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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

29 October 2012

Dear Secretary

The Contribution of Sport to Indigenous Wellbeing and Mentoring – Australian Rugby Union

Australian Rugby Union (ARU) appreciates the opportunity to briefly contribute to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into the contribution of Sport to Indigenous Wellbeing and Mentoring.

Indigenous participation in Rugby

Rugby has a long tradition of engagement with Indigenous communities throughout Australia. From Wallaby greats like the Ella brothers to the tireless work of the Lloyd McDermott Rugby Development Team (LMRDT), the contribution of Indigenous people to Rugby has been felt across the Game – from the grassroots to the elite level.

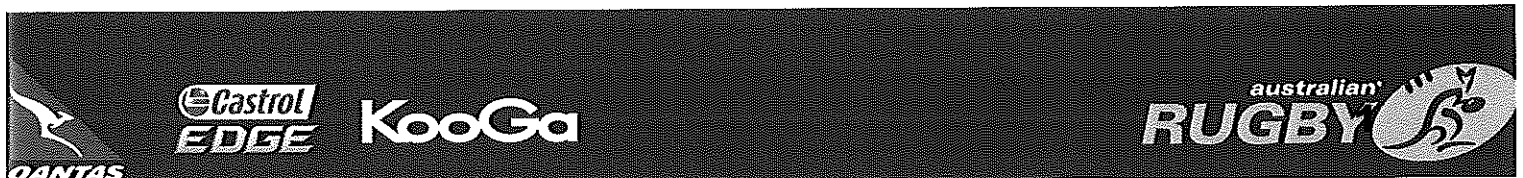
In particular, over the last 20 years ARU and the LMRDT have developed a strong partnership, which has helped to deliver excellent outcomes for Indigenous communities across Australia.

However, while Australian Rugby has always valued and benefitted from the skills, knowledge, experience and culture of Indigenous people, it is clear that Rugby has a greater role to play – and more work to do – in improving the quality of life in Indigenous communities around Australia.

Recognising the importance of the role Rugby can play, ARU along with the LMRDT has committed, through our *Indigenous Rugby Plan 2012 – 2016* (Indigenous Rugby Plan), to work in partnership with Indigenous communities and organisations and other stakeholders to use Rugby as a vehicle to improve the employment, education and health outcomes of Indigenous people and their communities. In addition to the Indigenous Rugby Plan ARU's has recently begun the process of adopting and implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Through the Indigenous Rugby Plan and proposed RAP ARU is attempting to demonstrate how sport can be used to remove barriers and create genuine opportunities for Indigenous individuals, promote reconciliation in Australia and contribute to the Government's *Closing the Gap* targets.

While Rugby has always promoted the involvement of Indigenous people in the Game and had a positive impact on the lives of many Indigenous players, the Indigenous Rugby Plan provides the platform for ARU to build stronger partnerships in a more coordinated and strategic way in an attempt to make a lasting and more meaningful contribution to Indigenous communities.



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The Indigenous Rugby Plan is framed around four pillars of growth, education, delivery and services and has as its vision to 'engage Indigenous Australians with opportunities to enhance their lives through a lifelong association with Rugby Union'.

In support of the Indigenous Rugby Plan, ARU is working in partnership with government, LMRDT and our Member Unions to successfully deliver a range of programs and events that utilise Rugby as a positive influence in the lives of young Indigenous people including the *No School, No Play* (NSNP) program and the Annual Under-18s Indigenous National Championships and the Ella Sevens competitions.

In addition to this, two of ARU's Member Unions, NSW Rugby Union and Queensland Rugby Union, have recently established *Learn. Earn. Legend!* programs.

The success of each of these programs is due in large part to the time and energy devoted by Rugby's many Indigenous ambassadors, ranging from high profile Rugby players, both current and former, like Wallabies Kurtley Beale and Women's Sevens player, Bo de la Cruz, to business and community leaders.

Through these Programs and the work that occurs throughout Rugby from local clubs to the elite level, the contribution Sport can make to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring is clear.

Sport can be the Difference

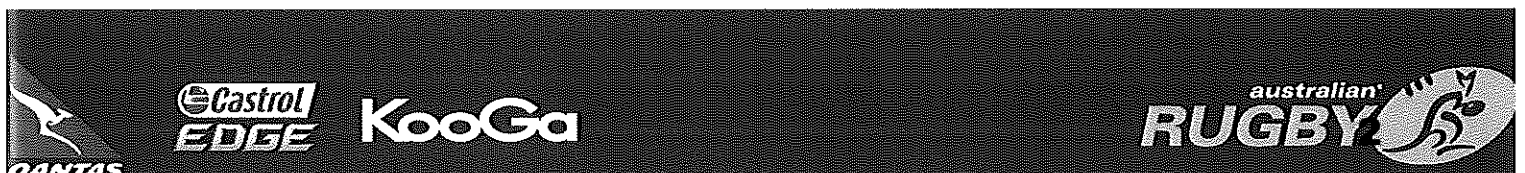
The experience of ARU and LMRDT is very simply that sport has the power to transform the lives of Indigenous people, young Indigenous people in particular.

The NSNP program is a clear example of the positive difference sport can make to the lives of Indigenous people. The NSNP initiative aims to build strong partnerships between sporting organisations, parents and communities of secondary school students and improve attendance rates for students.

Australian Rugby Union together with the LMRDT delivered NSNP Programs for under-16s and under-18s students in 2012. In total, over 200 students were exposed to the Program in 2012. Among a range of initiatives to engage the students, the under-18s of were given the opportunity to travel to Alice Springs to play Rugby and participate in education, health, and cultural activities. This year the team visited Desert Park which provided additional cultural awareness and appreciation.

In addition to the extremely positive response to the Program from headmasters, principles, Aboriginal Education Officers, teachers, parents and, of course, the students themselves, the Program also had a dramatic and measureable impact on school attendance rates. The schools involved confirmed that the attendance rate for students in the Program were as high as 90 per cent, far in excess of the national average.

Through Programs like NSNP and Learn Earn Legend, we're seeing involvement in sport act as a vehicle for transformational change in the lives of young people. Furthermore, this change is not only positive and lasting it's also measurable.



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Lloyd McDermott Rugby Development Team

The work of the LMRDT over the past 20 years is also indicative of the power of sport to be transformational.

The LMRDT primarily assists young Indigenous people in developing their Rugby skills and then using those skills as a means of personal development to assist in securing a future for themselves as adults.

The LMRDT objectives are:

- To develop, promote and encourage the recreational and competitive sport of Rugby Union in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Community through the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.
- To promote and hold either alone or jointly with any other Associations, Club, Authority, Company or person, Competitions, tournaments and matches and to offer, give or contribute towards the provision of prizes, medals, awards, pennants or certificates in respect thereof.
- To encourage the professional and career development of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who participate in the Team's activities.
- To encourage the development opportunities for the personal growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth through the activities of the organisation.

The work done by LMRDT has taught thousands of young men and women about the game of Rugby and more importantly about healthy living, fitness, life skills and the importance of a good education.

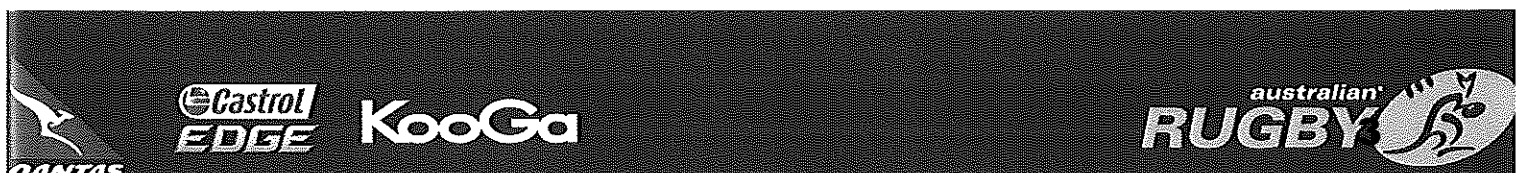
In particular, the work the LMRDT undertakes in connecting young Indigenous men with schooling opportunities is remarkable. In 2011/12 alone, more than 30 young men have been introduced to schools and provided with scholarships through the LMRDT to some of the country's best schools.

Continued engagement

Importantly, for many of these young people participating in Programs like NSNP or one of the Lloyd McDermott development teams is only the start of their engagement with Rugby. The aspiration of ARU and the LMRDT is to promote a lifelong association with the Game for the young people who come through these programs.

As a result, ARU and the LMRDT look to promote ongoing engagement with the young people who have left our programs. Whether it's through social media, involvement in club Rugby or going on to work for a Rugby organisation, we have found that promoting sustained engagement is the most important factor in creating lasting change.

In particular, effective mentoring is an important method of ensuring ongoing support for people who've progressed through formal programs.



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Engaging young women

The capacity for sports to positively influence the lives of young Indigenous men is clear. However, the major professional sports, Rugby included, have traditionally been less successful in extending these same opportunities to young Indigenous women.

While there are a range of programs aimed at engaging young Indigenous men in sport and physical activity, young Indigenous women have traditionally been limited in the choice of sporting opportunities available. As a result, too many young Indigenous women are falling through the gaps and missing out on the transformative power of sport. This means they're missing out not only on the obvious health benefits of regular physical activity but also the important social benefits and the values that go along with team sports like greater self-confidence, resilience and respect.

Promoting opportunities to engage these young women must be a priority for all sports in future. For Rugby, the inclusion of Sevens in the Olympics creates a unique opportunity to build on the success of our indigenous programs to-date and grow the Game beyond Rugby's traditional areas of support, including among young Indigenous women.

Being an Olympic sport also provides Sevens with a strong point of difference to sports that predominantly target men as Sevens can now provide a high performance pathway for talented female Indigenous athletes.

Australian Rugby Union is planning to invest significantly in Sevens and in growing Indigenous participation in the Game and, in the lead-up to the Rio Olympics, will attempt to utilise Women's Sevens as a vehicle to regularly engage young Indigenous women in sport and physical recreation.

Conclusion

Sport has the obvious potential to contribute in a meaningful and lasting way to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring. It is clear that on any reckoning we need to be doing more as a community to ensure that the some opportunities are being extended to Indigenous people that other members of the community enjoy.

Sport is a perfect vehicle to promote these opportunities.

The power of sport to bring people together and transcend traditional cultural, racial and religious barriers is too often overlooked by political and business leaders. Indeed, sport is almost unique in its ability to promote the universal values of inclusion, equality and fairness. Sport has always helped to define Australia's national ethos and it should also be fundamental in our efforts to achieve better outcomes in our efforts, as a community, to overcome Indigenous disadvantage.

Yours Faithfully

Ian Alker
General Manager, Community Rugby

