

## Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital Questions on Notice

### 1. What are the NRL's considerations for selecting major rugby league event locations?

The NRL takes into consideration 4 elements when selecting major rugby league event locations:

- a. Athlete facilities: for example, appropriate dressing sheds, hot and cold recovery areas, medical rooms. We believe world-class athletes deserve world-class facilities.
- b. Fan experience: for example, food and beverage outlets, comfortable seating out of the weather, accessibility, transport options, (related both to getting to the location and getting to the venue). We believe our fans deserve a world-class venue experience for our premium events.
- c. Commerciality: for example, destination fees (the fee that the State based Tourism agency would pay to secure the content in their State), venue hire terms and a world-class facility that helps the venue hirer generate a strong commercial return.
- d. Strategic Alignment: for example, growth areas where we can acquire new fans v rugby league heartland where we can reward loyal fans.

### 2. How does Canberra stack up against these considerations?

Unfortunately, Canberra's Stadium does not meet expectations on a), b) and c) above. We do note that Canberra serves a region of loyal rugby league fans who frequently travel to see premium rugby league matches, so it is disappointing that the Canberra Stadium does not meet the standards required for major events to be hosted in Canberra.

Please see our submission for an in-depth assessment of the elements listed above.

### 3. Given the current state of the National Capital's infrastructure, does the NRL consider Canberra a possible location for major events like internationals, State of Origin and Indigenous All Stars games?

Not currently. Please see the below excerpts from our submission as to why:

*"As the heart of Australia and as the nation's capital, Canberra should have the capacity to host nationally significant NRL events such as Internationals and the Indigenous All Stars. However, the current stadium infrastructure, amenities, and location make it impossible to achieve this objective"...*

*"From an NRL major event perspective, the venue no longer meets best practice in terms of fan experience, athlete experience, high performance facilities, connectivity*

*and technology, transportation and location. Despite the natural alignment to host significant national matches in Canberra, the lack of significant investment in stadium infrastructure has made the region uncompetitive for hosting such events”...*

*“In representative rugby league, it's crucial to provide players with superior high-performance facilities that enable them to prepare before and recover after matches. This is considered a non-negotiable aspect for players to perform at their best and represent the nation effectively. To achieve this, adequate facilities like a warm-up area, recovery wet area with hot and cold options, medical room, team meeting room, property room, player strapping room, and drug testing room are essential. These facilities should cater to both home and away sides and be gender-inclusive, providing the same quality and quantity of facilities for both male and female athletes. These facilities should allow for a seamless transition with minimal barriers and be spacious enough to accommodate 30+ athletes comfortably. Unfortunately, GIO Stadium Canberra lacks these facilities, either entirely or in quality and quantity and with the current lack of female facilities, scheduling premier female and male events in Canberra has become unfeasible for the NRL.*

*Across all major events, the NRL focuses on fan experience to drive attendance. A venue must offer various elements such as comfortable seating with optimal sightlines, a range of food and beverage options, top-tier corporate facilities, advanced technology (audio, big screen, Wi-Fi, etc.), accessible amenities (parking, seating, restrooms, transportation), and complete digital integration for an engaging game day experience. However, GIO Stadium Canberra falls short in several areas that are critical to hosting an NRL Major event. Specifically, it has inadequate connectivity and technology, subpar corporate facilities compared to other venues, and insufficient undercover accessible seating, leading fans to opt for watching the game from home instead of enduring the discomfort of a cold and wet stadium seat. Match attendee access is also compromised when approaching the venue and once inside, concerns are held by both the NRL and Canberra Raiders in respect to patron safety and satisfaction.*

*In terms of enhancing fan experience, the location of a venue and its accessibility through public transportation are crucial factors. Modern stadium planning considers the entire match day experience, including pre-match, during the game, and post-match activities. Fans' enjoyment of the event, their accessibility to dining and entertainment, and how they travel to and from the venue all impact their overall experience, which may influence their attendance at future events. Unfortunately, the location of GIO Stadium Canberra in Bruce, away from the city centre and any active commercial precinct, makes it difficult to provide a satisfactory end-to-end fan experience, even with reliable transportation networks.*

*Another essential element closely linked to fan experience is the commercial opportunity a venue provides. This encompasses the ability to sell tickets within the stadium and the premium corporate hospitality offerings available. If the fan experience does not meet a certain standard, it can be challenging to sell out events and obtain the best possible commercial return, particularly in terms of premium corporate hospitality. The NRL will always consider the commerciality of the venue when assessing its suitability for hosting major events.*

*When evaluating minimum venue requirements for NRL Major Events, the elements needed for an appropriate level of fan and athlete experience are critical. Unfortunately, GIO Stadium Canberra no longer meets these requirements. While some issues may be remedied through a stadium redevelopment, the current venue location will always be a significant challenge."*

**4. Will upgrades to GIO Stadium in Bruce guarantee more major rugby league events for Canberra?**

Potentially, but this will depend on the extent of the upgrades or whether it is a complete rebuild. We would still need to take into consideration the 4 elements listed in question 1 and as part of this assessment. GIO Stadium would be compared to similar sized venues across Australia including, CommBank Stadium in Parramatta, Queensland Country Bank Stadium in Townsville and AAMI Park in Melbourne.

Importantly the aforementioned venues are within walking distance of each city's CBD which further enhances the fans overall event experience as they can easily go to a restaurant or bar before and/or after the match and public transport accessibility is vastly superior in CBDs when compared to suburban locations. For these reasons we strongly advocate a new stadium for Canberra should be built in the city's CBD.

**5. Would a new National Stadium in Civic guarantee more major rugby league events for Canberra? If so, what kinds of events?**

Most likely, yes. The type of events Canberra could attract will depend on the size of the venue, but if a new 30,000 seat stadium was built in Civic, Canberra would be likely to secure matches such as Indigenous All Stars and Internationals, Test Matches and Women's State of Origin.

We would, however, still need to take into account elements such as commerciality, such as destination fees paid by the government to secure the content and the new Canberra Stadium would need to offer competitive venue hire terms in comparison to other venues in Australia of similar size.

6. What would be the likely benefits to Canberra as our National Capital if a state-of-the-art stadium were built in Civic?

Our submission speaks to this point, however, please see below specific excerpts:

*"... hosting a major sporting event, specifically an NRL Major event, highlights the tourism potential of a location. The economic and tourism benefits of major events are well-documented. They attract visitors, encourage overnight stays, and when held repeatedly in the same location, can promote habitual travel. A major event can be utilised by a nation, state, or territory to promote the location more widely. It will attract new visitors while also enticing previous visitors to return and explore the location further, beyond the sporting event itself. Additionally, the event is broadcasted to a global audience, showcasing packed stadiums, iconic landmarks, and unique offerings".*

*"A national stadium that showcases national significance should be located in a central business district. Best practice planning for modern stadiums involves integrating them into an active precinct, with proximity to commercial hubs and multiple transportation options. This allows for maximum utilisation of the services the CBD has to offer, including accommodation, transportation/parking, hospitality, and shopping. Not only does this improve the fan experience, but it generates additional economic benefits for the city.*

*In terms of business and community benefits, locating a stadium in the CBD can provide several advantages, including but not limited to:*

- Increased revenue from pre- and post-match spending on hospitality and other activities*
- Improved access to public transportation to attend matches and events, as existing networks often prioritise connectivity to the CBD*
- Enhanced media coverage and a better image of the location on TV and other platforms*
- Improved accessibility to the airport and the ability to walk to most hotels, thus enhancing the visitor experience*
- Improved road networks around the venue, resulting in reduced congestion during events*
- More parking options due to the proximity to the CBD*
- Serves as a major catalyst for CBD development and revitalization*
- Greater opportunities to facilitate new and alternative uses of the venue to maximise utilisation*
- Enhanced visibility of current and former sporting role models, either in person or through public art (e.g. Laurie Daley and Mal Meninga statues)*

**7. What kinds of events have you delivered to other 20,000-30,000 seat stadiums in Australia, and what have been the economic impact of these events?**

As a standard practice, we measure the economic impact of overseas, intrastate and interstate visitors to NRL events, (so not the total economic impact of the event).

Please see below recent examples of the kind of events we have delivered in 20,000 – 30,000 seat stadiums and the visitation/tourism economic impact at each event:

- 2023 Women's State of Origin Game 1 in Sydney – visitation/tourism economic impact of \$2,302,724
- 2023 Women's State of Origin Game 2 in Townsville – visitation/tourism economic impact of \$1,965,435
- 2022 All Stars Game in Sydney – visitation/tourism economic impact of \$6,751,829

**8. In its current assessment of Canberra's facilities, does the NRL view Canberra more as a regional town or a major capital city?**

The NRL would view Canberra's stadium infrastructure as more representative of a regional town/city, as opposed to what would be expected of a nation's capital.

**9. What is the effect of the current state and location of Bruce Stadium on the viability of the Canberra Raiders as a team and as a business based in Canberra?**

Our submission and the Inquiry hearing speaks to this point, in terms of it making it an increasingly more difficult situation for the Canberra Raiders, however, please see below specific excerpts:

NRL Submission:

*"This is a similar situation for the Canberra Raiders. They have an impressive history both on and off the playing field, six Grand Final appearances in 41 seasons (including 3 Premierships) and unmatched innovation in terms of sports presentation (e.g., iconic Viking Clap). However, the Club cannot realise their full potential (or exhibit their regional pride) because of the standard of GIO Stadium Canberra, the only venue they can use for their home fixtures"...*

*"GIO Stadium Canberra has been home to the Canberra Raiders since 1990 and has served the region adequately, despite originally opening in the late 1970's as an Athletics meet venue within the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) precinct. Unfortunately, the venue no longer meets a best practice standard for stadium and sporting event delivery and infrastructure revitalisation is needed. Consequently, the competitive position of Canberra as a possible sporting event destination has been impacted, and the deteriorating facilities will further affect the sustainability of the Canberra Raiders that use the venue for their NRL Premiership and NRLW Premiership games."*

*"Match attendee access is also compromised when approaching the venue and once inside, concerns are held by both the NRL and Canberra Raiders in respect to patron safety and satisfaction."*

Inquiry hearing (Jaymes Boland-Rudder):

*"I touched on this in terms of the sporting infrastructure being good at a grassroots level, but not as good at that elite level. And what it means for Canberra is missing out on major events. But it also means for a Brumbies game or a Raiders game that with the poorer amenity for fans, you start to see a flow-on in terms of a lower average spend at the venue and also where it's located. Local businesses don't get to benefit from an event week in, week out, whereas in other parts of Australia—you look at the sporting infrastructure in Melbourne or the new CommBank Stadium in Sydney or the new QCBS in Townsville. What we see is that the week in, week out premierships content has seen greater crowds, greater attendances. But more importantly for the businesses that surround those stadia that are centrally located, the local businesses are also sharing in that and there's greater patronage of restaurants, of bars and increased occupancy rates at hotels. So we like to think of sport not only as playing an important role in uniting communities and giving them the escapism from the challenges of everyday life but also as a stimulus for local economies. And it's an opportunity that I think Canberra could hopefully embrace in the coming years".*

*"Yes. I was looking at the Raiders attendance and it was quite interesting. They draw from primarily southern New South Wales. Sorry: about two-thirds of their fans who attend a game are local Canberrans, and then about one-third are drawing from Wagga, the south coast—if you drew a three-hour circle around. So they're doing a good job there. The overnight average stay is quite low. There's an unusually large proportion of people doing a day trip as opposed to staying overnight. If you compare that data to Townsville, for example, what you're seeing in Townsville—I would use a four-hour radius for them because Cairns and Mackay are about a four-hour drive—is that those people are choosing to stay. More are coming to the games but they're also choosing to stay overnight. And it's that ease of staying in the city without the additional, 'I've got to shuttle out to the outskirts of suburban areas back into the city'. And the average spend is lower here in Canberra versus up in Townsville. Again, it's driven by—if you're not having to shuttle, you're more likely to go to the local restaurant or to the local bar and have a pre- or post-match meal or celebratory drink with your friends or your family who you've come to the game with."*

*"Attracting players: it's a really great question. It's something we've discussed with the Raiders quite a bit. They do a very good job at attracting good players, and they foster them. And I think it's part of the culture that they've built out as a club as opposed to the infrastructure. So what are the things that attract players, and the drivers? The athlete themselves wants to be part of a great culture and a great coaching system."*

*Tick: Ricky Stuart is absolutely brilliant. They want to have access to great-quality infrastructure and play in the best venues. The Raiders have a really good high-performance facility—and again, credit to the New South Wales and ACT governments for co-investing in that with the Raiders. They have an inferior ground, stadium, versus other stadiums. So it's a pass mark. The other driver is families. If you say to your partner—your wife or your husband, as the NRLW teams take on as well—'Hey, I want to move to this area because of my work,' they want to go through, 'Are there good schools?' Yes. 'Are there good hospitals?' Yes. 'Are there things for the kids to do?' Sort of—not really.*

*So in terms of attracting the best quality athletes, it's challenging at the moment down here. And it could be enhanced by greater sporting infrastructure, because the greater sporting infrastructure will mean that there's more content for the families to go and watch, because they're sporting families. They're going to go and watch the Brumbies; they're going to go and watch the A-League team if the A-League team comes down. They're also going to want to watch great concerts and other pieces of entertainment. And at the moment, no promoter is looking at putting a concert on down here, because it's not good-quality infrastructure. You don't have the protection from weather. Whereas promoters all of a sudden have been looking at putting on concerts in Townsville, where they'd never previously looked. Why? Because you've got a great experience through good quality infrastructure. That actually has a tangible impact on the decision-making of an athlete because it means that there's a better experience in that regional community for their family."*