every respect, the Storm's big three had special reason to celebrate.

Billy Slater not only came back from a serious shoulder injury to win a premiership in his first year back but he also took out the Churchill Medal as best player on the ground.

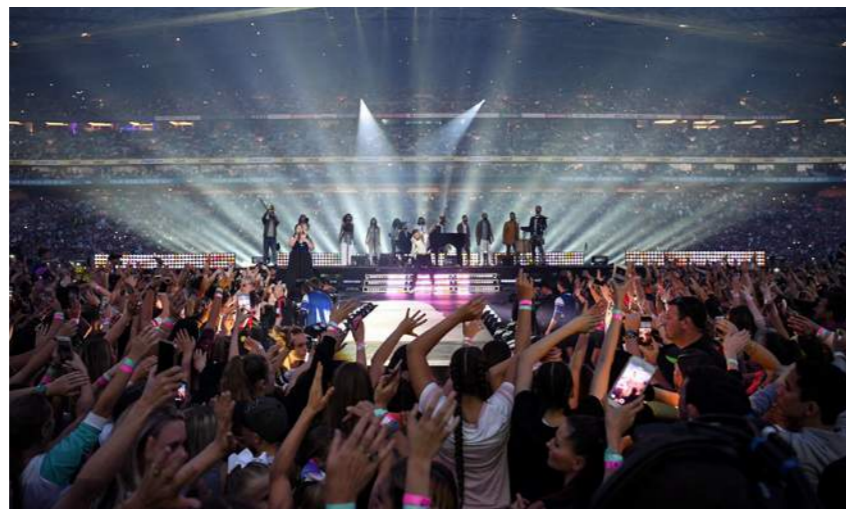
Cooper Cronk, who had announced that he was leaving the Club at the end of the season, could not have hoped to go out on a greater high than with a premiership ring on his finger.

And skipper Cameron Smith capped off one of the most remarkable seasons of all time in which he captained Australia to victory in the Four Nations tournament, won the Dally M medal and took out another premiership. And he has now played more premiership games than any other player in the history of the NRL!

One of the highlights of the Grand Final for me personally was the pre-match entertainment provided by Macklemore. This was a calculated gamble because he provided a very different performance to what we are used to at Grand Finals.

However, the feedback from his performance was overwhelming. His act was the most viewed NRL video ever posted on Facebook and 90% of people who commented were positive about his performance. More than 10,000 people tweeted about Macklemore while he was on stage.

## MORE THAN 10,000 PEOPLE TWEETED ABOUT MACKLEMORE WHILE HE WAS ON STAGE.



## TELEVISION AUDIENCES

Television audiences fell slightly, by 3% in 2017.

Some of this can be attributed to the replacement of Monday night games with the 6pm Friday game. However, we believe the early Friday game gives us an opportunity to capture new fans, particularly, young people and families.

While total audiences declined, the NRL's share of the TV market again rose in our core markets. So, while fewer people are watching television overall, a greater proportion of these people are continuing to watch rugby league than other forms of entertainment.

As always, the State of Origin series was the major drawcard for the year.

Game Three, which was the series decider, was the highest rating show on television in 2017.



## ATTENDANCES

Rugby League attendances have remained largely flat for more than a decade. In 2017, total attendances fell by 2%. There was a drop in crowd numbers early in the season during a period of wet weather but this was partly offset by a strong mid-season.

It has become clear in recent years that crowds will only lift when fans are offered world-class facilities.

## WE CURRENTLY HAVE ABOUT 2.4 MILLION SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS



That is why it is so pleasing to see the NSW Government investing more than \$2.3 billion in new stadia in NSW.

We expect this program to have a significant impact on crowd numbers, especially at venues like Parramatta Stadium which are close to transport, restaurants, bars and shops.

## PARTICIPATION

I said when I took on this role that one of my priorities was to work with our States and Clubs to encourage more people to play rugby league.

It is therefore pleasing to see that participation numbers rose in 2017, thanks largely to a spike in player numbers in country NSW.

Nearly 800,000 registered and non-registered players played rugby league last year through school, district, regional and other competitions.

We are keen to see people play any form of our game, whether it is tackle, tag or touch football. So our participation strategy will continue to emphasise that there is a place for everyone in rugby league.

## DIGITAL AND MEMBERSHIPS

These two areas both showed strong growth in 2017.

We currently have about 2.4 million social media followers – an 8% rise over the last 12 months.

Club memberships rose by five per cent to 316,000. Twelve of the 16 clubs saw rises in memberships – and the indications from many clubs is that the figures will be even higher in 2018.

## THE NEW \$2.3 BILLION STADIUM PACKAGE UNVEILED BY THE NSW GOVERNMENT WILL USHER A NEW ERA OF COMFORT FOR RUGBY LEAGUE FANS



### NEW STADIUM PACKAGE

For so long, fans in NSW have been denied the world-class facilities that spectators in other States enjoy. But that is all about to end.

We will have three new stadia – at Parramatta, Sydney Olympic Park and Moore Park – and all three will be specially built for rugby league. Fans will be closer to the action than ever before and they will have the comfort and facilities of a world-class venue.

Importantly, the Government is building infrastructure to service the new venues at Sydney Olympic Park and Moore Park. Light rail services will make it easier than ever to get in and out of the venues.

And, of course, Parramatta is already serviced by the rail network.



### BEANIES FOR BRAIN CANCER ROUND

One of the highlights - and most moving moments of 2017 – was the inception of the Beanies for Brain Cancer promotion.

Matt Callander, who played such an integral role in Channel 9's rugby league coverage for many years, came up with the initiative after being diagnosed with brain cancer.

He wanted to make a difference. He wanted to stop others having their lives cut short through brain cancer.

So when Matt and his colleagues at Channel 9, along with the Mark Hughes Foundation, came up with the idea of selling beanies to fans to raise funds for brain cancer, the NRL did not hesitate to cooperate. Matt hoped to raise around \$500,000 for brain cancer research. His campaign raised almost \$2 million.

Matt tragically died late in 2017 but his legacy will live on and his idea will undoubtedly save many lives in the future.

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

One of the most important outcomes of 2017 was the new Collective Bargaining Agreement.

After a long negotiation with the RLPA, we have come up with a package which will see our players enter a genuine partnership with the governing body.

The agreement will see a 53% increase in player salaries over the next five years. The average player will earn \$330,000 a year. And the minimum wage will rise to \$120,000 by the end of the five-year agreement.

Importantly, provision has been made to increase the injury hardship fund, improve leave entitlements and boost the player retirement fund.



There will also be a big increase in spending on the women's game and grassroots along with new integrity standards to safeguard the future of rugby league.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved, especially RLPA President Cameron Smith, CEO Ian Prendergast and NRL Chief Operating Officer Nick Weeks for their work in finalising this historic agreement.

### CHAIRMAN AND COMMISSION

A special thanks to the ARL Commission, and particularly Chairman John Grant, for their leadership, guidance and support throughout 2017.

I have no doubt that, as the Commission continues to evolve, it will play an even more important role in mapping out the future of the game.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to John Grant for his tireless work and service over the last six years. Both John and his wife Helen have always had the best interests of the game at heart and we thank them for their support.

### THE FUTURE

In my view, the outlook for rugby league has never been brighter.

Our Clubs are being funded better than ever before. For the first time, every Club in the NRL should have the financial security they need to operate successfully.

Our players have a Collective Bargaining Agreement which delivers the best pay and conditions they have ever experienced.

Memberships are growing, television audiences remain strong and I have no doubt attendances will grow as our new stadia come on line.

We should talk up our game. We have a close, exciting competition that other sports can only envy.

We have seen, through the World Cup, that we have the potential to be strong – not just in Australia – but throughout the Pacific and beyond.

It has been a challenging but highly successful year. I expect to see the benefits of this hard work come to fruition in the years ahead.

**Todd Greenberg**  
NRL CEO



SECTION

01

PLAYING  
OUR GAME



# NRL TELSTRA PREMIERSHIP

The 2017 NRL Telstra Premiership was the closest and most exciting in more than a decade with 36% of matches decided by six points or less and an average game margin of only 13.1 points.

Members, fans, clubs and players all benefited from a revised schedule which included a reduction in five-day turnarounds, the introduction of a family friendly 6pm Friday game and matches in every mainland State of Australia.

The decision to introduce a shot clock and reduction in interchanges resulted in more "game time" for fans. Referees were also encouraged to make more on-field decisions and this reduced average video review times by 11 seconds.

The Telstra Premiership Grand Final was a tale of two very different storylines.

The Storm, as minor premiers, made their second consecutive Grand Final with a side containing three modern-day greats, a powerhouse forward pack and the most electrifying wing-combination the game had witnessed in years.

The North Queensland Cowboys, despite having only just scraped into the Finals series and without their two inspirational captains, became the first team since 2009 to make the Grand Final from eighth position.

In the end, the Storm confirmed their status as one of the greatest teams in Rugby League history with a flawless 34-6 win over the Cowboys to send departing halfback Cooper Cronk out as a two-time Premiership winner.



# FOOTBALL

## DOWNER AUCKLAND NINES

The fourth NRL Nines tournament once again kick-started the season in February, with some of the game's best and brightest stars turning on some spectacular football at Auckland's Eden Park.

The Sydney Roosters survived an epic second-half comeback from the Penrith Panthers to hold on for a gripping 10-8 victory and claim their maiden NRL Auckland Nines title. Connor Watson was named Player of the Tournament.

The Harvey Norman Jillaroos also claimed their first NRL Nines Series title, completing a clean sweep of their three-match series against the Kiwi Ferns.

The NRL Nines tournament will be suspended for 2018 to ease the workload of players following the 2017 Rugby League World Cup.

## HARVEY NORMAN RUGBY LEAGUE ALL STARS

Newcastle played host for the first time to the men's and women's Harvey Norman All Stars matches – which again featured some of the year's best entertainment.

A crowd of more than 20,000 packed into McDonald Jones Stadium and were treated to a spine-tingling pre-game Indigenous war cry led by Greg Inglis, followed by two highly entertaining matches.

The Dean Widders-coached Indigenous Women's All Stars defeated the World team for the first time with an impressive 14-4 win. All three tries were scored by debutantes who were backed up by a relentless defensive effort from the team.

In the men's match, a first-quarter points-scoring blitz propelled the Indigenous All Stars to a thoroughly deserved 34-8 win over their World All Stars counterparts. Johnathan Thurston was in supreme form, steering his side to their fourth win from the seven matches.

A decision was made to postpone the All Stars match in 2018 due to the impact the 2017 Rugby League World Cup would have on player workload. Instead, a Festival of Indigenous Rugby League has been scheduled to take place in Redfern.

## WORLD CLUB SERIES

The World Club Series between two of the best clubs from the NRL and Super League once again provided Rugby League fans from both sides of the globe with two highly entertaining fixtures.

League Leaders Shield winners the Warrington Wolves were too good for the Brisbane Broncos in the opening fixture at Warrington's Halliwell Jones Stadium, while an impressive Wigan Warriors outfit outclassed NRL Premiers the Cronulla Sharks 22-6 the following evening to claim the World Club Championship for the fourth time.

The win also snapped a four-year drought for Super League Champions in the fixture with Australia to host the World Club Series for the first time in 2018. The Melbourne Storm will take on the Leeds Rhinos in February.



## HOLDEN STATE OF ORIGIN

The 2017 Holden State of Origin Series was once again the most anticipated Australian sporting series of the year, going down to a decider to crown this year's victor.

More than 10 million viewers tuned in across the three matches, with games three and one the first and third highest rating shows on television this year, respectively.

In addition, more social impressions were recorded across the series than ever before, confirming the 2018 Series was the most viewed Origin Series in history.

NSW were desperate to win after capturing just one title in the past 11 years.

Queensland were desperate to continue their dominance on the back of some of the best players ever to don a State of Origin jersey.

New South Wales stunned the Queensland team in Game I to record their greatest ever Origin win at Suncorp Stadium, scoring five tries to one in a 28-4 romp.

Their dominance continued early in Game II when the Blues raced out to a 16-6 lead midway through the first half.

However, the combination of a new-look forward pack and a winning culture sparked a comeback that saw Queensland win 18-16 and take the series into a decider.

A record Suncorp Stadium crowd attended the third match, which saw Queensland claim another series victory and the curtain drawn on one of Queensland's greatest ever players, Johnathan Thurston, who had earlier announced his retirement from Queensland representative honours.

Without their chief playmaker Johnathan Thurston, Queenslanders did not know what to expect in the decider. But his replacement Cameron Munster produced a brilliant debut to steer the Maroons to a 22-6 victory and yet another series win.



## THE AUSTRALIAN KANGAROOS

The Kangaroos continued their rise both on and off the field to end the year as one of the most successful and respected national sporting teams in the world.

Off the back of reclaiming the number one spot in the world and winning the Four Nations tournament in 2016, the Kangaroos celebrated Cameron Smith's 50th match in green and gold with a 30-12 win over the New Zealand Kiwis side in the year's sole Test match in May.

The Australians took on Fiji and Papua New Guinea in an historic tri-contest in Suva in October which saw the three teams face each other for 40 minutes. Australia won both their matches.

Australia cruised through the pool stages of the World Cup, accounting for England, France and Lebanon before defeating Samoa in Darwin in the Quarter-Finals.

The team thrashed Fiji in the Semi-Final and took on England in the Final. An exhausting and exciting match that lived up to its billing as the teams could only be separated by a single converted try resulting in Australia claiming their 11th World Cup.

Seven players made their Australian debuts in 2017.

“WE’RE  
CUSTODIANS  
OF THE  
JERSEY AND  
WE INSPIRE  
OTHERS TO  
WEAR IT.”

**Mal Meninga**  
Australian Kangaroos Coach

## THE KANGAROOS ODE

**RISE** is often said and **RISE** is often heard. But it's more than just four letters... It's more than just a word.

**RISE** is the beaches, towns and desert core. **RISE** is the people from every foreign shore.

**RISE** is realising we come from sacred land. **RISE** is all our players, our coach and every fan.

**RISE** is bigger than self, it's all for your team. **RISE** is every kid, who ever dared to dream.

**RISE** is the players laying their bodies on the line. **RISE** is for our country... That shiver down our spine.

**RISE** is our colours, the chevron, the emblem on our heart. **RISE** is more than just taking part.

**RISE** is in the stories that our legends past have told. **RISE** is never backing down...

**RISE** is green and gold.



## WOMEN'S RUGBY LEAGUE

2017 saw a larger growth in the women's game than at any other time in Rugby League's history.

Female participation increased 33% compared with last year, and the announcement of increased competitions across Australia now provides a clear pathway for females six years and older to play Rugby League, right through to the elite level.

The game celebrated the 11th year of the Harvey Norman Women in League round, with widespread community, commercial and media sentiment helping promote females, playing or participating at all levels of the game.

Another highlight occurred in February, when the women's Indigenous All Stars team triumphed for the first time in eight appearances against the All Stars team.

At the grassroots level, more than 66,376 women participated in events and gala days, including the biggest schoolgirl Rugby League tournament ever to be held in New South Wales.

The Harvey Norman Jillaroos recorded their most successful year to date, playing a record 10 international fixtures and securing a clean sweep of winning results. This included defending their Women's Rugby League World Cup on home soil.

The national team entered the 2017 World Cup as favourites and lived up to expectations, defeating New Zealand in the final as part of a men's and women's double-header at Suncorp Stadium.

The Jillaroos also played an historic first match alongside the Prime Minister's XIII in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, thanks to the support of the Australian Government and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The team recorded a convincing win against the PNG Orchids with the possibility of a Pacific fixture becoming a permanent part of the women's playing calendar.

The surge in women's rugby league shows no sign of slowing, with a minimum \$3.75 million being put into supporting and strengthening the women's game as part of the recent Collective Bargaining Agreement (2018–22).

Players at the elite level will receive increased match and participation payments with a commitment to see more competitions and matches played all levels of women's rugby league.

### Highlights:

- » 33% participation growth
- » Harvey Norman Jillaroos played more international matches than ever before
- » Indigenous All Stars women's team recorded first win in eight appearances against the women's All Stars team
- » Dally M Female Player of the Year – Simaima Taufua
- » New South Wales won their second consecutive Interstate Challenge against Queensland
- » Women's Rugby League World Cup broadcast on free-to-air and digital channels for the first time in history
- » Women's Rugby League World Cup played concurrently with the men's World Cup for the first time



## SPECIAL EVENTS

### ANZAC ROUND

The NRL, together with clubs, players and fans, paused during Round 8 to honour and reflect and acknowledge the sacrifices the thousands of servicemen and servicewomen gave to protect Australia, New Zealand and countries around the world.

Short ceremonies were held prior to the commencement of matches, in partnership with the Returned Services League, Australian War Memorial and Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces in honour of those who have served and continue to serve.

Both traditional Anzac Day matches honoured past and present servicemen and servicewomen with a brand of footy befitting the occasion.

A Mitchell Pearce field goal gave the Sydney Roosters a memorable golden point victory over St George Illawarra in front of a record crowd of 40,864 at Allianz Stadium, while the Melbourne Storm left it late to sneak home 20-14 over a spirited New Zealand Warriors outfit at AAMI Park.

**“It’s our Australia Day, for me. That’s how important it is. It’s the day we commemorate the culture and the history that’s been passed on from generation to generation.”**

**Trent Robinson**  
Sydney Roosters Coach

### HARVEY NORMAN WOMEN IN LEAGUE ROUND

The NRL’s vision for women and girls is to ensure they continue to be included, respected and engaged equally in all aspects of rugby league.

More than 248,000 women and girls participated in all forms of rugby league in 2017, with female participation the fastest growing category in the game.

For the eleventh consecutive year, the Harvey Norman Women in League Round recognised and celebrated the key role of women in the game, particularly their contributions at a grassroots level.

One of these women included mother of five and Indigenous All Stars player Samartha Leisha, who became the focal point for this year’s round as part of the NRL’s “Power for Change” campaign. Her inspiring story of passion, love and dedication to both her family and football showcased just how much our game is better for the inclusion and support of women like Samartha.

The weeklong celebration concluded with the Women’s Interstate Challenge between New South Wales and Queensland, with the Blues winning their first title on home soil. It was the first time a women’s Rugby League match was broadcast live on television in Australia.

**“Female participation continues to be the fastest growing area of our game and we are determined to forge greater opportunities for women on and off the field.”**

**Todd Greenberg**  
NRL CEO

**“I share the passion for the game that my father shared and it gives me a lot of confidence just knowing that Rugby League runs in the family. To me, Rugby League is great for women and women are great for Rugby League.”**

**Samartha Leisha** – Mother of five and Indigenous All Stars player



## BEANIES FOR BRAIN CANCER

The NRL community rallied alongside broadcast partners Channel Nine, Fox League, Macquarie Radio Network and the Mark Hughes Foundation in support of 'Beanie for Brain Cancer' in Round 11.

A concept of NRL Footy Show and Nine NRL Executive Producer Matt Callander, diagnosed with brain cancer in 2016, saw tens of thousands of people donate, purchase and wear special beanies across the weekend's NRL fixtures in support of finding a cure for the disease.

The Beanie for Brain Cancer campaign raised almost \$2 million for brain cancer research, smashing the original aim of raising \$500,000.

Matt Callander passed away in November 2017, but his legacy will undoubtedly live on.

## INDIGENOUS ROUND

The game celebrated Indigenous Round throughout Round 10, with every NRL Club wearing Indigenous inspired jerseys during the round for the first time.

Under the theme of recognition, a series of cultural performances, gift exchanges and Welcome to Country ceremonies took place at matches.

An alternative National Anthem backed by Indigenous education leader and Australian Rugby League Commissioner Professor Chris Sarra, was also showcased before games during the round.

The NRL again partnered with RECOGNISE and Reconciliation Australian for the round, supporting the movement to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in the Australian Constitution and ensure there is no place for racial discrimination.

On the field, fans at Suncorp were treated to one of the most extraordinary and unlikely results of the season with an injury-hit Titans coming back to beat Melbourne 38-36 at Suncorp Stadium as part of the annual NRL double-header.

“Rugby League has been a leader in support and inclusion for all people over many years and the game benefits greatly from the participation and engagement levels of Indigenous communities.”

**The Honourable Linda Burney MP,**  
Australian Rugby League Indigenous Council Chairwoman





SECTION

02

OUR PLAYERS



## MILESTONES



Cameron Smith continued his remarkable assault on the Rugby League record books when he broke Darren Lockyer's all-time premiership appearance record to become the most capped player in Premiership history. He has now played 358 games, all for the Melbourne Storm.

During the year, Smith also became the first player to captain more than 250 games for a Club, the first player to secure 250 wins and the first to kick more than 1,000 goals. During the Melbourne Storm's Grand Final victory over North Queensland Cowboys, he climbed to outright second on the all-time list of Premiership points, behind only Canterbury Bulldogs' Hazem El Masri.

Smith's Melbourne teammate Billy Slater made history of his own and moved to outright second on the list of premiership try scorers on 183 tries. Slater now trails only Ken Irvine's mark of 212 tries.

Canberra Raiders captain Jarrod Croker became only the fifth player to achieve the career double of 100 tries and 500 goals. He joins Ryan Girdler, Hazem El Masri, Luke Burt and Jamie Lyon who have also achieved that milestone.

North Queensland Cowboys captain Johnathan Thurston equalled Matt Bowen's all-time appearance record of 270 matches for the North Queensland Cowboys.

Parramatta Eels winger Kirisome Auva'a scored the fastest try in NRL history when he crossed after 12.8 seconds against Brisbane in Round 25, bettering the previous mark by almost 22 seconds.

Penrith Panthers halfback Nathan Cleary eclipsed former Manly Sea Eagles fullback Graham Eadie's record as the youngest player to score 200 points in a season. He also became the youngest player since 1913 to top the season's point scorers list, finishing the regular season with 212 points.

### 300 CLUB

Four players were inducted into the exclusive 300 Club in 2017.

Three of them were from the Cronulla Sharks – Chris Heighington, Luke Lewis and Paul Gallen – and they were joined by New Zealand Warriors veteran Ryan Hoffman.

Fewer than 30 players have played 300 games.

### STATE OF ORIGIN

Queensland captain Cameron Smith became the first player to play 40 State of Origin games when he lined up against New South Wales in the opening game of the series. Blues centre Jarryd Hayne equalled Michael O'Connor's record for most tries by a New South Wales player. He has now scored 11 tries against Queensland.

### COACHES

During the 2017 season, Melbourne's Craig Bellamy achieved his 250th win as coach, becoming only the fifth coach to reach the mark behind Wayne Bennett (473), Tim Sheens (340), Brian Smith (305) and Bob Fulton (261).

Canterbury Bulldogs' Des Hasler became only the 10th coach in Premiership history to reach 350 games, while veteran coach Wayne Bennett surpassed the 600-game milestone in charge of the Broncos with a 64% winning record.

## 2017 AWARDS

### DALLY M AWARDS

In 2017, Cameron Smith was named the winner of the Dally M Player of the Year for the second time in his career – 11 years after he first took out the award. It was a night to remember for the Australian Kangaroos Captain, who was also crowned Dally M Hooker of the Year for the sixth time in his career, as well as Captain of the Year for the third time.

New South Wales and Australian Jillaroos forward Simaima Taufu claimed her first Dally M Female Player of the Year medal, after being nominated in each of the past three years since the award's inception.

- » CAPTAIN OF THE YEAR:  
**Cameron Smith** (Melbourne Storm)
- » PETER MOORE AWARD FOR ROOKIE OF THE YEAR:  
**Nick Cotric** (Canberra Raiders)
- » HOLDEN CUP PLAYER OF THE YEAR:  
**Jake Clifford** (North Queensland Cowboys)
- » TOP POINTS SCORER:  
**Nathan Cleary** (Penrith Panthers)
- » TOP TRY SCORER:  
**Suliasi Vunivalu** (Melbourne Storm)
- » TACKLE OF THE YEAR:  
**Nathan Brown** (Parramatta Eels)
- » TRY OF THE YEAR: **Kyle Feldt** (North Queensland Cowboys)
- » COACH OF THE YEAR: **Craig Bellamy** (Melbourne Storm)
- » PETER FRILINGOS HEADLINE MOMENT: **Mitchell Pearce** (Sydney Roosters)

- » PROVAN SUMMONS PEOPLE'S CHOICE MEDAL: **Clinton Gutherson** (Parramatta Eels)
- » FULLBACK OF THE YEAR:  
**Billy Slater** (Melbourne Storm)
- » WINGER OF THE YEAR:  
**Jordan Rapana** (Canberra Raiders)
- » CENTRE OF THE YEAR:  
**Dylan Walker** (Manly Sea Eagles)
- » FIVE-EIGHTH OF THE YEAR:  
**Gareth Widdop** (St George Illawarra Dragons)
- » HALFBACK OF THE YEAR:  
**Michael Morgan** (North Queensland Cowboys)
- » LOCK OF THE YEAR:  
**Paul Gallen** (Cronulla Sharks)
- » SECOND-ROWER OF THE YEAR:  
**Matt Gillett** (Brisbane Broncos)
- » PROP OF THE YEAR:  
**Aaron Woods** (Wests Tigers)
- » HOOKER OF THE YEAR:  
**Cameron Smith** (Melbourne Storm)
- » INTERCHANGE PLAYER OF THE YEAR:  
**Reagan Campbell-Gillard** (Penrith Panthers)
- » FEMALE PLAYER OF THE YEAR:  
**Simaima Taufu** (Jillaroos)
- » DALLY M PLAYER OF THE YEAR:  
**Cameron Smith** (Melbourne Storm)

### RLPA AWARDS

- » PLAYERS' CHAMPION FOR 2017:  
**James Tedesco** (Wests Tigers)
- » DENNIS TUTTY AWARD:  
**James Maloney** (Cronulla Sharks)
- » NRL-RLPA ACADEMIC PLAYER OF THE YEAR: **Tim Mannah** (Parramatta Eels)
- » PASIFIKA LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE AWARD:  
**Adam Blair** (Brisbane Broncos)
- » INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE AWARD:  
**Ryan James** (Gold Coast Titans)



## 2017 RETIRING CLASS

The following players were recognised as the Official Retiring Class of 2017:



### Raiders

Jeff Lima  
Dane Tilse



### Warriors

Manu Vatuvei



### Titans

David Shillington  
Daniel Vidot



### Cowboys

Ben Hannant  
Ray Thompson



### Sea Eagles

Steve Matai  
Feleti Mateo  
Brett Stewart



### Eels

Isaac De Gois  
Jeff Robson  
Danny Wicks



### Storm

Matt White



### Rabbitohs

Bryson Goodwin



### Knights

Rory Kostjasyn  
Anthony Tupou

Players who subsequently retire are captured in future years. The fraternity of players that make up the NRL Official Retiring Class are duly recognised for their long service to the premiership – 100 plus first grade matches, with the consideration also to representation at a state and/or international level.



## PLAYER WELLBEING & EDUCATION

In 2017, nearly 1,000 players took part in the National Rugby League and National Youth Competitions.

Of the 443 players who took the field in the NRL, only 25% will go on to play more than 10 first grade matches. That is why it is so important for the NRL's Wellbeing and Education program to provide greater opportunities, experiences and advice for players away from the field.

The close working relationship between the NRL, RLPA, Clubs and State governing bodies throughout Australia and New Zealand saw an increase in the number of players taking part in the Mental Health, Wellbeing, Character Development and Careers programs.

In fact, during 2017, more than 87% of the 1,000 NRL and NYC contracted players were involved in education or work experience.

In partnership with the Australian Government, the NRL continued to support and promote the value of Vocational Education and Training to players, staff and fans through the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program.

The program boasts 15 current and former NRL players who have volunteered their time to promote the many benefits of completing an apprenticeship or traineeship throughout their own clubs, as well as the wider community.

**“While natural talent and hard work have provided them with the skills to succeed on the field, Vocational Education and Training is giving many players the skills to succeed off the field and beyond their playing careers.”**

**The Honourable Karen Andrews MP**  
Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills

There were more than 4,000 career interviews conducted by Club career coaches while 20% of players used the Graduates of League program to assist them with university studies.

Under the Chairmanship of Neil Whittaker, 2017 also saw the expansion of the Wellbeing and Education Committee to include representatives from Queensland Rugby League, New South Wales Rugby League and New Zealand Rugby League.

### Player Profile:

#### RYAN JAMES

Gold Coast Titans Captain and proud Bundjalung man, Ryan James, is one of the game's genuine Wellbeing and Education success stories.

Off the back of a breakout year in 2016 in which he broke the record for most tries scored by a front rower, the four-time Indigenous All-Star representative also graduated from Griffith University with a Bachelor of Business degree.

Through the support of the NRL Wellbeing and Education team, Gold Coast Titans, Griffith University Sports College and GUMURRII Student Support Unit, James was able to combine the rigours of being a professional athlete while juggling a young family.

He was awarded the NRL and Rugby League Players Association Indigenous Leadership & Excellence award in 2017.

**“Footy could last 10 years or it could last a day depending on how lucky you are, so you have to have something else behind you.”**

**Ryan James**  
Gold Coast Titans Captain



## PLAYER WELLBEING & EDUCATION

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The number of players engaged in career development away from the playing field exceeded expectations in 2017. More than 87% of the 1,000 NRL and NYC contracted players were involved in education or work experience.

A renowned expert in sport career development, Professor David Lavelle, has advised that NRL players who actively engage in career development and opportunities are more likely to be selected in teams, they receive longer contracts and experience extended playing careers.

### PLAYER ENGAGEMENT

There was increased support, awareness and ownership from players in the NRL's Wellbeing and Education programs in 2017.

A survey of players showed that:

- » 62% of players engaged in career development felt it aided their playing performance
- » The level of career coaching and wellbeing support rated as excellent
- » Financial literacy training was the area most requested for increased support.

### WELLBEING & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

All Wellbeing and Education Managers at NRL Clubs, States and Governing bodies were required to complete a Certificate 4 in Elite Athlete Wellbeing aimed at providing first-class support for players. At the end of the year, 60% of all NRL and NYC players had completed an individual support plan with their respective Club representatives.

The NRL continued its use of a private and confidential counselling service with around 13% of the playing group and support staff using this service throughout the season. NRL Clubs also engaged clinical psychologists to assist players with counselling support when required. These services support the game's commitment to encourage players and staff to seek assistance for mental health issues.

More than 5,500 players and staff from Australia and New Zealand attended more than 500 various workshops, including a Better Choices and Resilience program for Junior Representative teams, Rookie Camp and Theatre Sports for National Youth Competition, Semi Pro day for State Cup players and an Illicit Drugs, Understanding Addictions and Resilience Project programs for NRL representatives.

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

The relationship between the NRL, Clubs and the Rugby League Players Association (RLPA) has never been stronger, following the announcement of an historic Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) which will deliver the best deal to players in the game's history.

From 2018, the \$980 million deal will deliver extra funding for the player retirement fund, a world-class wellbeing and education program, guaranteed leave entitlements and it signalled the start of a genuine partnership between the game and the players.

A 42% reduction in the number of five-day turnarounds from 43 in 2016 to 25 in 2017 honoured a commitment the NRL made with the players, with fewer also scheduled in 2018.

### RETIREMENT AND TRANSITION

In 2017, more than 100 current players over the age of 27 were provided specialised career and personal coaching support from the NRL's Wellbeing managers. The NRL is seeing increased engagement from each season's retiring class, with more players and partners attending annual functions and transition workshops, as well as accessing grants for further education.

While a player's transition may not always be perfect or without challenges, the purpose of the work conducted by the NRL club Wellbeing staff is to make a positive impact in the preparation of players lives after their professional Rugby League career has ended.



## MATCH OFFICIALS

NRL officials oversaw more than 800 games during 2017 including 402 NRL and NYC matches, 315 State Cup games and 52 representative fixtures, 40 of which took place at the men's and women's Rugby League World Cups.

Two of the game's leading referees, Gavin Badger and Ben Cummins, reached the milestone of 300 NRL matches in 2017, with Cummins achieving the feat in the shortest period on record in just his 12th season.

But it was Matt Cecchin who proved to be the leading referee in 2017, handling the Telstra Premiership Grand Final and all three State of Origin matches.

Kasey Badger and Belinda Sleeman created history when the pair became the first female officials involved in a Rugby League Finals match, selected as touch judges. Sleeman also became the first woman to officiate in a Rugby League World Cup.

Following an extensive review of the NRL judiciary system, a new hybrid model that incorporated both fines and points was introduced for some low-grade offences.

With support from the NRL and RLPA, offences such as careless high tackles, tripping, contrary conduct and detrimental conduct resulted in a \$1,500 fine for a Grade One offence, rather than demerit points and possible suspension.

Players who accepted an early guilty plea had their fine or penalty points reduced by 25%, while the categories of offences were also streamlined to ensure easier explanation and understanding for all, decreasing from 17 to 12.

The changes had a significant impact in 2017 with 53 fewer charges, 34 fewer suspension weeks and a record 90% of players taking the early plea for less serious offences.

Fine revenue was put into player wellbeing and education related initiatives.

The NRL Bunker's operation was also streamlined during 2017 to intervene in fewer rulings. Referees were empowered to make more on-field decisions resulting in fewer referrals and quicker rulings.

Social media was used to explain Bunker decisions quickly and simply. During the season, a total of 550 decisions were posted on social media – an average of 21 per week.

### REFEREE MILESTONE AND AWARDS

#### 300 games – Review officials

Bernard Sutton  
Luke Patten

#### 300 games – On-field referees

Gavin Badger  
Ben Cummins

#### Col Pearce Medallist and NRL Telstra Premiership Grand Final referee

Matt Cecchin



## 2017 VALE

### MATT CALLANDER

Callander was a much-loved and respected member of the Rugby League community, having been an integral part of Channel Nine's NRL coverage for two decades. In a selfless example of putting others before himself in the quest to save more people from brain cancer, Callander joined forces with former Newcastle Knights legend Mark Hughes for the Beanie for Brain Cancer round – raising almost \$2 million to go towards brain cancer research.

### ROGER COWAN OAM

Roger was a dedicated and passionate Rugby League trailblazer having served as the CEO of Penrith Panthers from 1965 through to 2005. He is the longest serving CEO in the Club's history. An energetic and hands-on leader, his entrepreneurial skills, spirit and vision helped grow the Penrith Panthers into the club it is today.

### PAUL MCBLANE

McBlane officiated in 97 first grade matches after making his debut in 1994 before health issues forced him into early retirement. Officially recognised in NRL history as the 10th referee to earn a position in the NRL, McBlane officiated the 1996 City v Country Origin fixture and was also part of the first ever intake of full-time Rugby League referees.

### TONY STAVRIANOS

Living just a stone's throw from Kensington Oval in Sydney, Tony Stavrianos carved out his early career alongside his brother Tassie for Kensington United in the South Sydney junior competition. In 1959, he was selected in South Sydney Presidents Cup team, in which they were runners up to Balmain. A 'bossy' halfback who continually played well above his weight, Stavrianos played grade with South Sydney Rabbitohs in 1960 and 1961 before moving across to Eastern Suburbs for the next three seasons, playing 12 first grade games. The Men of League Foundation Member succumbed to pancreatic cancer in June 2017.

### MERV GILMER

Gilmer played in the Manly Warringah Sea Eagles inaugural first grade team in 1947 and was the longest serving player during the club's formative years. He played 21 games for Manly from 1947 to 1949, scoring two tries and kicking 38 goals for 82 points. A lifetime Manly-man loved by many people on Sydney's Northern Beaches, Gilmer attended Brookvale Oval in his maroon and white club colours at every opportunity.

### BERNIE SEYMOUR

A larger than life character, Seymour always had a word and friendly face for everyone he met. However, that off the field persona was known to change once Bernie ran out onto the playing field for his Manly Warringah Sea Eagles. Seymour played in the forwards and quickly gained a reputation as a rugged and fearless tackling machine, never taking a backward step. He rose through the Sea Eagles ranks playing 45 first grade games, and became the first Sea Eagles player to play 200 grade games for the Club. Post-football, he remained actively involved with the Club as a coach, selector, administrator, committee member and he received Life Membership in 1985.

### RON ROWLES

A prolific point-scorer originally hailing from Wollongong, Rowles was winger in the Manly Warringah Sea Eagles' maiden Grand Final appearance in 1951. Rowles was the first Manly player to top 100 points in a season, and was leading point-scorer in four successive years from 1951. Rowles also played for Country Firsts, as well as starring in a Possibles v Probables trial for the 1948-49 Kangaroos team.

### MICK ADAMS

Despite living in Tamworth for the latter part of his life, Adams was part of a Widnes side in the 1970s and 1980s that were known as 'Cup Kings', appearing in eight Challenge Cup final ties including replays. He was part of four Wembley triumphs, and scored 68 tries in more than 400 appearances. His impressive career saw him inducted into the Widnes Hall of Fame in 1992.

In 1975 and 1976 he played 23 first grade games with the Bulldogs, including one as captain. In 1979 and 1984 he toured Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea with the British Lions, playing 34 games on tour including 12 of the 13 Tests.

### CHAD ROBINSON

For more than a decade, Chad Robinson played for the Parramatta Eels and Sydney Roosters in the NRL, as well as Harlequins RL in the Super League. While he missed selection for the Roosters 2002 Grand Final triumph, Robinson played in the 2003 World Club Challenge 38-0 win over St. Helens just a few months later.

The hard-working backrower came off the bench in the Roosters 2003 and 2004 grand final losses. He returned to the Eels for the next four seasons, where he was rewarded with selection in the City Origin side in 2008.

### KEN BOOTHROYD

After migrating to Australia in 1966 from Manchester with his wife Patricia, Boothroyd began working as the St. George Dragons trainer – a job he would go on to hold for more than 15 years. He played a crucial part in the Dragons' Grand Final sides of 1971 and 1975, as well as the Premiership-winning 1977 and 1979 seasons.

Boothroyd was brought to the Illawarra Steelers during the early 1980s as training innovator, and taught Physical Education at Kogarah Marist Brothers for more than 25 years.

### WALLY WATSFORD

A former South Sydney Rabbitohs player between 1961 and 1963, Watsford played 34 grade games for the club including three first grade games. Watsford went on to become a successful lower grades coach with the Rabbitohs, taking the men in red and green to Premiership glory in reserve grade in 1983, a side that included future first grade stars such as Ross Harrington, Les Davidson, Ken Stewart, Craig Coleman, Nathan Gibbs, Michael Andrews and Mark Ellison. He was inducted as a Life Member of the South Sydney Football Club in 1985.

### SOL BELLEAR

A proud Bundjalung man originally from Mullumbimby, Belleair was graded by the Rabbitohs in the late 1970s, also representing the Redfern All Blacks in the Koori Knockout competition. Sol went on to become a director of the South Sydney Football Club between 2002 and 2006, and was a mentor for the Rabbitohs' Indigenous players and staff up to the day of his passing.

A strong supporter of Rugby League, he managed the Indigenous Dreamtime team in 2008 and maintained his support of his beloved Rabbitohs in the years after his official involvement with the Club came to an end.

### BOB HONEYSETT

Honeysett played his junior football with the South Sydney Fernleighs. He was a member of Souths' 1953 winning Presidents Cup team and played grade for the Rabbitohs from 1953 to 1957, playing 73 grade games including 52 first grade games. He played 30 first grade games with the North Sydney Bears in 1958-59 and represented NSW against Queensland four times. He was possibly the first Indigenous captain of NSW in 1959, and was playing for Wagga Magpies when called into the state side for a fourth time in 1962.



SECTION

03

# DELIVERING OUR GAME



## NRL CLUBS

The 16 NRL Clubs play a crucial role in the success of the game each year.

In 2017, one of the competition's most consistent teams, the Melbourne Storm took out the NRL Telstra Premiership for the fifth time. The Storm capped off a successful year with a Minor Premiership and a blitzing Grand Final performance over the North Queensland Cowboys.

The Cowboys, who continued to surprise fans right throughout the season, were just one win away from a fairy tale finish. After ending the 2017 regular season in eighth position, the Cowboys excelled throughout the Finals series to clinch their second Grand Final appearance in just three seasons.

### BUSINESS ACADEMY

Business Academy is the NRL Internship Program for university students across Australia and New Zealand. Now in its third year, the program combines work experience in an NRL Club with a training program across a number of key departments. In 2017, the program had 28 participants from eight universities with more than 60% of students securing employment in our Clubs following the program.

### MEMBERSHIPS

2017 saw further growth in Club memberships.

More than 330,000 fans signed up for memberships in 2017 – with 75% of Clubs exceeding their previous year's figures.

Eight Clubs posted record membership growth in 2017. The Canberra Raiders and Wests Tigers led the way with growth of 25% and 21% respectively. The Melbourne Storm, North Queensland Cowboys and Sydney Roosters followed closely with 17%, 13% and 10%, respectively.

MEMBERSHIPS		2017	2016	DIFFERENCE 16-17
	<b>Broncos</b>	36,298	36,203	1%
	<b>Bulldogs</b>	18,833	20,703	(9%)
	<b>Cowboys</b>	22,278	19,676	13%
	<b>Dragons</b>	19,181	17,932	7%
	<b>Eels</b>	24,501	23,779	3%
	<b>Knights</b>	13,370	12,110	10%
	<b>Panthers</b>	20,248	20,195	0%
	<b>Rabbitohs</b>	30,220	32,813	(8%)
	<b>Raiders</b>	19,091	15,239	25%
	<b>Roosters</b>	16,001	14,458	11%
	<b>Sea Eagles</b>	13,163	13,351	(1%)
	<b>Sharks</b>	15,613	14,325	9%
	<b>Storm</b>	20,507	17,518	17%
	<b>Titans</b>	10,914	10,278	6%
	<b>Warriors</b>	18,190	18,350	(1%)
	<b>Wests Tigers</b>	18,074	14,879	21%
	<b>NSWRL &amp; QRL</b>	26,031	25,583	2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>342,513</b>	<b>327,392</b>	<b>5%</b>



## COMMERCIAL PARTNERSHIPS AND MAJOR EVENTS



The NRL acknowledges the extensive contribution our commercial partners make to the NRL Competition and broader game. We value the support of leading companies including Telstra, partner of the NRL Telstra Premiership, Finals and Grand Final, in addition to major partners SportsBet, Carlton & United Breweries, Holden and Harvey Norman.

In 2017, Telstra helped more fans to experience rugby league than ever before. The NRL Live Pass enabled fans to stream rugby league games live, fast and data free with Telstra customers also able to access preferred ticket prices and a range of exclusive experiences.

Telstra connected more fans to the game than ever before with more than 504,000 subscribers to the NRL Live Pass. That is a 260% increase year on year.

The Telstra Thanks Program achieved more than 40,000 ticket sales throughout 2017. In an Australian sport first, The Telstra Tracker utilised new technology during the State of Origin Series to showcase player performance.

The NRL's partnership with Australia's number one online wagering platform, SportsBet, continued to drive interest in the game while leading the way in the promotion of responsible gambling. SportsBet increased its share of the Rugby League market by 5% in 2017.

Holden and the NRL continue to build on the brand's excellent reputation amongst NRL fans through programs such as the Holden Junior State of Origin campaign.

The NRL renewed its partnership with Carlton United Breweries, Australia's number one Beer and Cider portfolio. The agreement included an ongoing commitment to support programs, initiatives and communications in relation to the responsible consumption of alcohol, such as the NRL's Alcohol Management Strategy and Drinkwise.

During the State of Origin campaign, the CUB's major promotion – *The VB Sheds* – entertained more than 10,000 fans.

The NRL and Harvey Norman celebrated their 22-year partnership in 2017. Harvey Norman continues to directly contribute to the recognition and growth of the elite women's game, including the Harvey Norman Jillaroos. Harvey Norman also invests in the Premiership, All Stars week and Women in League program.

Our focus in 2018 is to continue to develop new ways of creating value for not only our corporate partners but also for our fans through better live experiences and promotions.

### MAJOR EVENTS

The year kicked off with the Downer Nines tournament in Auckland, followed by a successful All Stars match which was played in Newcastle for the first time.

The Junior Kangaroos, Jillaroos and Kangaroos all played in a historic triple-header at GIO stadium in Canberra in front of 18,535 fans.

Mudgee hosted a memorable final chapter of the historic City v Country contest in front of a crowd of 8,322 fans.

The rise of Pacific Test matches continues with the highest attended triple-header in its history (18,271 fans) at Campbelltown Stadium.

The Holden State of Origin Series was again a highlight of the Rugby League calendar in 2017. The NSW Blues won the first match in Brisbane before Queensland took game 2 at ANZ Stadium.

This set the scene for a thrilling decider which saw Queensland again take out the series in front of a capacity crowd at Suncorp Stadium and 3.7 million television viewers – making it the highest rating TV show of the year.

A revised Dally M awards presentation focussed on the players and the highlights of the 2017 season. Cameron Smith took out the top honour for the second time.

A new Fan Fest was held at Luna Park on Thursday of Grand Final week. Featuring free rides for families, sponsor promotions and the chance for fans to mix with players from all 16 Clubs.

The Telstra Premiership Grand Final was played between the Melbourne Storm and North Queensland Cowboys in front of 79,000 fans at ANZ Stadium. The Melbourne Storm won the 2017 crown after having established themselves as the top team all season.

A highlight on the major events calendar was the pre-match Grand Final entertainment by Macklemore.

His performance drove a flood of support for the act and the Grand Final. Macklemore attracted, not just regular Rugby League fans, but music and other fans who do not usually follow Rugby League.

Macklemore attracted the highest viewed Facebook video ever on NRL and more than 10,000 tweets during his performance.

The success of each of these events would not have been possible without the generous support of Auckland Tourism – Events and Economic Development, Destination New South Wales and the ACT Government.

# COUNTRY RUGBY LEAGUE



An increase in senior males, new and returning players and the continual growth of female participation has seen Country Rugby League record a 3.5% increase in registered players in 2017.

One-third of all nationally registered players participated in CRL competitions with all six CRL Regions experiencing an increase in growth.

The growth in female participation in Rugby League remains particularly high in regional areas.

More than 9,000 female players registered to play rugby league in 2017 – an increase of more than 32%. In fact, half of all nationally registered females playing a form of rugby league or tag competitions are from regional areas.

This season also saw the expansion of the Country Championships and a successful change in the Senior Men's Competition to an Under-23s format to more closely align with the ARLC's pathways model and structures.

Additional highlights included the final Country v City fixture played at Mudgee's Glen Willow Regional Sporting Complex, Country U23s Representative sides taking on Samoa and Scotland in warm-up matches before the Rugby League World Cup and additional CRL Women's Nines competitions taking place across regional NSW.

## Additional highlights in 2017:

- » More than 100,000 viewers tuning into live streams of Country U23s taking on Samoa and Scotland in Wagga Wagga and Ballina
- » A successful tour of New Zealand for the Country U16/18 Representative sides
- » The inaugural Country Women's Representative team taking on City at North Sydney Oval
- » Monaro claiming inaugural U23 Men's Country Championships.



# NSW RUGBY LEAGUE



The 2017 season was successful in many ways for the NSWRL despite the disappointing result of losing the Holden State of Origin Series. The organisation had plenty to celebrate as NSWRL broke new ground on and off the field.

The NSW Women's team secured back-to-back Harvey Norman Women's Interstate Challenge titles. The KARI City Origin side defeated Country 20-10 in front of 8,322 fans in Mudgee in the final Country-City fixture, and the NSWRL Pathways Programs teams continued their dominance over their Queensland counterparts claiming the Under 16, Under 18 and Under 20 Junior Origin Series for the second consecutive year.

The NSWRL recorded an increase in Junior League Participation with an impressive 63% year on year increase in female participation alone. A record-high 2,849 females played the game in 2017, up from 1,744 in 2016. The NSWRL's commitment to the growth of Women's Rugby League was further enhanced through Harvey Norman's generous support in becoming the first major sponsor of Women's Rugby League in NSW - the Harvey Norman NSW Women's Premiership - as well as the creation of the Tarsha Gale Cup for Under 18s.

The NSWRL also created new formats in 2017 to supplement regular weekend competitions. Recreational Rugby League pilot programs were trialled in the Penrith, Parramatta, Manly, Balmain and Western Suburbs districts and included the following alternate formats - Weight and Age (W8s), Mates (M8s) and Friday Night 9s. These formats were structured around providing a fun and safe environment for participation with a shorter commitment requirement to ensure children are not lost to the game.

Off the field, construction on the NSWRL Centre of Excellence commenced in October 2017, with the Minister for Sport, The Honourable Stuart Ayres MP, laying the foundation stone for the high-performance facility. Due for completion in late 2018 and located adjacent to ANZ Stadium at Sydney Olympic Park, the NSWRL Centre of Excellence will feature a full-sized training field, gymnasium, player recovery facilities and lecture theatre, as well as a new building for specialised support and the offices of the NSWRL.

In 2017 the NSWRL took further significant steps to achieving its short and long term strategic objectives and look forward to delivering further benefits for the NSW Rugby League community in 2018.

## Highlights

- » The next generation of NSW Blues claimed the Under 16, 18 and 20 State of Origin titles for the second consecutive year
- » Elite female Rugby League players received professional paid contracts to represent NSW in the annual Interstate Challenge for the first time
- » NSW secured back-to-back Harvey Norman Women's Interstate Challenge titles and their first win on home soil with a convincing 22-6 victory at WIN Stadium in Wollongong
- » Construction of the NSWRL Centre of Excellence commenced
- » The NSWRL Hogs For The Homeless program raised more than \$130,000 for Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets
- » NSWRL SG Ball junior representative premiers Parramatta claimed the National Junior Final against Queensland's Under-18 premiers Western Mustangs 48-12
- » True Blues greats Bradley Clyde, Ron Coote, Laurie Daley, Brad Fittler, Bob McCarthy and Norm Provan became the inaugural inductees to the NSWRL The Star Hall of Fame, joining automatic inductees Dally Messenger and seven Immortals who represented NSW
- » More than 3,500 junior Rugby League players across 150 teams from NSW converged on Western Sydney for the 73rd All Schools Carnival
- » 21 alternative Recreational Rugby League competitions across Sydney introduced to encourage children of all ages and sizes to play and stay in the game
- » Four Grand Finals, including the Inaugural Harvey Norman NSW Women's Premiership decider, featured at Leichhardt Oval for the first time, as Penrith celebrated their third Intrust Super Premiership NSW premiership, upsetting minor premiers Wyong 20-12
- » Intrust Super Premiership NSW premiers, Penrith Panthers, capped off their Grand Final triumph with an emphatic 42-18 victory over Queensland's Intrust Super Cup titleholders, Papua New Guinea Hunters
- » Australian-based heritage teams from nations including Lebanon, Italy, Tonga and Australian Indigenous communities travelled from all parts of NSW to compete in one of Australia's biggest multicultural Rugby League carnivals, the Blue Harmony Cup in conjunction with the NRL



## QLD RUGBY LEAGUE



The Queensland Maroons again showed they are one of the best teams of all time by taking out the Holden State of Origin Series for the eleventh time in 12 years.

Their title defence got off to a shaky start when they suffered a heavy loss in the first match to the NSW Blues.

Selectors made eight changes for Game II in a bid to keep the series alive in Sydney.

The Maroons rallied from behind to snatch a remarkable 18-16 win after a late Dane Gagai try and brilliant sideline conversion from Johnathan Thurston.

The Maroons carried that momentum into Game III, dominating the Blues on their way to a comprehensive 22-6 victory in front of more than 52,000 fans.

Only a few months later, Suncorp Stadium hosted another memorable encounter when the Papua New Guinea Hunters came from behind in the final 90 seconds to defeat the Sunshine Coast Falcons 12-10 in the Intrust Super Cup Grand Final.

The match attracted a record Grand Final crowd of 11,260, eclipsing the previous best of 10,126 in 2002.

There were many wonderful stories throughout the local leagues as well, and pleasingly, the QRL recorded an increase in overall club participation numbers.

The number of registered female club players increased by 21%. The league also introduced a female Under 15 squad to the innovative Queensland Academy of Sport Rugby League program.

Twenty-one young players from around the state also assembled in camp on the Gold Coast for four days in January 2017, in a major boost for female rugby league. Participants received expert coaching and guidance from experienced coaches and mentors, in line with the program's aim to develop highly skilled and motivated players for future Queensland representation.

Off the field, QRL made improvements to its Governance structure and also appointed its first female Independent Director, Renita Garard.

### Highlights

- » **60,857:** QRL registered club players in 2017
- » **4,646:** Registered female club players, up 21%
- » **11,260:** A record Intrust Super Cup Grand Final crowd between Papua New Guinea Hunters and Sunshine Coast Falcons
- » **\$151,000:** Revenue generated by clubs which hosted Country Week matches in Round 20 of the Intrust Super Cup
- » **961:** Intrust Super Cup games played by members of the 2017 Melbourne Storm and North Queensland Cowboys Grand Final teams
- » **37,066,780:** The cumulative number of video plays recorded by the QRL Digital team across four platforms
- » **14,401:** Considerable growth again for our Maroon Members
- » **39,000:** People who attended the Maroon Festival, which generated direct and incremental expenditure of \$1.7 million attributable to the Brisbane economy.



## NRL ACROSS AUSTRALIA – AFFILIATED STATES



Total participation rates increased across the Affiliated States in 2017 with the women's game continuing its upward trend across majority of the regions. 2017 also saw a record number of registered coaches, match officials, trainers and volunteers involved in growing the game at a grassroots level.

### VICTORIA

Total participation in Victoria grew by 2.2% in 2017 with more than 3,800 registered rugby league participants. Most of this is attributable to a 26.8% increase in female participation, as well as an uplift of more than 158% in the Sunraysia junior competitions. There was also significant growth of eight and 28% in both the male and female open age competitions, respectively.

Game Development Officers from the Melbourne Storm and NRL Victoria continued to make an impact in traditional Melbourne schools via both non-contact and tackle versions of the game. Two Victorian teams competed in the GIO Schoolboy Cup – Hallam College and Victoria University Secondary College, with Hallam College teacher, Travis McIntosh, named Teacher of the Year at the NRL Community Awards for his work in using rugby league to engage students.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The number of West Australians playing rugby league remained steady in 2017. The trend of positive growth for the women's game continued, with an increase of more than 25% in the number of females playing the game, leading to more teams playing rugby league.

There were five elite level rugby league matches staged at Perth's nib Stadium in 2017 – two NRL Telstra Premiership matches, as well as a Rugby League World Cup warm-up match and double-header. Ten Western Australian players represented the Combined Affiliated States (CAS) side against England in their only warm-up match prior to the Rugby League World Cup in Perth. While Maddison Bennett from the Rockingham Sharks Rugby League Club created history when she debuted for the Harvey Norman Jillaroos against the Papua New Guinea Orchids on their historic joint-tour of Papua New Guinea with the Prime Minister's XIII in September.

In 2018, the new Perth Stadium will host an NRL Telstra Premiership Round One double-header as well as Holden State of Origin in 2019.

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Rugby league participants in South Australia increased by 6.2% in 2017 to a total of 1052 and included an 11.6% rise in the number of male participants, the best of all the affiliated states.

NRL South Australia continued to see growth throughout regional areas such as Wilunga and Roxbury Downs, but experienced the largest rise in male participation in the Adelaide metropolitan competition. Registered female participation fell 6.5% overall.

The Sydney Roosters attracted a strong crowd of 21,492 fans to Adelaide Oval when they hosted and beat the Melbourne Storm in Round 16 of the NRL Telstra Premiership.

### TASMANIA

Elite level Rugby League returned to Tasmania for the first time in five years when Melbourne Storm hosted Canterbury Bankstown Bulldogs in a trial match at North Hobart Oval in February 2017. Tasmania continues to be supported by NRL Victoria, with an operations manager responsible for delivering both rugby league and touch football to juniors through schools-based programs in Hobart.

### NORTHERN TERRITORY

Total participation in the Northern Territory grew by 4.6% to 2,540 in 2017, highlighted by a 29.8% increase in female participation. A record 458 females participated in rugby league, including Harvey Norman Jillaroo Meg Ward who travels more than three hours each way from Katherine to Darwin each weekend to compete in the NRL Northern Territory Women's Premiership.

The Northern Territory hosted three elite level matches in 2017, adding the Rugby League World Cup Quarter-Final between Australia and Samoa to the two Parramatta Eels games scheduled in recent years.

Game Development officers travelled thousands of kilometres, promoting rugby league to several desert and Indigenous communities including Yulara and the Tiwi Islands. NRL and NRL Northern Territory representatives also welcomed the Northern Territory Government's decision to bring forward plans for a \$25 million dedicated rugby league stadium at Warren Park in Darwin.

SECTION 04 DEVELOPING OUR GAME





# NRL DIGITAL NETWORK

In 2017 the new NRL Digital Network was launched. This will revolutionise the way our fans interact with the game.

The network includes the NRL official app, nrl.com, Club and State websites and apps.

The new network will make it easier for fans to access breaking news, on demand match replays, historical games and match highlights.

NRL ID gets fans closer to the action with personalised content from their team and favourite players through behind the scenes interviews and exclusive access to the stories that make up the game. Fans can set their own filters and get all the content across the game or create a personally designed feed to only receive their club or player news.

Fans will never miss a moment with the NRL official app including live streaming on mobile and tablet. The Telstra Live Pass now enables a three-click sign up process making it easier than ever for fans to watch live games on the go.

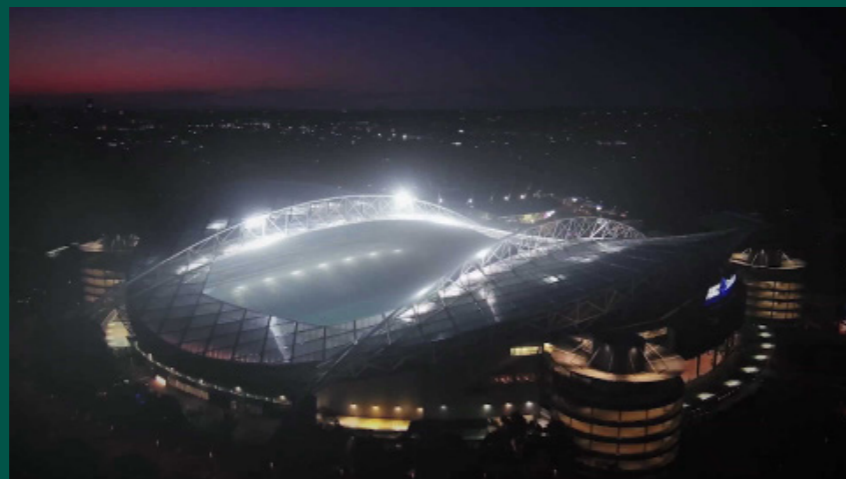
In 2018 we will relaunch the Official NRL Fantasy, and Tipping games. All products are undergoing a complete redesign to provide fans with simpler, cleaner websites together with improvements to game play.

The product suite will be expanded to make all formats playable across desktop, mobile and the official app.

A range of Fantasy articles, videos and podcasts will drive registrations and engagement with the game throughout the season.

The new network also focuses on the clubs, players and statistics, enabling fans to get closer to their favourite team and players through video interviews and archival footage.

The new NRL network means fans will never miss a moment.



Click image to play video

## 228%

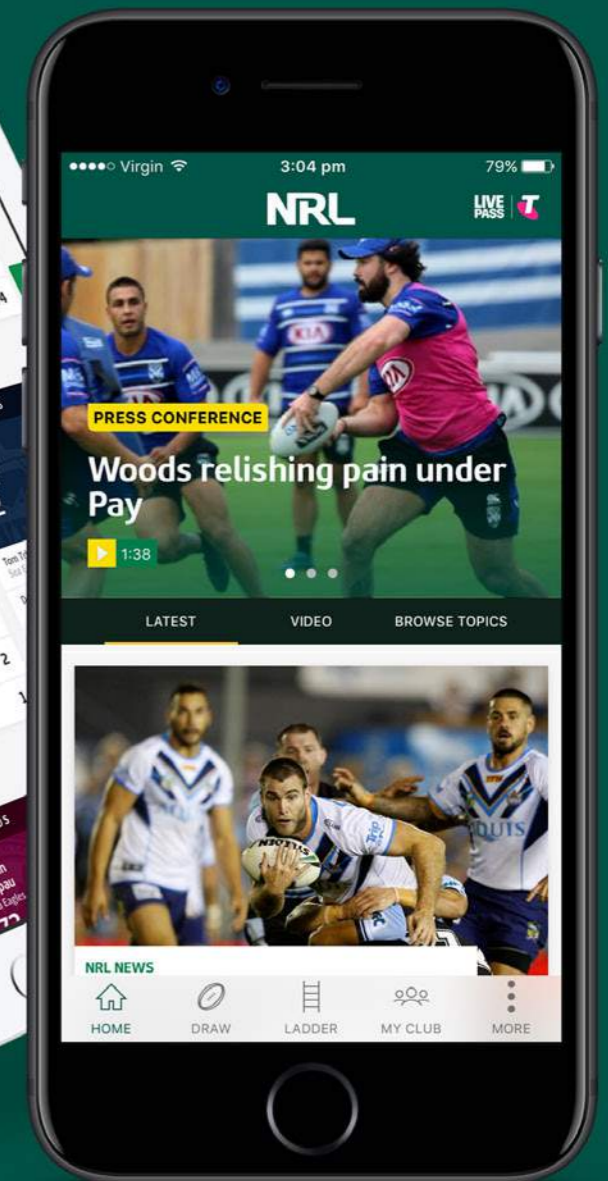
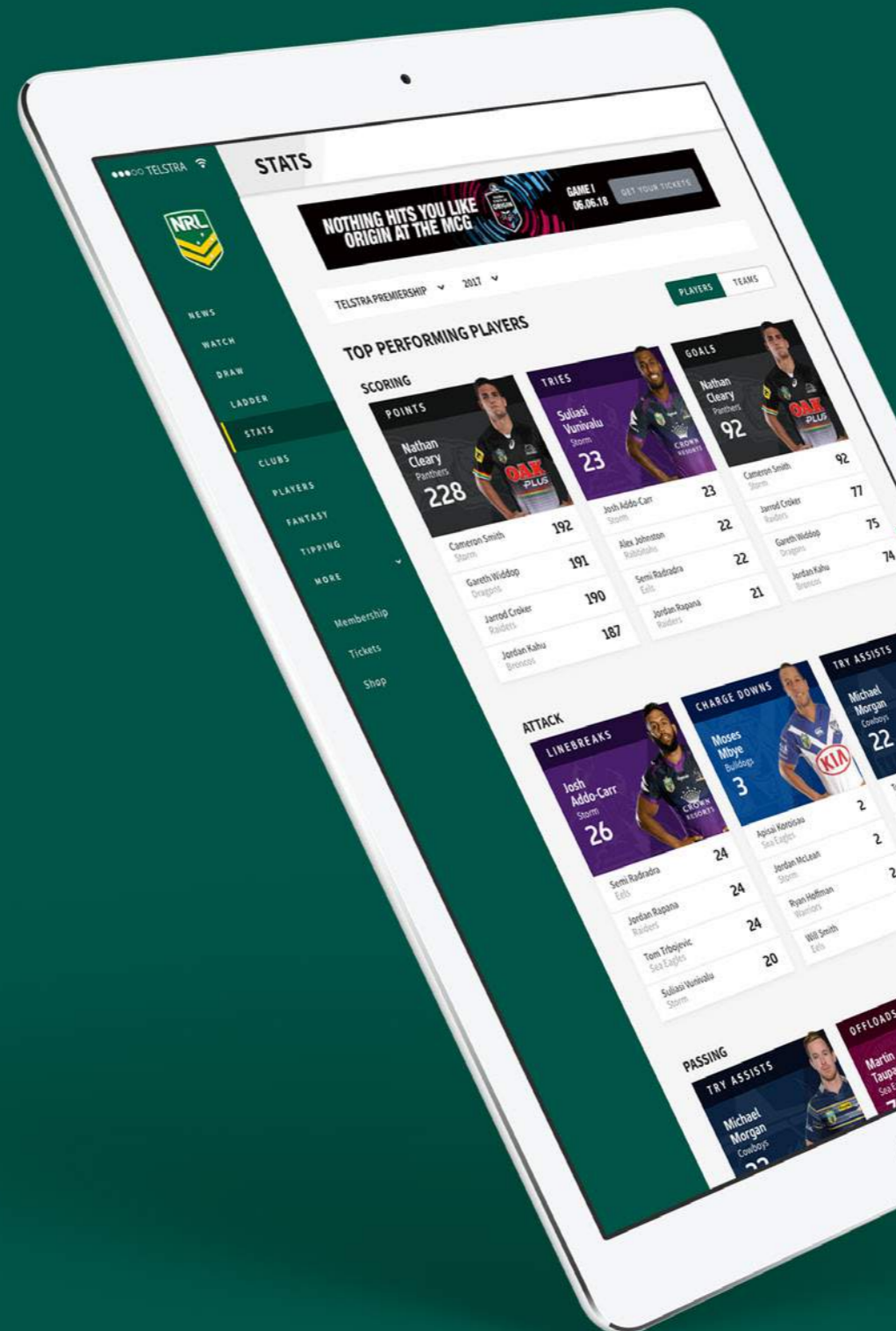
Live Pass subscriptions growth YOY

## +26%

Network page views

## +2%

Network visits



## INTEGRITY AND GOVERNANCE

2017 saw the NRL make significant investment in measures to ensure the integrity of our game, both on and off the field.

Our investment builds on an already robust integrity and governance framework. Anchored by the NRL Rules, this framework safeguards the integrity of our on-field contests. This is achieved through comprehensive anti-doping, anti-match-fixing and wagering compliance measures, and through the NRL Salary Cap, which ensures the competitive balance of our competition.

The framework also addresses off-field risks to the game's reputation and the health and wellbeing of its participants. Measures address areas such as behavioural standards, anti-violence and the prohibition of illicit & hazardous drug use.

### THE UNIT

Based within a secure area of Rugby League Central, the Integrity Unit is responsible for ensuring compliance with the NRL Rules across the game. During 2017 the Unit grew to comprise 14 full-time personnel drawn from the ranks of the legal and accounting professions, policing, criminal intelligence and sports administration. The Unit works closely with other areas of the NRL, such as the Medical and Football Departments, and utilises the services of external experts such as betting monitors and forensic accountants.

The increased capacity and capabilities enable the Unit not only to address integrity issues as they arise but to continue to take a leadership role in policy development and proactive intelligence gathering and assessment. The Unit has built strong relationships with law enforcement such as State and Federal Police bodies and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, together with authorities and regulators including the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, the Australian Sports Commission and the National Integrity in Sports Unit.

### WAGERING INTEGRITY

Several new initiatives rolled out for the 2017 season further improved the game's ability to detect and deter integrity risks around wagering. A new team announcement process increased certainty around player selections, whilst prohibitions on mobile phones in dressing rooms reduced the risk of match-day insider information. The NRL continued to build on its strong relationships with the game's Approved Betting Operators, promoting a ready exchange of integrity information between operators and the Integrity Unit.

The detection of prohibited wagering by an NRL player during the season demonstrated the success of these measures, and underlined the importance of continued efforts.

The resulting cancellation of the player's registration confirmed the game's strong stance against betting by its participants.

The NRL continued to work closely with NSW Police on the finalisation of the Strike Force Nuralda investigation, forging relationships between the game and law enforcement which will continue beyond the Strike Force's welcome finding of no match-fixing in the NRL Competition. It should be noted that the two-year investigation found no evidence of match-fixing in the Telstra Premiership.

### ANTI-DOPING, ILLICIT DRUGS & BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS

Behavioural incidents which risk reputational damage are a fact of life for major sports, and 2017 saw a small number of breaches which tarnished the game. However the number of incidents, and the manner in which they were detected, reported and dealt with highlighted continued improvement in this area.

The finalisation of a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Rugby League Players Association provides a new opportunity to further develop policy in this area, with players granting access to phone and banking records where necessary for investigations, and a renewed commitment to improving player compliance across the NRL Rules.

The game's comprehensive anti-doping testing regime, conducted through the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority and welfare-based Illicit & Hazardous Drugs testing, continued throughout 2017, with more than 3,500 tests conducted.

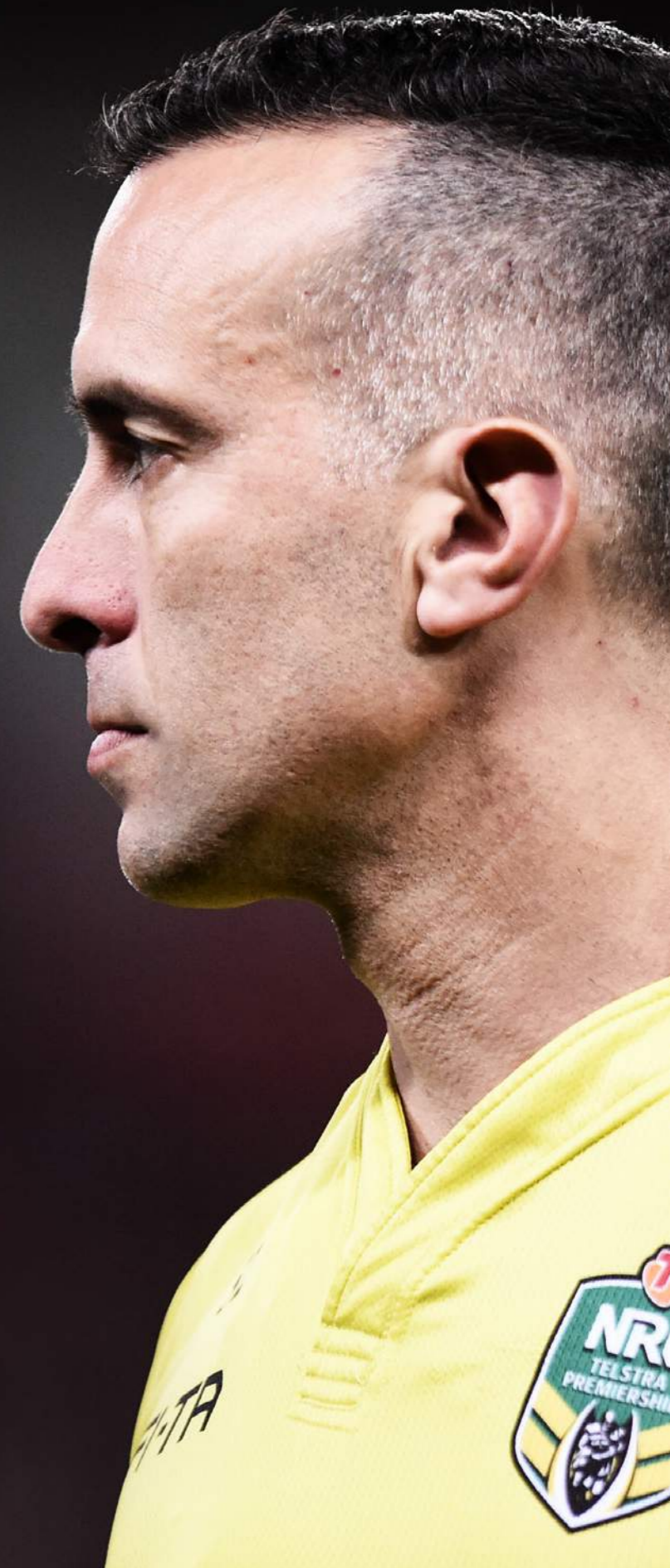
### SALARY CAP

The 2017 season was the last to be conducted under the 2012-17 Collective Bargaining Agreement and saw a \$7.5 million cap per club, with \$300,000 for NYC Teams competing in the final year of that competition.

The NRL Salary Cap continues to be a key driver of the competitive balance of the NRL Competition, ensuring the close and exciting contests seen across the season.

The Salary Cap team works actively and closely with all Clubs to identify in advance issues with cap compliance. Where potential compliance breaches are identified the NRL is willing to commit significant resources to ensure the integrity of the salary cap.

In 2018, the Salary Cap Rules will change to accommodate a new Football Department Expenditure Cap, the retirement of the National Youth Competition, and the new NRL/RLPA Collective Bargaining Agreement resulting in a 2018 cap of \$9.4 million per club.



SECTION 05 OUR COMMUNITY



## THE NRL COMMUNITY

Community is not just part of our game – it is our game.

The NRL continued to open doors, break down barriers, establish connections and create a sense of belonging in 2017.

Committed to utilising the power of rugby league to make a positive difference, the NRL delivered extensive programs designed to create positive social change across three core pillars; NRL Health, NRL Respect and NRL Learn.

This year, the NRL launched the Power for Change campaign. It shared stories from five of the NRL Community's marquee programs and their participants, reaching 4.1 million through social media channels.

**“Rugby League changed my life and I’m glad I can help others too through the In League In Harmony program in bringing people from all backgrounds together.”**

**Obed Karwhin**, a refugee from Sierra Leone who, together with his mother, fled war-torn West Africa when he was four years old.

### Meet one of our NRL Community champions



**Darren Deitz**  
2017 NRL Community Volunteer of the Year.

In 2017 Darren was recognised for his incredible contribution to the game and named the national NRL Community Volunteer of the Year.

Darren was the driving force behind the introduction of the Try Time Junior Rugby League program. The program provides a safe, enjoyable and inclusive environment for children, teenagers and adults with special needs and Intellectual disabilities to play rugby league. The Try Time program is a modified version of the game, enabling the specific needs of individuals to be taken into consideration, whilst maintaining the majority of rugby league rules and techniques.

Darren, with his wife Natalie Deitz, initially investigated the opportunity to introduce the Try Time program for their son Lachlan, who has autism. Lachlan had wanted to play rugby league since he was six years old, but had limited opportunities available to him given his specific needs.

Through the hard work of his father and support of Parramatta District Rugby League, Lachlan, now 18, has been able to compete in the program which has grown into a regular competition in 2017 in the Parramatta district.





“The main message is that mental health is diagnosable and treatable; it is something that can be looked after. It is not something that means you are less of a person, or not capable of doing what you do. That’s the big thing.”

**Matt Cecchin**  
NRL Referee

## NRL HEALTH

The NRL is a powerful voice for physical and mental health and wellbeing, promoting the benefits of sport and exercise to help people feel healthy, positive and connected.

The NRL’s State of Mind program aims to reduce the stigma around mental illness by creating positive discussion and connections in communities, encouraging people to seek help. In 2017, the NRL continued to work with grassroots clubs from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand.

In 2017, the NRL State of Mind Ambassadors program increased to 30 players and officials, with NRL Referees included for the first time. The State of Mind grassroots initiative saw significant growth in Queensland this year through the support of the Queensland Government, with 75 clubs signing up or acting to become recognised as an official State of Mind Club. Thanks to funding from the Victorian Government, Sunraysia Rugby League in northern Victoria became the first league in Australia to have all its clubs recognised as State of Mind clubs.

## NRL LEARN

In 2017, the NRL Community team provided a suite of programs and initiatives aimed at improving education and enhancing employment opportunities. These programs and initiatives promoted the importance of study, education and working hard to achieve goals.

### School to Work

The highly successful NRL School to Work program, which supports and mentors young Indigenous students to stay at school by encouraging them to achieve their goals, had its future firmly secured in 2017.

The Australian Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, generously committed \$6.3 million in funding over the next three years. This extra funding now means the NRL and participating clubs will be able to support 1,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete their HSC and transition into further education or employment.

Since 2011, the NRL School to Work program has assisted more than 750 Indigenous students, with staff working tirelessly to maintain the 98% transition rate of participants from school-based studies to further education or employment.

## NRL RESPECT

NRL Respect is about showcasing rugby league as a champion of self-respect and social responsibility. In 2017 the NRL worked closely with the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop a whole of game social inclusion and anti-discrimination framework. This was in addition to the two marquee NRL Respect programs – NRL In League In Harmony and NRL Voice Against Violence – which encourage social inclusion and build cohesive communities.

Two highlights were the NRL Youth Ambassador Program and the Pacific Youth Summit – empowering young people to be leaders and positive role models in their community.

“The actions that have been taking place to date in rugby league to address discrimination and racism and promote inclusion generally are commendable, with community programs that are the envy of other sports. I hope that it provides a benchmark to take the game from good to best practice.”

**Dr Tim Soutphommasane**  
Federal Race Discrimination  
Commissioner Human Right  
Commission

## NRL Voice Against Violence

In 2017, The NRL Voice Against Violence initiative expanded internationally. As well as delivering programs across Australia, NRL Ambassador Alan Tongue also delivered our Voice Against Violence program to five clubs in Papua New Guinea and four clubs in Fiji.

### Pullout stats:

- » 29 workshops delivered across New South Wales, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Western Australia, Victoria, Fiji and Papua New Guinea
- » 998 participants

### NRL In League In Harmony

The NRL’s In League In Harmony program, aimed at empowering young people to be agents of change for a more cohesive society, had another successful year in 2017.

The school-based educational program delivered over six sessions and modelled off the NRL’s values of Excellence, Inclusiveness, Courage and Teamwork, culminated in a celebratory Harmony Festival Gala Day in March 2017. The program empowered participants to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the diversity among their peers and the wider community.

In League In Harmony continued to grow in New South Wales through the support of Multicultural NSW and was being delivered in Wollongong for the first time in four years, along with an inaugural delivery to high schools in both the Central Coast and Newcastle.

The program was also successfully piloted for the first time in Queensland during October and November 2017.

1,580

Participants

38

Programs

213

Individual workshops

444

hours of face-to-face delivery

## INDIGENOUS STRATEGY

Recognition of the genuine connection between rugby league and the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities continued to grow in 2017.

The NRL continued its commitment to understanding, respecting and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and values, in the belief that both the business, community and game overall would be better for doing so.

### INDIGENOUS ROUND

The NRL celebrated Indigenous Round again in 2017, with every NRL Club wearing Indigenous inspired jerseys during Round 10 for the first time. A series of cultural performances, gift exchanges and Welcome to Country ceremonies took place at matches, with recognition the main theme and focal point for discussion throughout the round.

An alternative National Anthem backed by Australian Rugby League Commissioner Dr Chris Sarra, internationally recognised for his leadership in Indigenous education, was also showcased before games during Indigenous Round.

The NRL continued its partnership with RECOGNISE and Reconciliation Australia throughout Indigenous Round, by supporting the movement to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution and ensuring there is no place for racial discrimination.

### NRL RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

The NRL ended its current Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan with Reconciliation Australia this year extremely proud of the outcomes, including:

- » Achievement of our 5% Indigenous employment target
- » Implementation of an Indigenous Employment Strategy
- » Continued procurement of Indigenous businesses
- » Support for Indigenous Carnivals, QLD Murri Carnival, NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout and the National Indigenous Rugby League Championships
- » Active Australian Rugby League Indigenous Council and Indigenous NRL Players Group, providing strategic advice from a community and players' perspective

The next iteration of the NRL's Reconciliation Action Plan is scheduled for early 2018.

### NRL COWBOYS HOUSE

NRL Cowboys House, a facility that provides significant benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Far North Queensland, officially opened in Townsville in March 2017.

The facility, supported by a \$9.5 million investment by the Australian Government, will help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote areas in Queensland to complete their secondary education and access school-aged apprenticeships.

In 2017 the facility housed 25 high school aged boys. This is set to grow to 50 school aged boys by 2018, all attending local high schools in Townsville and being supported with their education, personal development and cultural growth.

North Queensland Cowboys halfback Johnathan Thurston was awarded the prestigious Human Rights Medal by the Australian Human Rights Commission for his work with NRL Cowboys House to improve the life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

“While I am only one person in a community of leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators who are working to create better lives for Indigenous Australians, I am honoured to be recognised and can only hope that the award will bring valuable attention to closing the education gap for all Australians.”

#### Johnathan Thurston

North Queensland Cowboys Captain and 2017 Australian Human Rights Medal winner



## 2017 AMBASSADORS

NRL Ambassadors join NRL Clubs and the wider NRL community in supporting numerous community initiatives and major events throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. These programs are aimed at improving lives and educating communities and stakeholders on positive wellbeing.

A record 46 Ambassadors were selected and made almost 400 appearances in 2017. The group included 10 female and 10 Pasifika ambassadors, with one-third of the group selected for the first time.

- » Roy Asotasi
- » Matthew Bowen
- » Sam Bremner
- » Danny Buderus
- » Terry Campese
- » Petero Civoniceva
- » Ben Creagh
- » Jamie Feeney
- » Mario Fenech
- » Nathan Friend
- » Joe Galuvao
- » Tazmin Gray
- » Dene Halatau
- » Georgia Hale
- » Steph Hancock
- » Bronson Harrison
- » Nathan Hindmarsh

- » Justin Hodges
- » Jenni-Sue Hoepper
- » Dan Hunt
- » Dallas Johnson
- » Brett Kimmorley
- » Matt King
- » Jason King
- » Renae Kunst
- » Darren Lockyer
- » Alex McKinnon
- » Steven Menzies
- » Anthony Minichiello
- » Karyn Murphy
- » Corey Parker
- » Frank Puletua
- » Jerome Ropati
- » George Rose
- » Ben Ross
- » Andrew Ryan
- » Ruan Sims
- » John Skandalis
- » David Solomona
- » Maddie Studdon
- » Brent Tate
- » Alan Tongue
- » Clinton Toopi
- » Dean Widders
- » Craig Wing
- » Rebecca Young



## RUGBY LEAGUE IN THE PACIFIC

The importance and impact that the game had throughout the Pacific in 2017 continues to grow.

A record number of men, women and children benefited from the NRL's package of social inclusion, education, health and rugby league programs.

The ongoing support from partners Digicel, Nestlé, General Electric and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, resulted in 150,000 rugby league experiences being provided to men, women and children throughout Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji.

Alan Tongue and the NRL's Community team delivered the very first Voice Against Violence programs in both Papua New Guinea and Fiji. This important program is aimed at informing and empowering young men and women to stand up, speak out and take action against domestic violence in their communities.

On the field, the 2017 edition of the Pacific Test saw England clash with Samoa for the first time as part of an all International Rugby League triple-header at Campbelltown Sports Stadium. A crowd of 18,271 turned out to watch Papua New Guinea outclass Cook Islands, Tonga steal a late win over Fiji and England prove too strong for Samoa.

The Harvey Norman Jillaroos created history when they joined the Australian Prime Minister's XIII for the first time in Papua New Guinea in September 2017. Australian co-captain Stephanie Hancock scored two tries for the side's comfortable 42-4 victory over Papua New Guinea Orchids, who created history of their own by becoming the country's first international female rugby league team.





## MEN OF LEAGUE

The NRL continued its strong support for the Men of League Foundation in 2017. The Men of League Foundation cares for the men, women and children of the rugby league community and is often the last port of call for those within our sporting family who are facing tough times.

The Foundation celebrated 15 years as rugby league's chosen charity at the annual black-tie gala dinner held at Hyatt Regency Sydney in July 2017. The night showcased the Foundation's charity work and paid tribute to Co-Founder and Honorary President Ron Coote AM for his contributions to the Foundation over the past 15 years.

The theme for the evening was Celebrating 15 years of Rugby League through the Eyes of Ron Coote, including the celebration of an iconic rugby league moment selected for each year from 2002 to 2016 by the rugby league stalwart. A public vote was conducted and the most popular moment was announced as the 2015 NRL All Queensland Grand Final.

The Foundation was also showcased at one home game of each Australian NRL team throughout the 2017 NRL Telstra Premiership season, which provided a wonderful opportunity to share the great work being undertaken across the country.

“The vision was to build a foundation that provided practical assistance and social support, and this vision has been realised. Our mission remains to provide a wide range of wellbeing support and referrals in a professional and timely manner to those within the Rugby League community who are in genuine need and are unable to overcome that need within their own resources.”

**Prof. the Hon. Stephen Martin**  
Foundation Chairman



SECTION 06 THE FUTURE



## PLAYERS

A **GENUINE PARTNERSHIP** BETWEEN THE PLAYERS AND THE GAME

NEW COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT GIVING PLAYERS A **52% INCREASE** IN PAY OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

**MORE MONEY** FOR THE PLAYERS' RETIREMENT FUND

NEW INJURY **HARDSHIP FUND**

AVERAGE SALARY FOR PLAYERS **RISES TO \$330,000**



## WOMEN'S GAME

**NEW NRL WOMEN'S PREMIERSHIP** AS WELL AS STATE OF ORIGIN AND TEST MATCHES

**FULL JILLAROOS PROGRAM** FOR THE ELITE LEVEL

**BIGGEST SHAKEUP** IN THE WOMEN'S GAME

FASTEST GROWING SEGMENT OF RUGBY LEAGUE – AND IT **WILL ONLY GET BIGGER**

## STADIA

**BIGGEST SPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE BOOST** IN THE GAME'S HISTORY

NEW **25,000** SEAT RECTANGULAR STADIUM IN TOWNSVILLE OPENS 2020

NEW **45,000** SEAT RECTANGULAR STADIUM AT MOORE PARK OPENS 2021

NEW **75,000** SEAT RECTANGULAR STADIUM AT SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARK OPENS 2023

NEW **30,000** SEAT STADIUM AT PARRAMATTA - SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR RUGBY LEAGUE OPENS 2019

NRL SECURES A **NEW \$2.3 BILLION AGREEMENT** WITH THE NSW GOVERNMENT FOR THREE WORLD-CLASS STADIUMS



## CLUBS

CLUB FUNDING AT RECORD LEVELS – AVERAGING \$13 MILLION A YEAR DURING THE CYCLE – THAT'S **\$3 MILLION ABOVE** THE SALARY CAP

**MORE MONEY** FOR GRASSROOTS AND JUNIOR FOOTBALL

ALL CLUBS SHOULD BE **FINANCIALLY SECURE** FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

## DIGITAL

REDESIGNED WEBSITES FOR **ALL 16 CLUBS, BOTH STATES AND THE NRL** TO GIVE FANS A PREMIUM EXPERIENCE WITH A CLEANER LOOK AND IMPROVED NAVIGATION

**RUGBY LEAGUE** – IT ALL LIVES HERE ON THE NEW NRL DIGITAL NETWORK

**19 NEW APPS** FOR THE NRL, CLUBS AND STATES

**FANS WILL HAVE ACCESS** TO MORE ARTICLES, MORE VIDEOS, MORE PODCASTS, MORE IMAGES AND MORE FEATURES ON ALL THE SITES



## PARTICIPATION

**NEW PARTICIPATION STRATEGY** DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO TAKE UP RUGBY LEAGUE – AND STAY IN THE GAME LONGER

YEAR-ROUND FORMATS AND COMPETITIONS TO DRIVE MORE PARTICIPANTS

REVIEW OF RULES TO MAKE THE GAME **SAFER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

## PATHWAYS

NEW PATHWAYS PROGRAM TO GIVE PLAYERS A DEDICATED STRATEGY FROM **JUNIORS TO THE ELITE** GAME

NEW SYSTEM WILL ALLOW YOUNG PLAYERS TO STAY AT HOME LONGER – AND **IMPROVE PLAYER WELFARE**

SCOPE TO **BRING IN TEAMS FROM OVERSEAS** SUCH AS PNG, FIJI AND OTHER PACIFIC NATIONS

**NEW STATE-BASED COMPETITIONS** IN QUEENSLAND AND NSW



SECTION

07

FINANCIALS



# FINANCIAL RESULTS 2017

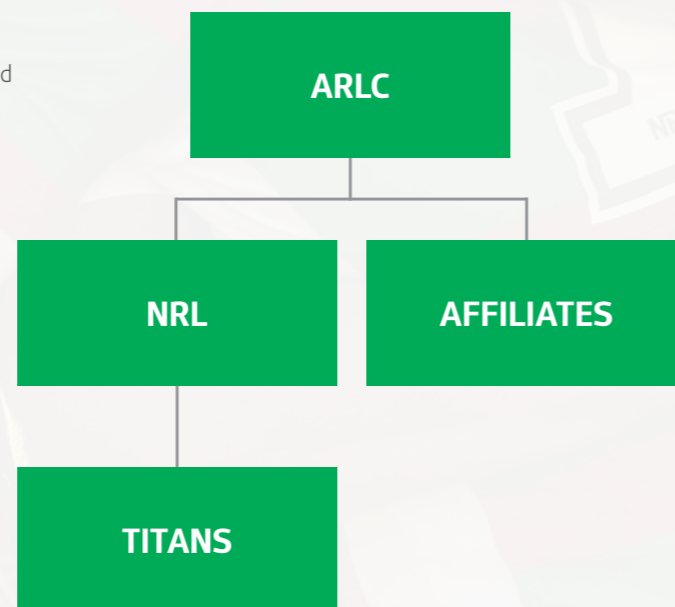


## OVERVIEW

The diagram here reflects the change in corporate structure between 2016 and 2017 and illustrates what is consolidated into the statutory financial statements. The financial commentary separates the ARLC and NRL entities (“Controlling Body”) and the subsidiary entities (“controlled entities”) so a like-for-like comparison of financial results can be made.

### 2017

All 100% Owned

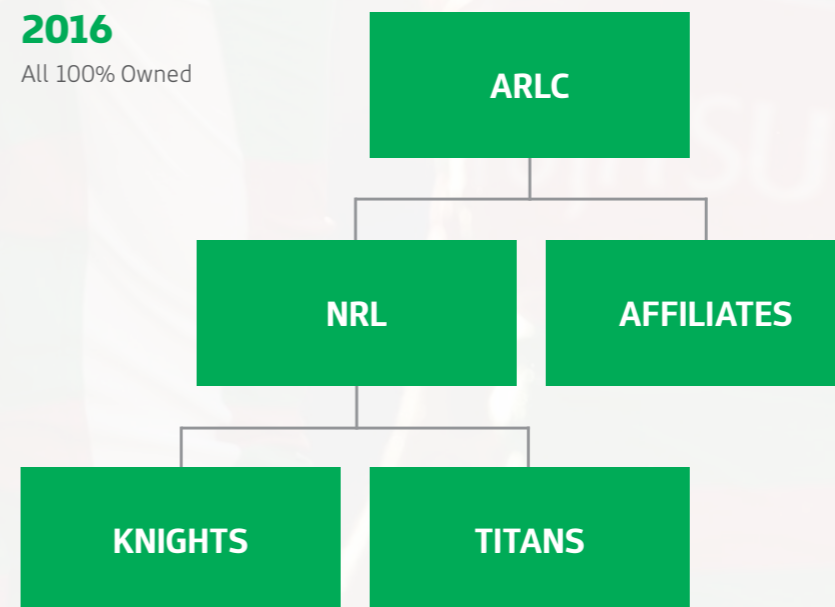


The NRL completed the sale of 100% of its shares in Knights Rugby League Pty Ltd to Western Suburbs (N'cle) Leagues Club Ltd (WSL) on 31 October 2017. The NRL relinquished control of Knights Rugby League Pty Ltd on 31 August 2017 meaning the entity was disposed from the group at this date.

Affiliates comprise of ARLC WA Ltd, ARLC SA Ltd, ARLC VIC Ltd, ARLC NT Ltd and NRL Foundation Ltd.

### 2016

All 100% Owned



Affiliates comprise of ARLC WA Ltd, ARLC SA Ltd, ARLC VIC Ltd, ARLC NT Ltd and NRL Foundation Ltd.



# FINANCIAL RESULTS 2017

The following financial commentary relates to the underlying operations and results of the Controlling Body before consolidation and the impact of impairment of Club loans.

## Revenue

- » Broadcast revenue: 2017 results reflect the final year of the 2013-2017 broadcast deal. As broadcast revenue is recognised on a straight line basis across the period, 2017 revenue of \$206.2m is largely in line with prior years (2016: \$206.3m).
- » Non-broadcast revenue: Revenue increased by \$3.8m (3%) in 2017 to \$147.9m. The increase was primarily due to an increase in corporate partnership revenues. Game receipts were largely steady year on year, due to the favourable State of Origin on-field results offsetting a challenging Grand Final match-up. Other moves included a continuation of strong wagering product fees largely offsetting lower Interest revenues on reduced average cash holdings.



## Expenditure

- » Event, Game and Sponsorship expenditure: Increased \$3.3m to \$75.4m (2016: \$72.1m). Most of this increase is attributable to the International calendar. There was a Four Nations tournament and one Test Match in 2017 (total cost \$5.4m) compared to two Test Matches in 2016 (total cost \$3.3m). The other notable cost was in the Digital business (-\$1.1m) as a result of the build out of NRL Digital. Note, there was an additional \$3.8m in build costs capitalised to the balance sheet in 2017.
- » Football: Increased \$0.7m to \$20.1m (2016: \$19.4m). Approximately half of this cost is staff (both permanent and casual football operations staff and all referees) and most of this increase is attributable to this area.
- » Community and Player Welfare: Reduced by \$0.5m to \$16.4m (2016: \$16.9m). Included in this category are contributions to the Players' Retirement Fund to which the NRL contributed a one-off \$1.2m in 2016 as a result of a Mid Term review. Offset against this was an increase in other program funding, notably the Men of League and the government-supported School to Work initiative.
- » Integrity and Salary Cap: Increase of \$0.6m to \$3.8m reflects the additional investment associated with increased staffing, technology and drug testing.

- » Administration: Significant decrease of \$2.0m or 9% to \$19.6m. These expenses now represent 5.5% of total revenue, compared to 6.2% in 2016.

## Distributions

- In line with the ARLC's strategic priority to strengthen the financial sustainability of the game, total funds available for distribution increased in 2017 to \$219.0m. Actual distributions totalling \$222.7m reflect a \$2.7m uplift on 2016. Financial reserves were used to fund the difference between funds available and funds distributed (\$3.7m).
- » Clubs: Distributions to clubs decreased by \$3.2m, despite an increase in club base participation payments of \$3.4m (\$0.21m per club). This is due to a reduction in other areas of funding, notably Monday Night Football Grants (+\$1.0m), the end of a two-year club incentive scheme (+\$2.0m), a reduction in investment in membership assistance such as the FRMC (+\$1.6m), reduced game relocation underwriting payments (+\$0.5m), pass through of merchandise royalties owed to clubs (+\$0.5m) and other reductions in club-specific assistance (+\$1.0m).
  - » States: Distributions to States increased by \$2.3m. \$0.9m of this relates to an agreed 4% uplift in State League Funding, as well as a one-off expense payable to NSWRL towards their Centre of Excellence (\$1.9m).

- Offset against this is a reduction to NZRL financial assistance provided in 2017 (-\$0.5m).
- » Development: Distributions increased by \$3.6m. There was increased investment in grassroots facilities programs in NSW (-\$0.3m), as well as a new government partnership facilities program in Queensland (-\$0.7m). There were also increases in staff related costs (-\$2.0m) as well as start-up costs relating to the new Pathways program for 2018 (-\$0.5m).

## Consolidated Result

The consolidated result includes the Controlling Body and its Controlled Entities.

Total consolidated revenue (excluding contra) disclosed in the Financial Statements is \$377.0m (2016: \$375.7m) and Total Funds available for Distribution was \$203.0m (2016: \$195.8m). Total distributions on a consolidated basis totalled \$209.6m (2016: \$204.4m) with an overall deficit of \$6.4m (2016: deficit of \$8.7m).

Controlled Entity deficits total \$5.3m (2016: \$4.4m) along with the impairment charges which sit outside the group of \$Nil (2016 \$1.7m). This represents the difference between the Controlling Body's deficit of \$3.7m (2016: \$2.6m) and the consolidated deficit of \$6.4m (2016: \$8.7m).

# FINANCIAL RESULTS 2017

## KEY FINANCIAL INDICATORS

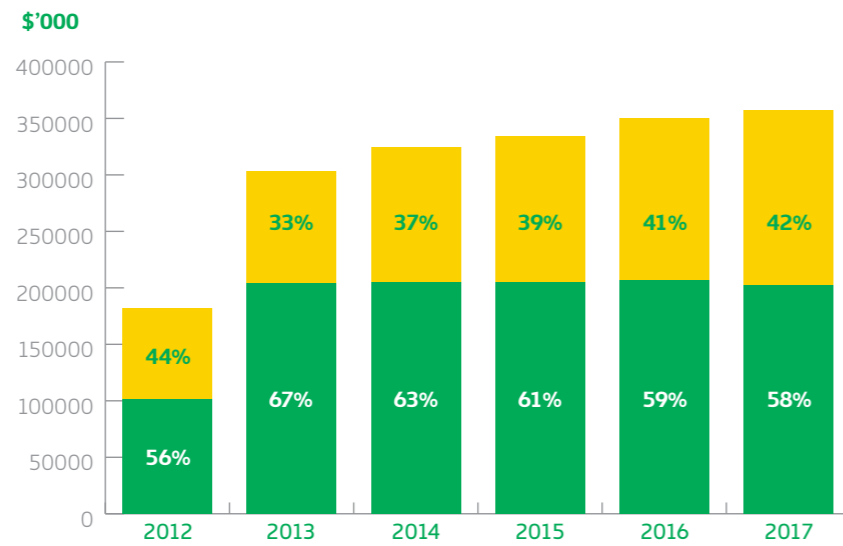
### Revenue

Non-Broadcast Revenue

**↑ 2.6%**

on 2016 to **\$148m**

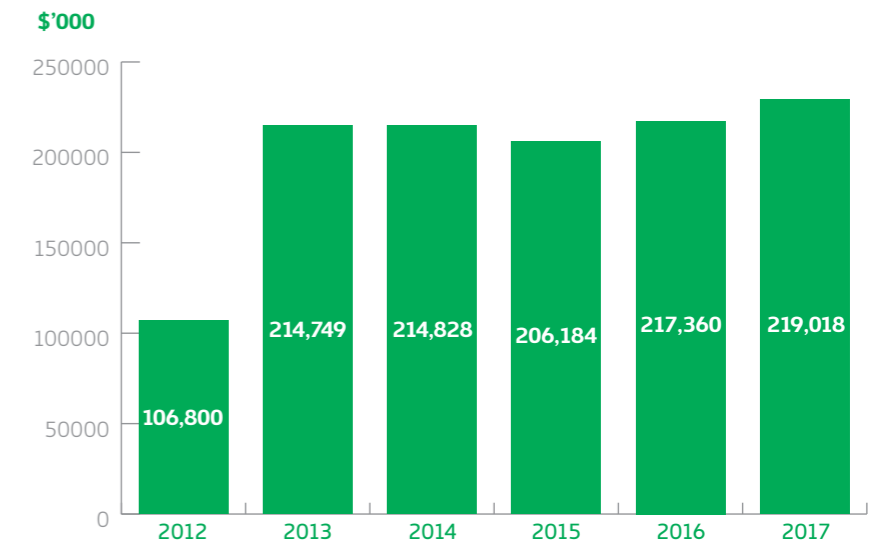
- Non-Broadcast Revenue
- Broadcast Revenue (excl. contra)



### Available for Distribution

**↑ 0.8%**

on 2016 to **\$219m**

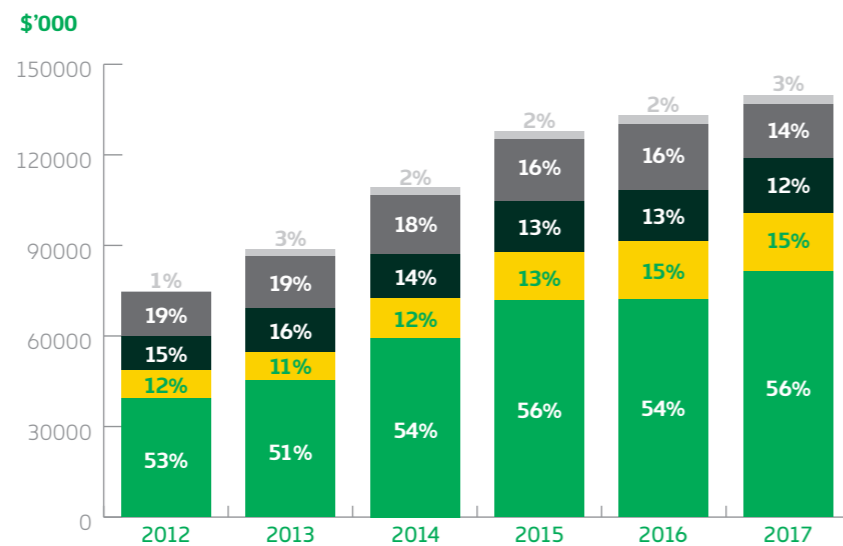


### Expenditure

**↑ 1.5%**

on 2016 to **\$135m**

- Integrity and Salary Cap
- Administration
- Community and Player Welfare
- Football
- Event, Game and Sponsorship (excl. contra)

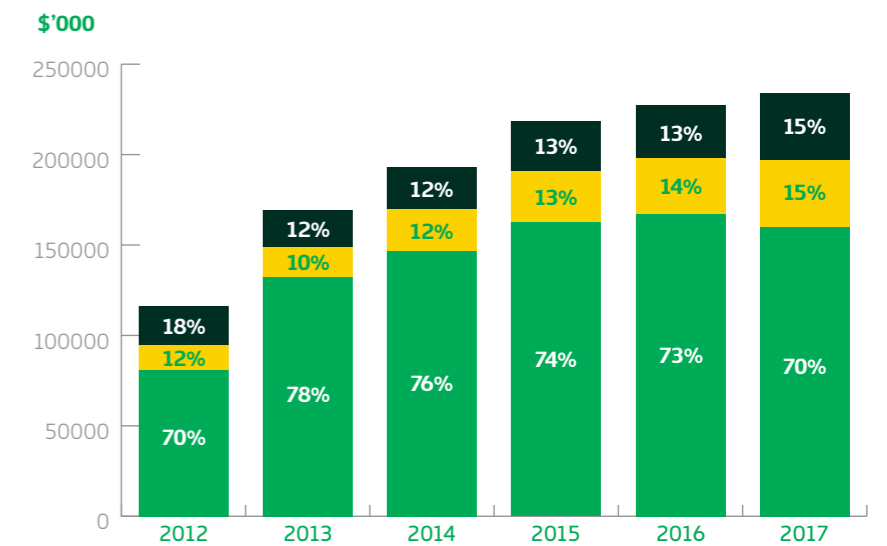


### Distributions

**↑ 1.2%**

on 2016 to **\$223m**

- Development
- States
- Clubs



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### THE CONTROLLING BODY 2012-2017: Underlying operating performance

PROFIT & LOSS (\$'000)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2016-17 \$	2016-17 %
Broadcast Revenue (excl. contra)	101,600	204,345	205,000	204,735	206,345	206,198	(147)	(0%)
Non-Broadcast Revenue	80,000	99,030	119,024	129,270	144,160	147,946	3,786	3%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>181,600</b>	<b>303,375</b>	<b>324,024</b>	<b>334,005</b>	<b>350,505</b>	<b>354,144</b>	<b>3,639</b>	<b>1%</b>
Event, Game and Sponsorship (excl. contra)	(39,400)	(45,121)	(59,345)	(71,728)	(72,085)	(75,351)	(3,265)	(5%)
Football	(9,100)	(9,600)	(13,035)	(16,089)	(19,428)	(20,063)	(636)	(3%)
Community and Player Welfare	(11,500)	(14,478)	(14,907)	(16,727)	(16,860)	(16,370)	490	3%
Integrity and Salary Cap	(450)	(2,240)	(2,516)	(2,595)	(3,221)	(3,776)	(555)	(17%)
Administration	(14,350)	(17,187)	(19,393)	(20,682)	(21,551)	(19,565)	1,985	9%
<b>Funds Available for Distribution</b>	<b>106,800</b>	<b>214,749</b>	<b>214,828</b>	<b>206,184</b>	<b>217,360</b>	<b>219,018</b>	<b>1,658</b>	<b>1%</b>
Clubs <sup>1</sup>	(81,000)	(132,300)	(146,663)	(157,965)	(160,177)	(156,948)	3,229	2%
States & Affiliates	(13,500)	(16,300)	(22,914)	(28,667)	(30,473)	(32,784)	(2,311)	(8%)
Development	(21,700)	(20,808)	(23,410)	(27,650)	(29,354)	(33,000)	(3,646)	(12%)
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(9,400)</b>	<b>45,341</b>	<b>21,841</b>	<b>(8,098)</b>	<b>(2,644)</b>	<b>(3,713)</b>	<b>(1,069)</b>	<b>40%</b>

BALANCE SHEET (\$'000)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Assets	110,740	188,074	194,816	197,261	261,193	242,613
Total Liabilities	91,390	123,383	108,282	118,824	185,400	170,534
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>19,350</b>	<b>64,691</b>	<b>86,534</b>	<b>78,437</b>	<b>75,793</b>	<b>72,079</b>

#### Note

1. The above Profit & Loss shows the underlying performance of the Controlling Body and therefore does not include impairment charge taken on NRL Club loans.

## THE CONTROLLING BODY AND THE GROUP (CONSOLIDATED)

PROFIT & LOSS (\$'000)	2016		2017	
	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>
Broadcast Revenue (excl. contra)	206,345	206,345	206,198	206,198
Non-Broadcast Revenue	144,160	169,364	147,946	170,807
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>350,505</b>	<b>375,709</b>	<b>354,144</b>	<b>377,004</b>
Event, Game and Sponsorship (excl. contra)	(72,085)	(83,775)	(75,351)	(81,766)
Football	(19,428)	(47,355)	(20,063)	(45,781)
Community and Player Welfare	(16,860)	(17,087)	(16,370)	(16,470)
Integrity and Salary Cap	(3,221)	(3,221)	(3,776)	(3,776)
Administration	(21,551)	(28,510)	(19,565)	(26,028)
<b>Funds Available for Distribution</b>	<b>217,360</b>	<b>195,761</b>	<b>219,018</b>	<b>203,184</b>
Clubs	(160,177)	(143,835)	(156,948)	(142,473)
States & Affiliates	(30,473)	(29,603)	(32,784)	(31,838)
Development	(29,354)	(30,972)	(33,000)	(35,294)
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>(2,644)</b>	<b>(8,649)</b>	<b>(3,713)</b>	<b>(6,421)</b>

BALANCE SHEET (\$'000)	2016		2017	
	Total Assets	261,192	248,667	242,613
Total Liabilities	185,400	191,168	170,534	175,708
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>75,792</b>	<b>57,499</b>	<b>72,079</b>	<b>51,078</b>

### Notes

In the above Profit & Loss table depreciation, amortisation and interest are disclosed within the respective category to which they relate. This varies from the statutory accounts where these costs are disclosed separately on the face of the Statement of Consolidated Comprehensive Income.

1. Controlling Body includes ARLC Ltd and NRL Ltd.

2. Consolidated represents the Controlling Body and its Controlled Entities Knights Rugby League Pty Ltd (acquired 30 June 2014, disposed 31 October 2017), Titans Rugby League Pty Ltd (acquired 24 February 2015), ARLC WARL Ltd (acquired 8 June 2015), ARLC SA Ltd (acquired 30 June 2015), ARLC VIC Ltd (acquired 1 July 2015) and ARLC NT Ltd (acquired 6 July 2015) and NRL Foundation Ltd (incorporated 16 February 2015).

## CLUBS AND STATES (CONTROLLING BODY)

CLUBS & STATES FUNDING (\$'000)	2017		
	Base	Other	Total
Payments to Clubs	132,800	14,778	147,578
<b>Benefits to Clubs</b>			
Club Travel	-	4,482	4,482
Club Fans & Members Initiatives	-	2,998	2,998
Club Services	-	1,891	1,891
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to Clubs</b>	<b>132,800</b>	<b>24,148</b>	<b>156,948</b>
Payments to States	22,804	8,603	31,407
Benefits to States	-	1,377	1,377
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to States</b>	<b>22,804</b>	<b>9,979</b>	<b>32,784</b>

CLUBS & STATES FUNDING (\$'000)	2016		
	Base	Other	Total
Payments to Clubs	131,040	18,311	149,351
<b>Benefits to Clubs</b>			
Club Travel	-	4,642	4,642
Club Fans & Members Initiatives	-	4,289	4,289
Club Services	-	1,895	1,895
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to Clubs</b>	<b>131,040</b>	<b>29,137</b>	<b>160,177</b>
Payments to States	21,497	7,759	29,256
Benefits to States	-	1,217	1,217
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to States</b>	<b>21,497</b>	<b>8,976</b>	<b>30,473</b>

### Note

This note agrees to the underlying operating performance Profit & Loss and therefore does not include any impairment charges taken with respect to NRL Club loans.

## GAME STATISTICS 2012-2017

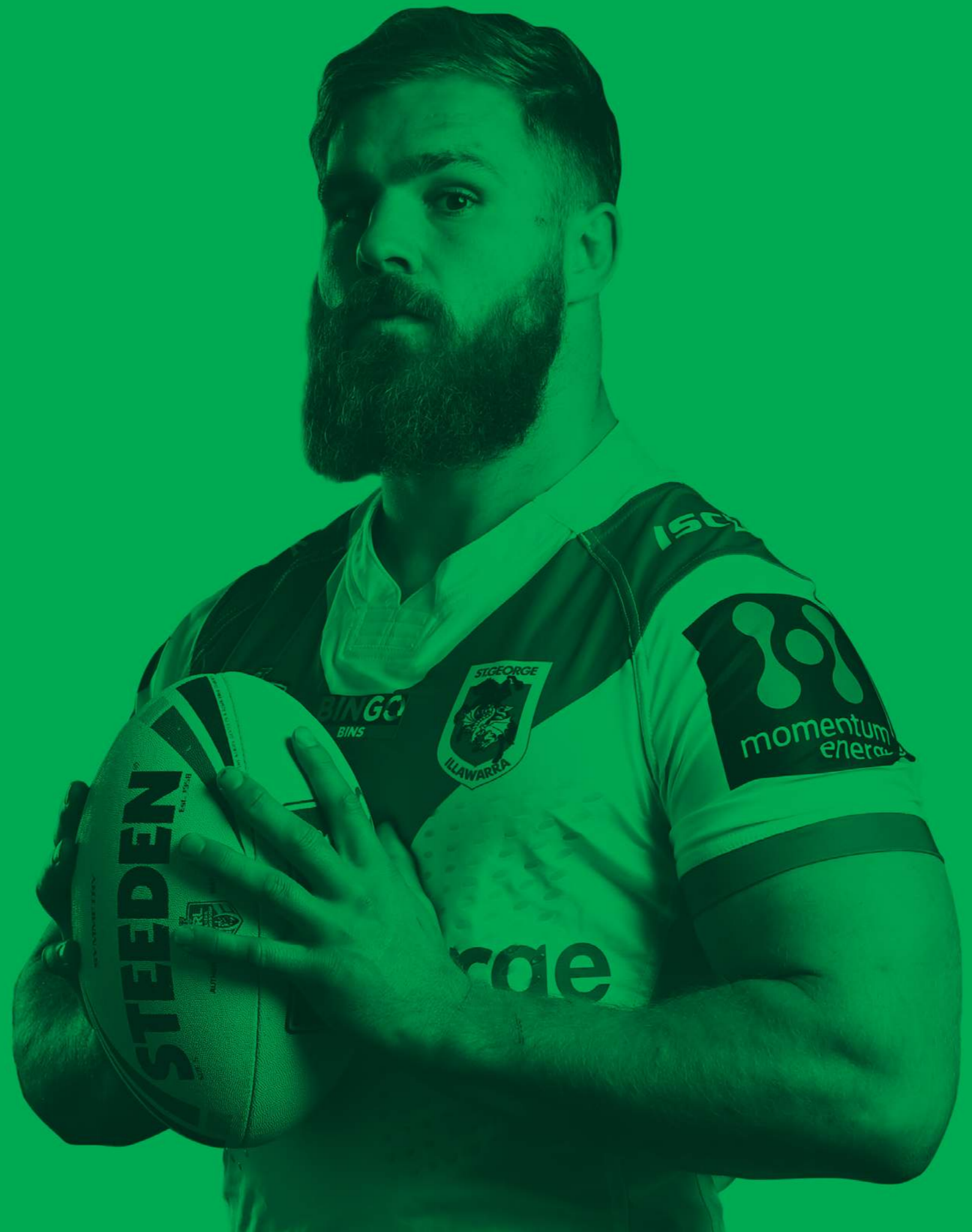
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>FINANCIAL STATISTICS</b>						
Broadcast/Total Revenue	56%	67%	63%	61%	59%	58%
Event, Game and Sponsorship/ Total Revenue	22%	15%	18%	21%	21%	21%
Event, Game and Sponsorship/ Non Broadcast Revenue	49%	46%	50%	55%	50%	51%
Administration/Total Revenue	8%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Clubs/Total Revenue	45%	44%	45%	47%	46%	44%
Distributions/Total Revenue	64%	56%	60%	64%	63%	63%



SECTION

08

CONCISE FINANCIAL  
REPORT



# DIRECTORS' REPORT

The Directors present their report for the Australian Rugby League Commission Limited ("ARLC" or "the Company") for the year ended 31 October 2017.

## DIRECTORS

The names and details of the Company's Directors in office during the financial year and until the date of this report are as follows. Directors were in office for this entire period unless otherwise stated.

### John Grant (Chairman)

Chairman Mr Grant is a former Kangaroo and Queensland State player and an experienced businessman and advisor to State and Federal Governments and multinational IT companies. He was a founder and for 19 years until December 2015, Managing Director of Australian listed IT company, Data#3 Limited.

### Tony McGrath

Mr McGrath is a former partner at KPMG and is a co-founder of McGrath Nicol. Mr McGrath is a Director of QBE Insurance (Australia) Limited and the National Foundation for Medical Research. Mr McGrath has also chaired the Risk, Investment and Audit Committee since 24 February 2017.

### Catherine Harris AO PSM

Ms Harris is the Chairperson of Harris Farm Markets, and a Director of the Sport Australia Hall of Fame, The Australian Ballet, Tyro Payments Ltd and is Consul General for Bhutan. Ms Harris is Chair of the Nominations Committee.

### Professor Chris Sarra

Professor Sarra is a Professor at the University of Canberra and founding Chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute. Professor Sarra is Chair of the People, Workplace Culture and Remuneration Committee.

### Wayne Pearce OAM

Mr Pearce is a former Kangaroos representative who also captained and coached the New South Wales State of Origin side. Mr Pearce is a business consultant and Director of Wayne Pearce Advantage.

### Dr Gary Weiss

Dr Weiss is Chairman of Ridley Corporation, Estia Health Ltd and Ardent Leisure Group and is Executive Director of Ariadne Australia and Director of a number of other entities. Dr Weiss is a former board member of the Westfield Group, Tower Australia, ClearView Wealth and Tyndall Australia.

### The Hon. Peter Beattie AC (appointed 25 July 2017)

Mr Beattie is Chairman of GOLDOC, Director of the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, Ambassador for Life Sciences Queensland, and joint adjunct professor at the University of Queensland's Australian Institute for Bioengineering & Nanotechnology & Institute for Molecular Bioscience. Mr Beattie served as the 36th Premier of Queensland and Minister for Trade from 1998 to 2007 and Leader of the Australian Labor Party in that state from 1996 to 2007.

### Professor Megan Davis (appointed 25 July 2017)

Professor Davis is Pro Vice Chancellor UNSW, Acting Commissioner of the NSW Land and Environment Court and a member of the NSW Sentencing Council. Professor Davis is a constitutional law professor specialising in constitutional design and constitution-building and one of the nation's leading public constitutional lawyers.

### Graeme Samuel AC (retired on 24 February 2017)

Mr Samuel is a business consultant with extensive government and private sector roles. Mr Samuel chaired the Risk, Investment and Audit Committee until 24 February 2017.

### Jeremy Sutcliffe (retired on 1 March 2017)

Mr Sutcliffe is Chairman of CSR Limited, a Director of Amcor Limited, a Director of Orora Limited and former Managing Director and CEO of SimsMetal Management Limited. He is also an Advisory Director to Veolia Environmental Australia Limited.

## COMPANY SECRETARY

Eleni North, General Counsel and Company Secretary. Ms North has been the Company Secretary of the Australian Rugby League Commission Limited and National Rugby League Limited since 13 August 2014.

## PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY

The principal activity of the Company during the course of the financial year was the fostering and propagation of the game of Rugby League Football throughout the States and Territories of Australia and internationally.

The short and long term objectives of the Australian Rugby League Commission are to foster, develop, extend and adequately fund the game from grassroots to elite level; conduct State of Origin and Australian representative matches; organise, conduct and foster the National Rugby League ("NRL") competition; liaise with the Rugby League International Federation on the international game; and to promote and encourage sport, recreation and the general welfare of young people in the community. The success of the Company's performance of these objectives is indicated by the growing awareness and participation in Rugby League.

## REVIEW OF OPERATIONS AND FINANCIAL RESULTS

Revenue generated for the year was \$400,090,909 (2016: \$391,368,205). The Group's current year operating deficit was \$6,420,672 (2016: operating deficit \$8,649,092).

## DIVIDENDS

No dividends have been paid, declared, or recommended by the Company during the financial year.

## SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AFTER THE YEAR END

On 2 November 2017, National Rugby League Ltd reached agreement with the Rugby League Players Association on the terms for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with players covering the period 1 November 2018 – 31 October 2022. On 15 December 2017, National Rugby League Ltd completed the sale of its one share in Titans Rugby League Pty Ltd to Wildkelly Pty Ltd.

There has not arisen in the interval between the end of the financial period and the date of this report any other item, transaction or event of a material and unusual nature likely, in the opinion of the Directors of the organisation, to affect significantly the operations of the organisation and the state of affairs in future financial years.

## LIKELY DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE RESULTS

The Directors are not aware of any other particular changes in the operations of the Company which will materially affect the results in subsequent years.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Company operations are not regulated by any significant environmental regulations under a law of the Commonwealth or of a State or Territory.

## DIRECTORS' INTERESTS AND BENEFITS

Since the end of the previous financial year, no Director of the Company has received or become entitled to receive any benefit because of a contract made by the Company or a related body corporate with a Director or with a firm of which the Director is a member, or with a company in which the Director has a substantial interest.

## INDEMNIFICATION OF OFFICERS

The Company paid an insurance premium of \$169,469 (2016: \$163,798) in respect of a contract insuring the Directors of the Company named earlier in this report and each executive officer, against liabilities and expenses arising as a result of work performed in their respective capacities, to the extent permitted by law, up to the policy limit.

## INDEMNIFICATION OF AUDITORS

To the extent permitted by law, the Company has agreed to indemnify the auditors, Ernst & Young, as part of the terms of its audit engagement agreement against claims by third parties arising from the audit (for an unspecified amount). No payment has been made to indemnify Ernst & Young during or since the financial year.

## MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

The Company is a company limited by guarantee. If the Company is wound up, the Articles of Association state that each member is required to contribute a maximum of \$10 each towards meeting any outstanding obligations of the Company. At 31 October 2017, the number of members was 26 (2016: 26).

## BOARD MEETINGS

The number of Board Meetings held during the year and the number of meetings attended by each Director was as follows:

DIRECTORS	BOARD MEETINGS	
	Eligible to Attend	Attended
John Grant (Chairman)	10	10
Tony McGrath	10	10
Catherine Harris AO PSM	10	10
Professor Chris Sarra	10	10
Wayne Pearce OAM	10	10
Dr Gary Weiss	10	9
The Hon. Peter Beattie AC (appointed 25 July 2017)	3	3
Professor Megan Davis (appointed 25 July 2017)	3	3
Graeme Samuel AC (retired on 24 February 2017)	4	4
Jeremy Sutcliffe (retired on 1 March 2017)	4	4

### REGISTERED OFFICE

The registered office of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited is located at: Rugby League Central, Driver Avenue, Moore Park, NSW, Australia, 2021.

### Corporate Structure

Australian Rugby League Commission Limited is a public, not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee. The domicile of the Company is Sydney, Australia.



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### Auditor's Independence Declaration to the Directors of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited

As lead auditor for the audit of the Australian Rugby League Commission Limited for the financial year ended 31 October 2017, I declare to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Corporations Act 2001* in relation to the audit; and
- no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

This declaration is in respect of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited and the entities it controlled during the financial year.

  
Ernst & Young

  
Christopher George  
Partner

Sydney  
31 January 2018

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Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Directors.

  
John Grant  
Chairman

  
Tony McGrath  
Director

Sydney  
31 January 2018



## STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

YEAR ENDED 31 OCTOBER	2017 (\$'000)	2016 (\$'000)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Broadcast	229,284	222,004
Other (note 2)	170,807	169,364
	<b>400,091</b>	<b>391,368</b>
<b>EXPENSE</b>		
Event, Game and Sponsorship	(109,069)	(99,097)
Football	(45,271)	(47,033)
Community and Player Welfare	(16,459)	(17,075)
Administration	(28,266)	(30,297)
Clubs	(140,922)	(143,835)
States, Affiliates and New Zealand Rugby League	(31,838)	(29,603)
Development	(35,134)	(30,809)
Depreciation and Amortisation	(2,491)	(2,250)
Finance Costs	(87)	(18)
Gain on sale of investments	3,025	-
	<b>(406,512)</b>	<b>(400,017)</b>
<b>DEFICIT</b>	<b>(6,421)</b>	<b>(8,649)</b>
Income tax expense	-	-
<b>NET DEFICIT</b>	<b>(6,421)</b>	<b>(8,649)</b>
Other comprehensive income for the period	-	-
<b>TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE MEMBERS OF ARLC LIMITED</b>	<b>(6,421)</b>	<b>(8,649)</b>

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

Consolidated net deficit improved by \$2.2m to \$6.4m.

#### CONSOLIDATED REVENUE UP BY \$17.2M TO \$391.4M DUE TO:

Consolidated revenue up by \$8.7m to \$400.1m due to:

- » Consolidated Broadcast revenue up by \$7.3m due to additional higher usage of broadcast contra
- » Consolidated Other revenue up by \$1.4m primarily made up of the following:
  - Increases in Game receipts (\$1.7m), Sponsorship and wagering (\$3.2m), Government income (\$0.5m) and Digital revenue (\$0.8m)
  - Offset by a decrease in Merchandising royalties (\$0.9m), Financing income (\$1.5m) and Sundry income (\$2.4m)

#### CONSOLIDATED EXPENDITURE INCREASED BY \$6.5M TO \$406.5M. THE MAIN REASONS FOR THIS WERE:

- » Increases in Event, game and sponsorship (\$10.0m) and Development (\$4.3m)
- » Offset by decreases in Clubs \$2.9m (due to a reduction in loan impairments and revenue incentives program partly offset by participation payment increase), Administration (\$2.0m) and Football (\$1.8) and the Gain on sale of investments (\$3.0m)

The accompanying notes form an integral part of this Statement of Consolidated Comprehensive Income.

## STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL POSITION

YEAR ENDED 31 OCTOBER	2017 (\$'000)	2016 (\$'000)
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	98,895	134,312
Trade receivables	21,977	19,245
Financial assets	-	-
Prepayments and other receivables	33,169	47,402
Inventory	-	84
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>147,041</b>	<b>201,043</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Intangibles	5,614	1,883
Property, plant and equipment	19,646	20,727
Other receivables	54,485	25,014
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>79,745</b>	<b>47,624</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>226,786</b>	<b>248,677</b>
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Trade payables	19,179	14,952
Other payables	139,876	158,099
Provisions	5,127	4,811
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>164,182</b>	<b>177,862</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Other payables	10,345	12,078
Provisions	1,181	1,228
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>11,526</b>	<b>13,306</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>175,708</b>	<b>191,168</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>51,078</b>	<b>57,499</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Reserves	2,228	2,228
Retained surplus	48,850	55,271
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>51,078</b>	<b>57,499</b>

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL POSITION

Consolidated total assets decreased by \$21.9m to \$226.8m. The movement in total assets principally comprised:

- » A decrease in consolidated cash and cash equivalents of \$42.4m
- » Offset by increases in Other receivables (Advances to NRL Clubs) (\$24.0m) and Intangibles (Digital Asset) (\$3.8m)

Consolidated total liabilities decreased by \$15.5m to \$175.7m. The movement in total liabilities principally comprised:

- » A decrease in consolidated other payables of \$20.0m (Movement in deferred revenue through release of prepayment on current 2013-17 broadcast rights agreement, partly offset by \$50m cash advance on 2018-22 broadcast rights agreement)
- » Offset by an increase in consolidated trade payables of \$4.2m

The accompanying notes form an integral part of this Statement of Consolidated Financial Position.

## STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED CASH FLOWS

YEAR ENDED 31 OCTOBER	2017 (\$'000)	2016 (\$'000)
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
Receipts from ordinary operations	397,236	457,842
Payments to suppliers and employees	(287,394)	(273,238)
Payments to Clubs	(155,194)	(144,083)
Interest received	1,509	3,001
Interest paid	(87)	-
<b>NET CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>43,930</b>	<b>43,522</b>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>		
Payments for property plant and equipment	(1,357)	(3,332)
Payments for intangibles	(4,159)	(550)
Issue of loans	(300)	(4,342)
Repayment of loans	7,329	-
Conversion of short term investments to cash	-	54,627
<b>NET CASH FLOWS FROM/(USED IN) INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>1,513</b>	<b>46,403</b>
NET INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS	(42,417)	89,925
CASH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PERIOD	134,312	44,387
<b>CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT THE END OF THE PERIOD</b>	<b>91,895</b>	<b>134,312</b>

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED CASH FLOWS

There was a net decrease in cash holdings of the consolidated entity, during the year, totalling \$42.4m.

The major reasons for the decrease in cash during the year were:

- » -\$80m A large cash P&L deficit in FY17 as a result of the reduced cash broadcast receipts compared to revenue recognised
- » -\$21m of Participation payments made to clubs in advance from 2018-22 rights
- » +\$50m Broadcast advance received from Fox in relation to 2018-22 rights
- » +\$10m of timing differences due to early payments and some deferred cash expenses to 2018

The accompanying notes form an integral part of this Statement of Consolidated Cash Flows.

## STATEMENT OF CONSOLIDATED CHANGES IN EQUITY

	Reserves (\$'000)	Retained Surplus (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)
<b>As at 1 November 2016</b>	2,228	55,271	57,499
Net deficit for the year	-	(6,421)	(6,421)
<b>As at 31 October 2017</b>	<b>2,228</b>	<b>48,850</b>	<b>51,078</b>
	Reserves (\$'000)	Retained Surplus (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)
<b>As at 1 November 2015</b>	2,228	63,920	66,148
Net deficit for the year	-	(8,649)	(8,649)
<b>As at 31 October 2016</b>	<b>2,228</b>	<b>55,271</b>	<b>57,499</b>

The accompanying notes form an integral part of this Statement of Consolidated Changes in Equity.

## NOTES TO THE CONCISE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Year ended 31 October 2017

#### 1. BASIS OF PREPARATION OF THE CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT

The requirements of AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports* do not have mandatory applicability to Australian Rugby League Commission Limited. However, the Directors of the Company have prepared the concise financial report, in accordance with the presentation and disclosure requirements of AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports* for distribution to the members. This financial report does not substitute nor is it intended to replace the mandatory requirements applicable to Australian Rugby League Commission Limited under the *Corporations Act 2001*.

The financial statements and specific disclosures required by AASB 1039 have been derived from the consolidated entity's full financial report for the financial year. Other information included in the concise financial report is consistent with the consolidated entity's full financial report. The concise financial report does not, and cannot be expected to, provide as full an understanding of the financial performance, financial position, and financing and investing activities of the consolidated entity as the full financial report. A full financial report is available to the members, upon request to the Company.

This concise financial report has been prepared using the historical cost convention. All amounts in the concise financial report are in Australian dollars.

Where necessary, comparative information has been reclassified to achieve consistency in disclosure with current financial year amounts. A full description of accounting policies adopted by the consolidated entity may be found in the consolidated entity's full financial report.

## 2. REVENUE

YEAR ENDED 31 OCTOBER	2017 (\$'000)	2016 (\$'000)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Broadcast Revenue	229,284	222,004
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>		
Game Receipts	54,014	52,319
Sponsorship and wagering	73,006	69,756
Merchandise Royalties	13,831	14,718
Government income	11,546	11,030
Digital Revenue	6,583	5,826
Financing Income	1,509	3,001
Sundry Income	10,318	12,714
<b>TOTAL OTHER INCOME</b>	<b>170,807</b>	<b>169,364</b>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>400,091</b>	<b>391,368</b>

## 3. EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO BALANCE SHEET DATE

On 2 November 2017, National Rugby League Ltd reached agreement with the Rugby League Players Association on the terms for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with players covering the period 1 November 2018 – 31 October 2022. On 15 December 2017, National Rugby League Ltd completed the sale of its one share in Titans Rugby League Pty Ltd to Wildkelly Pty Ltd.

There has not arisen in the interval between the end of the financial period and the date of this report any other item, transaction or event of a material and unusual nature likely, in the opinion of the Directors of the organisation, to affect significantly the operations of the organisation and the state of affairs in future financial years.

## Directors' Declaration

In accordance with a resolution of the Directors of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited, we state that:

In the opinion of the Directors:

(a) the financial statements and notes of the consolidated entity has been prepared in accordance with AASB 1039 Concise Financial Reports; and

(b) there are reasonable grounds to believe that the consolidated entity will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

On behalf of the Board



John Grant  
Chairman



Tony McGrath  
Director

Sydney  
31 January 2018



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## Independent auditor's report to the Members of the Australian Rugby League Commission Limited

### Report on the concise financial report

#### OPINION

We have audited the concise financial report of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited, which comprises the consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 October 2017, the consolidated statement of comprehensive income, consolidated statement of changes in equity and consolidated statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and related notes, derived from the financial report of Australian Rugby League Commission Limited for the year ended 31 October 2017. The concise financial report also includes discussion and analysis and the directors' declaration. The concise financial report does not contain all the disclosures required by the Australian Accounting Standards.

In our opinion, the accompanying concise financial report, including the discussion and analysis and directors' declaration, complies with Accounting Standard AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports*.

#### BASIS FOR OPINION

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Concise Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Company in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of the *Corporations Act 2001* and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's *APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the concise financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

#### CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT

The concise financial report does not contain all the disclosures required by Australian Accounting Standards. Reading the concise financial report and the auditor's report thereon, therefore, is not a substitute for reading the financial report and the auditor's report thereon.

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#### THE FINANCIAL REPORT AND OUR REPORT THEREON

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on the financial report in our report dated 31 January 2018.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIRECTORS FOR THE CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT

The directors of the Company are responsible for the preparation of the concise financial report in accordance with Accounting Standard AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports*, and the *Corporations Act 2001*, and for such internal controls as the directors determine are necessary to enable the preparation of the concise financial report.

#### AUDITOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE AUDIT OF THE CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on whether the concise financial report complies, in all material respects, with AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports* and whether the discussion and analysis complies with AASB 1039 *Concise Financial Reports* based on our procedures, which were conducted in accordance with Auditing Standard ASA 810 *Engagements to Report on Summary Financial Statements*.

Ernst & Young

Christopher George

Partner  
Sydney  
31 January 2018

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## MESSAGE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) thanks all of our partner national sporting organisations (NSOs) for your continued hard work and commitment to excellence. All of you understand innately the importance of sport in Australian life. It's much more than a source of national identity and pride, it's the fabric that binds us together – a common language for all, with multiplier benefits in health, education, social cohesion and the economy.

There were many great sporting events to celebrate during the course of last year – the launch of both the AFL Women's competition and the National Netball League with prime-time TV coverage, our most successful winter sports season ever on the world stage, and fairytale victories against the odds for Cronulla in the NRL and the Western Bulldogs in the AFL.

Last year's Olympic and Paralympic Games underscored the challenge however for Australia in retaining its status as one of the world's pre-eminent sporting nations, given rising competition from developed and developing nations alike. We must keep innovating, being bold and willing to change both on and off the field if we are to succeed, not just in Olympic and Paralympic sports but across the sporting spectrum.

We appreciate the willingness of NSOs to embrace this challenge. We commend athletes for their dedicated commitment to training ahead of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and, further ahead, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

One of the most important long-term challenges for our country is to help our children be physically active, to participate in sport and enjoy its lifelong benefits.

The ASC's Sporting Schools program has now reached more than 5,600 primary schools around Australia and has already begun a targeted program for high schools. It is vital to ensure physical education is re-emphasised in the national school curriculum. To this end, the ASC has been doing ground breaking work on physical literacy for children and youth and we look forward to rolling this out nationally in the year ahead.

As the national leadership organisation for sport in Australia, the ASC was delighted when our new Minister for Sport, the Hon. Greg Hunt recently proposed a National Sports Plan, the preparation of which will be led by the ASC. This will create, for the first time, a comprehensive blueprint for Australian sport. It's an outstanding initiative and we thank the Minister for his leadership and vision. We hope all NSOs take the opportunity to contribute their views to the plan.

Most of you will know that this year the ASC welcomed a new CEO, Kate Palmer, a talented sports leader, who has quickly built excellent relationships with sports and is embracing the challenges ahead with an inspiring enthusiasm.

Finally, I say a big thank you to the army of volunteers – parents, coaches, officials and administrators – who contribute their time and services for the good of Australian sport. You bring community strength, passion and great value to the identity, productivity, cohesion and health of our nation.

The ASC wishes you every success in the year ahead. We look forward to working closely with you for the common good of Australian sport.

**JOHN WYLIE AM**  
Chair – Australian Sports Commission



# OUR PARTNERS





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