



National Rugby League  
Annual Report 2019









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# 2019 Highlights



## Roosters

Win the NRL Telstra Premiership.  
First team in 25 years to win  
back-to-back premierships



## Broncos

Win NRL Holden Women's  
Premiership. Back-to-back  
winners





**9.5 million**

Viewers across the Holden State of Origins series



**3.25 million**

Viewers watched Holden State of Origin Game One



**818,000 viewers**

Women's Holden State of Origin – 2019 most-watched female sporting event on television



**1,615,382**

Total audience for Holden Women's Premiership





## \$3.1 million

Raised for Mark Hughes  
Foundation during Beanies for  
Brain Cancer Round



## Belinda Sharpe

First female referee in  
NRL Telstra Premiership



## Seven new

NRL Hall of Fame inductees



## Cameron Smith

First player to play 400  
NRL matches



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# \$500m

NRL became a \$500m business in 2019

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# Up 1.23%

National participation rates up 1.23%

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# 27 venues

NRL Telstra Premiership matches held across 27 different venues in Australia and New Zealand

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# 3.9% growth

NRL Clubs (YOY) growth up 3.9% across all 16 clubs





## Message from the Chairman

Peter V'landys AM

It is an honour and privilege to be appointed chairman of the Australian Rugby League Commission (ARLC).

Rugby league is more than a game.

Only in rugby league, can thousands of people from diverse backgrounds and views fill a suburban hill in unity.

Our game brings communities and cultures together.

It brings people together.

I raise this first because we should be proud of what rugby league contributes to the social fabric of Australian society.

I come to this role as someone who owes so much to rugby league.

As a migrant child from Greece, with limited English, I saw rugby league as an opportunity to fit in and make friends.

So, I decided to play.

Without playing rugby league my life at school and integration into Australian society would have been so much harder.



Rugby league allowed me to be included and to this day it remains a game of inclusion. We are, to paraphrase, the greatest game for all.

Now, it is my turn to give back to rugby league – as Chair of the ARLC.

First, my thanks to outgoing Chair Peter Beattie on the outstanding contribution he made to our game during his tenure.

Peter stands down with the game in a stronger position than when he started. The birth of Magic Round, expansion of State of Origin, the growth of the women's game, expanding the international game and the introduction of the No-Fault Stand Down to protect the integrity of the sport will forever be legacies of his leadership.

I look forward to both growing and strengthening our game further next season and beyond.

My first meeting as chair was a two-day off-site in Penrith at the end of October where we mapped out the Commission's top priorities for 2020.

It is our focus to build on the strong surplus – which again exceeded expectations – and secure the game's revenues long term. We will seek to grow our asset pool, ensuring alternative revenue streams for generations to come. We are also preparing to negotiate the next broadcast rights deal.

Grassroots and country rugby league will become an even greater priority as we look to increase participation and bring more people together.

Grassroots rugby league is the foundation of our great game and with a strong surplus we can invest more back into participation.

Suburban rugby league is the backbone of the NRL and it will be my laser focus to seek funding to upgrade our suburban grounds.

This year, the Commission will make a determination on the optimum footprint for our game – rest assured, no Sydney club will be forced to relocate.

We will continue to evolve our world's best practice methods in dealing with head injuries and work with global leaders in the field to make our game even safer for our players today.

And we will innovate.

Above all, the NRL is in the entertainment business. Television viewers and fans at the game want to be entertained. I am committed to making rugby league even less predictable. We will continue to look at ways to innovate so we can better showcase the remarkable talents of our best players.

Our Commission is a “can-do” Commission and no challenge will ever be taken off the table in season 2020.

2018-19 was a ground-breaking year for rugby league and for the Commission.

We launched Magic Round. For the first time in history, every single game in one town, at one ground. We exceeded every target set for the round and we look forward to growing on that foundation in Round 8 next season. We took State of Origin to Perth for the first time and broke the ground record for Optus Stadium at the time. An outstanding achievement for our game. Next season we will look to do the same in Adelaide.

We welcomed the first of Sydney’s new stadia, Bankwest Stadium at Parramatta. We thank the NSW Government for their \$2 billion investment in three new state-of-the-art rugby league stadia in Sydney. This stadia will revolutionise the game-day experience for our fans.

The NRL takes providing a return on taxpayer investment seriously and we look forward to providing rugby league content that injects new money into the NSW economy.

We secured a strong financial agreement with the NSW Government to keep the Premiership Grand Final in Sydney during the construction phase. This deal will allow the game to put more money back into grassroots rugby league – a win for everyone.

Our competition was as close as it has ever been in 2019. It took until the 191st game of a 192 game season to determine who would play in the 2019 Telstra Premiership Finals series while the State of Origin series was decided in the final seconds of Game three.

**Financially the game is strong.  
We will bank a \$30.1m surplus,  
exceeding our forecasted projections  
at the start of the year.**

Season 2019 was not without challenges and we do not shy away from the issues we face. Player behaviour fell below community expectations and what we stand for as a game.

The Commission took immediate action to address these issues with the introduction of the No-Fault Stand Down – a policy that protects both the game and its stakeholders.

I was pleased to see the Federal Court confirmed our policy in July this year.



We continue to work with and invest in programs for our players and clubs to ensure our athletes meet the expectations the community rightly expects.

Commissioner Mark Coyne resigned in July. I thank him for his service and we look forward to announcing his replacement this year.

I thank all our Commissioners for their commitment to growing rugby league. Each and every Commissioner has a passion for our game and brings a unique skillset which enhances outcomes for all stakeholders.

I thank the state organisations, the 16 NRL Clubs and all our players for your efforts in season 2019.

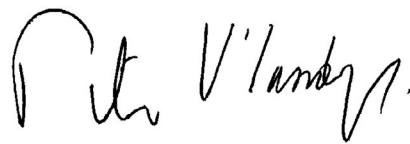
Without you we don't have a game. You are the reason communities come together every weekend in winter. We thank you for your hard work and dedication in taking our game to new heights.

To the game's volunteers, right across the country, thank you for the work you do. You are the unsung heroes of our game. You make rugby league the community game it is today.

I thank our chief executive Todd Greenberg and his executive team for their work in implementing the Commission's strategy in season 2019 and our staff in Rugby League Central and across the country and overseas for their dedication.

There are new frontiers to conquer in 2020. The Commission looks forward to growing our game and achieving the targets we have set.

And most importantly, I look forward to giving back to a game which has given so much to me.



**Peter V'landys AM**  
ARLC Chair

# Australian Rugby League Commission

(ARLC)





The ARLC is the single controlling body and administrator of the game in Australia. The ARLC's objectives 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.





**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 and a Non-Executive Director for Servcorp Limited.



**The Hon Peter Beattie AC**

Mr Beattie is Chairman of the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, Ambassador for Life Sciences Queensland, joint adjunct professor at the University of Queensland's Australian Institute for Bioengineering & Nanotechnology & Institute for Molecular Bioscience, and former Chairman of GOLDOC. 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 and Health Minister from 1995 to 1996.



**Amanda Laing**

Ms Laing is an experienced media executive, working previously as Group General Counsel and Managing Director of Nine Entertainment Co. Ms Laing is a former board member of Australian News Channels (Sky News), Stan and Pedestrian Group. She is currently on the board of Sports Australia and is Chief Commercial Officer of Foxtel.



**Peter V'landys AM  
Chairman**

Mr V'landys is Chief Executive and board member with Racing NSW, a position he has held since February 2004. Mr V'landys holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree majoring in Accounting and serves across a number of boards associated with the thoroughbred racing industry. Mr V'landys is also Chairman of the Fairy Godfather Foundation which assists people in Australia in necessitous circumstances. In 2014, Mr V'landys was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Racing industry.



**Professor Megan Davis**

Professor Davis is Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous UNSW and a Professor of Law, UNSW Law. Professor Davis was elected by the UN Human Rights Council to UNEMRIP in 2017. Professor Davis currently serves as a United Nations expert with the UN Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the rights of Indigenous peoples based in UN Geneva. Professor Davis is an Acting Commissioner of the NSW Land and Environment Court.

**Dr Gary Weiss AM**

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. Dr Weiss was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2019 for significant services to the business and to the community.

**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. Mr Pearce holds an Order of Australia medal for services to Rugby League and the community.



## CEO Report

Todd Greenberg

The 2019 season was a groundbreaking year for the NRL.

We launched Magic Round, Holden State of Origin was played in Perth for the first time, the NRLW hosted its first standalone match, Bankwest Stadium opened, we announced Origin will be played in Adelaide in 2020 and the Club Nines will be reborn in Perth.

Fans saw more rugby league – there were 400 more sets of six in 2019 than the previous season and 700 fewer penalties. Matches had 2.5 minutes less dead time which meant more free-flowing footy.

Our footy was closer than ever. It took until the 191st game of a 192-game season before the Telstra NRL Premiership Top 8 was finalised and our Origin series wasn't decided until the dying seconds of Game Three.

No matter the metric we broke new ground and conquered new frontiers in our game.

Congratulations to the Sydney Roosters who became the first team in 25 years to win back-to-back premierships and the Brisbane Broncos who successfully defended their title in the NRLW.

I'm pleased to report the game is in a very strong financial position.

We have again exceeded our budget targets with a \$30.1m surplus, \$4.7m million higher than anticipated.



Our corporate support grew by 5 per cent overall and 40 per cent in our digital arm.

We delivered outstanding exposure to our partners with rugby league once again not only the most-watched sport but most-watched television program in Australia.

More people watched the Holden State of Origin series opener, 3.23 million viewers, than any other show in 2019, while NRL content filled four of the top six most-watched shows in the country.

Women's Origin was the most-watched female sport in Australia with an audience of 813,000 an increase of 10.2 per cent on the previous year. The two most-watched shows in women's sport were both NRLW.

Traditional television numbers are in decline, but the cumulative audience watching rugby league, through alternative technological options like streaming, grew. 122 million watched rugby league in 2019, up 8 per cent on the previous year.

Our fans are watching our sport through more mediums than ever before and we thank our broadcast partners Channel 9, Fox Sports and Sky Sports New Zealand for making that possible.

Many said Magic Round wouldn't work but we delivered all eight matches at one ground, in one town – exceeding all targets.

More than 135,000 people attended our first Magic Round and we look forward to growing on that figure next year, in a fan-friendly, three-day format.

A ground record 59,700 – more than any AFL match – attended Optus Stadium in Perth for State of Origin match, a remarkable achievement for our game.

**We revolutionised the way children are introduced to grassroots rugby league with the launch of League Stars. More than 11,000 children have been registered.**

I'm pleased to report the number of girls and women playing rugby league continues to grow. Female participation increased by 18.4 per cent while overall participation in rugby league grew by 1.23 per cent.

We will continue to look at initiatives in 2020 to ensure the number of boys and men playing our game can grow.

Grassroots rugby league is the backbone of our sport. Our game brings communities and people together. We are part of society in suburbs right across the country and we will continue to invest more into participation next year.

The first of the NSW Government's \$2 billion investment in stadia, Bankwest Stadium, came on line and in part led to a 60 per cent increase in crowds for the Parramatta Eels.

We look forward to state-of-the-art venues in Allianz and ANZ stadia coming online in the years ahead. A revamped agreement for NSW to host the Grand Final until 2047 was concluded, landing a financial windfall for our game.

## 2019 wasn't without challenges.

Player behaviour fell short of community expectations.

We know our players are role models for young Australians and the behaviour of players impact our stakeholders.

That's why we introduced the No-Fault Stand Down, the first code to do so. It protects the game, our players and our stakeholders. This decision wasn't popular with some, but it was the right decision for our game.

Our role is to protect every participant in the NRL and we make no apology for doing so.

We will continue to work with clubs and the Rugby League Players Association in 2020 to do everything we can to ensure our players meet the standard expected from the community and of our values.

Thank you to the Australian Rugby League Commission for their leadership, support and guidance throughout 2019.

A special thank you to outgoing chair Peter Beattie for the leadership he has given the game and his friendship. Peter stands down as our chair with the game in a better place than when he took over.

I'm excited to work with Peter V'landys as our chair in 2020. Already the game is benefiting from Peter's innovative leadership, we are very lucky to have someone of his calibre leading our Commission.

And thank you to Mark Coyne for his service on the Commission in 2019.

The game saw the retirements of some legends in 2019. We thank representative and premiership winning stars Cooper Cronk, Paul Gallen, Greg Inglis and Robbie Farah

They leave a lasting legacy not only at their clubs but on the game.

I cannot wait for season 2020, we will introduce innovative rules that will make our game even less predictable for the fans.

**Our draw will be the most family friendly in years with more big matches played during the day and on weekends.**

2020 starts with a summer festival for the Club Nines before All Stars returns to its birthplace on the Gold Coast.

Round 1 we will open North Queensland Stadium with the Queensland Derby between the Cowboys and the Broncos.


Origin debuts in Adelaide and some of our brightest playing prospects will debut for new clubs.

Thank you all for your support in 2019. I know we can make 2020 bolder, brighter and more innovative than ever before.



**Todd Greenberg**  
NRL CEO



A man in a dark suit and tie stands at a clear glass podium, speaking into a microphone. Behind him is a large, illuminated logo consisting of a shield with three downward-pointing chevrons and a stylized 'T' above it. The logo is lit with a bright green light. The scene is set on a stage with a large, illuminated green rectangular area behind the speaker. The floor is made of large, reflective tiles.

I cannot wait for season 2020,  
we will introduce innovative rules  
that will make our game even less  
predictable for the fans.



Section One

# Playing Our Game





01









## NRL Telstra Premiership



### It was a new era for the NRL Telstra Premiership in 2019.

The continued influx of incredible young talent combined with a new direction in officiating resulted in more free-flowing football, fewer stoppages and fewer penalties.

In fact, the ball was in-play more than two minutes more each game compared with 2018 and equated to more than 6.5 hours of additional on-field action.

It took until the second last match of the regular season for the make-up of the NRL Finals to be decided.

2019 saw matches at 27 different venues across Australia and New Zealand, including the new Bankwest Stadium at Parramatta, Adelaide Oval and TIO Stadium in Darwin.

Matches were also played in five regional New South Wales locations (Bathurst, Tamworth, Mudgee, Wagga Wagga and Gosford), while the Sunshine Coast hosted a Premiership match for the first time.

### No club had more than three five-day turnarounds as part of a drive to protect player welfare.

Sydney Roosters became the first side in 25 years to win back-to-back premierships, defeating the Canberra Raiders in an enthralling and controversial grand final.

Roosters fullback James Tedesco won the Clive Churchill Medal as man of the match.

## Women's Rugby League

### The women's rugby league revolution continued in 2019.

Female rugby league remained the fastest growing area of the game and the year saw the game expand again both on and off the field.

Elite women's rugby league continued to pave the way for the NRL to show its commitment to diversity, inclusion and equality.

The growth of female participation also continued with an increase of 18.4 per cent in the number of women and girls playing the game in 2019.

Women's Rugby League recorded the top two domestic women's sporting events on television, with more than 818,000 people tuning in to watch Holden Women's State of Origin and 624,000 watching the NRL Holden Women's Premiership Grand Final.

The 2019 Dally M Female Player of the Year was awarded to Jillaroos and Dragons player, Jessica Sergis. She was also awarded the International Rugby League's Golden Boot to reinforce her standing as the best female player in 2019.





## NRL Holden Women's Premiership

The inaugural four NRL Holden Women's Premiership (NRLW) teams returned for the second iteration of the elite women's game with standalone matches played for the first time.

New heights were reached on and off the field in 2019. The season kicked off with the team Captains and NRLW Trophy scaling the Sydney Harbour Bridge at sunrise.

There was an increase in Women's Rugby League content broadcast across both traditional television and streamed online via the Nine Network (Nine/Gem), Fox League, SKY NZ and NRL Live Pass.

Matches were once again played as double-headers to the men's Finals Series matches, however two stand-alone matches allowed fans to attend fan-friendly Sunday afternoon women's-only fixtures at suburban venues in both Auckland and Sydney.

The inaugural stand-alone game, and New Zealand Warriors first-ever home game, was played at Mount Smart Stadium in front of more than 2000 fans in Round 2.

The St George Illawarra Dragons spoiled the party running out victors 26-6. The Dragons secured their place in the 2019 NRLW Grand Final the following week at Leichhardt Oval, defeating the Sydney Roosters 24-16 in the first standalone NRLW fixture to be played in Australia.

The Brisbane Broncos secured their second premiership in as many seasons with a dominant 30-6 victory over the St George Illawarra Dragons in front of a crowd more than 16,000.

Broncos and Jillaroos forward, Annette Brander was awarded the Karyn Murphy medal, while Kasey Badger became the first woman to take control of an NRLW Grand Final, after being an assistant referee in 2018.



## Special Events



### Downer World Club Series

The Betfred World Club Challenge between NRL Premiers Sydney Roosters and English Super League Champions Wigan Warriors was played at the DW Stadium in Wigan.

It was the second time the two sides had met with the Roosters running out 20-8 winners, equalling Wigan's record of four wins in the competition's 27-year history.

The win ensured the World Club Challenge trophy remained in Australia with the fixture between Sydney Roosters and St Helens to be played in the UK in February 2020.

### ANZAC Round

The rugby league community once again came together to commemorate and thank both past and present service men and women for the sacrifices they have made to protecting countries and people at home and abroad.

A Brodie Croft field goal in the dying minutes has secured a tense 13-12 win for Melbourne over the Warriors in their ANZAC Day clash at AAMI Park, Melbourne. The halfback slotted a shaky match-winner from 35 metres out, with the ball hitting the upright before going through.

In the other ANZAC Day fixture, the Sydney Roosters held off St George Illawarra 20-10 in a thriller held in front of 38,414 fans at the Sydney Cricket Ground. It was the first time since 2002 the fixture had been played at the historic venue.

Front-rower Sio Siua Taukeiaho proved the unlikely hero when he busted through some tired attempted tackles and crossed for the match-winner in the 77th minute.



## Magic Round

For the first time in NRL history, one round featuring all 16 NRL Clubs was held at one ground.

The inaugural NRL Magic Round Brisbane was a remarkable success, with almost 135,000 fans attending the event across the four days at Suncorp Stadium.

Almost one quarter of all ticket holders travelled from interstate and overseas to be a part of the history-making long weekend of rugby league action.

The weather was perfect across the four days of football, with clear skies and bone-dry conditions contributing to fast, expansive football and high scores.

There were significant initiatives delivered away from the field during the week, which included 23 school and junior club visits, four Voice Against Violence workshops, as well as coaching and refereeing education events.

In total, more than 10,000 junior players and officials were engaged in these programs.

**Proceeds from the opening night fixture between the Titans and Sharks went directly to NRL-aligned community charities.**

Magic Round Brisbane was supported by the Queensland Government via Tourism and Events Queensland and Brisbane City Council via Brisbane Marketing.







## Beanie for Brain Cancer

In a powerful display of unity, Australians rallied behind the Mark Hughes Foundation to raise \$3.1 million in the quest to defeat brain cancer across the 2019 NRL Beanie for Brain Cancer Round.

The NRL Beanie Round concept was the creation and continues the legacy of former Nine Rugby League Executive Producer Matt Callander, who was lost to brain cancer in 2017, with 2019 the third running of the round.

170,000 MHF beanies were sold during NRL Beanie for Brain Cancer Round and campaign.

**"Brain cancer remains a killer but hopefully the funds raised across the weekend will help find a cure to tackle this disease once and for all."**

**NRL CEO Todd Greenberg.**

## Harvey Norman Women in League Round

Harvey Norman Women in League Round was celebrated in Round 22 of the NRL Telstra Premiership.

The round, in partnership with Harvey Norman, is an acknowledgement of the significant role women play in rugby league and a chance to celebrate their contributions to the game.

Major sponsor of the Sydney Roosters – Steggles – removed their logo from the jerseys of the Sydney Roosters NRL men's team and replaced it with the names of the club's inaugural NRLW squad.

The Eels 'Women In League' jersey also incorporated the names of Parramatta Eels members, staff, partners and mums' names in the design of the jersey.



## Indigenous Round

Celebrating its eleventh year, the NRL's Indigenous Round once again brought the rugby league community together to raise awareness of the significant social challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face every day.

NRL Indigenous Round took place the week prior to National Reconciliation Week, with the theme for 2019 – 'Grounded in Truth. Walk Together with Courage'.

To showcase this message, the NRL in partnership with the Preston Campbell Foundation, Newcastle Knights and The Long Walk, delivered the NRL's first-ever 'The Long Walk'.

Indigenous sporting icons Preston Campbell and Michael Long led hundreds of fans and community members from New Lambton in Newcastle to McDonald Jones Stadium prior to kick off to the Newcastle Knights Indigenous Round fixture against the Sydney Roosters.

A traditional Welcome or Acknowledgement to Country took place at all matches, as well as cultural gift exchanges prior to kick off.

**Every player and match official wore Indigenous-inspired jerseys throughout the round.**



## Holden State of Origin

The generational shift in players continued during the 2019 Holden State of Origin series with 13 players making their Origin debuts, following on from the 17 debutants in 2018.

More than 9.5 million viewers watched the three-match series on television, with the series accounting for three of the top four rated programs of the year. A try-scoring double by man of the match Dane Gagai helped the Maroons overcome an 8-0 halftime deficit to win Game One 18-14 in front of 52,191 fans at Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane.

Game Two headed to Western Australia for the very first time, with a record crowd of 59,721 fans packing out Perth's Optus Stadium.

It was a dominant 38-6 victory for NSW, with a hat-trick for Tom Trbojevic seeing the Blues level the series.

In 80 minutes of high emotion, high action and huge momentum shifts, it was a final-minute try by James Tedesco which saw New South Wales defeat Queensland 26-20 and take out the 2019 State of Origin series.

**In an exhausting, enthralling and physical fixture, the capacity crowd of 82,565 at Sydney's ANZ Stadium had to wait until the final 20 seconds to know it was the Blues' game and series.**

James Tedesco was awarded the Wally Lewis Medal for Player of the Series.





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## Holden Women's State of Origin

Holden Women's State of Origin exceeded all expectations once again, both on and off the field.

In just the second iteration under the official Origin banner, more than 10,500 fans crammed into North Sydney Oval to witness the game's very best do battle for their state.

It was the most-watched female sporting event on television in 2019, with more than 818,000 fans tuning into the broadcast around the country.

Defending champions New South Wales fought back from a half-time deficit to beat Queensland 14-4, backing up their success from 2018.

Former NSW Blues Captain Maddie Studdon claimed the Nellie Doherty Medal for player of the match.

## Harvey Norman National Championship

The Harvey Norman National Championship was held on the Gold Coast once again in June 2019, with the annual competition extended to be played over four days.

It was an all NSW affair once again in the final. NSW City made amends for last year's disappointment to defeat NSW Country 34-4 and take out the 2019 title.

A hat-trick to Tiana Penitani – later announced as player of the tournament – inspired the City side, who were boosted by the late inclusion of Jillaroos prop Simaima Taufa for the final.

On the final day's play, Combined Affiliated States proved too good for the Australian Defence Force winning 10-4. South-East Queensland and Queensland Country could also not be separated with the match ending in a 16-16 draw.





It was the most-watched female sporting event on television in 2019, with more than 818,000 fans tuning into the broadcast around the country.





## International Game









## Australian Kangaroos

The Australian Kangaroos played two Tests against New Zealand and Tonga as part of the inaugural Oceania Cup in October 2019.

The squad included six debutants – Josh Addo-Carr (Melbourne Storm), Nick Cotric (Canberra Raiders), Payne Haas (Brisbane Broncos), Cameron Murray (South Sydney Rabbitohs), Paul Vaughan (St George Illawarra Dragons) and Jack Wighton (Canberra Raiders), while seven players from the 2019 Grand Final sides were also selected.

Fielding their least experienced Test team in 16 years, Australia exacted revenge for the shock loss of 2018, controlling the Test from start to finish in front of 18,104 fans at WIN Stadium in Wollongong.

Local Helensburgh product Damien Cook celebrated his homecoming with an inspired performance that saw him take home Man of the Match honours.

The win saw Kangaroos skipper Boyd Cordner become the first New South Wales player to captain an NRL premiership, a State of Origin series victory and a Test match win in a single season.

More history was created a week later, with Australia recording their first-ever Test loss against Tonga.

Leading 12-6 at halftime, Tonga crossed twice in the second half to hold on for a 16-12 victory. It was the first defeat to a side other than New Zealand, England or Great Britain since 1978 and saw the national side demoted to second in the world, behind New Zealand.

**Australia will embark on their first Kangaroos tour since 2003 in 2020, as they look to regain the number one spot in the rankings in the lead-up to the 2021 World Cup.**





## Harvey Norman Jillaroos

The Harvey Norman Jillaroos continued their undefeated run under coach Brad Donald in their sole international match in 2019.

Six players were awarded debuts in the October 25 fixture: Millie Boyle, Chelsea Lenarduzzi (Brisbane Broncos), Kirra Dibb (Sydney Roosters), Jessica Sergis, Shakia Tungai and Botille Vette-Welsh (St George Illawarra Dragons).

Jillaroos Captain Ali Briginshaw showed her class once again in a comfortable 28-8 victory in front of a crowd of 8,184 at WIN Stadium in Wollongong.

The Jillaroos, who have not lost to the Kiwi Ferns in a Test since 2016, scored five tries to two, less than a week after New Zealand claimed an upset win over their rivals in the World Cup Nines final in Sydney.



## Prime Minister's XIII

The Australian Prime Minister's XIII (PM's XIII) men's and women's teams toured Fiji in October for the first time.

The match took on extra significance this year with Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison joining the teams in Suva for the historic clash at ANZ Stadium, becoming the first Australian leader to attend the fixture since its inception in 2005.

The teams helped deliver several important messages around respect, equality and health and wellbeing at a number of schools and villages along the coast from Nadi to Suva.

The PM's XIII women's side was captained by Karina Brown from the Sydney Roosters, with the men's side led by Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks Captain Wade Graham.

A hat-trick to Fijian-born Patricia Raikadroka helped the Australian Prime Minister's XIII women prevail 22-14 over the Fiji PM's XIII, while the men's side easily accounted for the Fijian PM's XIII side 52-10.

In an iconic moment in the history of the fixture, a barefoot Prime Minister Scott Morrison ran waters to players following a try midway through the second half with vision and photos being sent around the globe of the Australian leader getting involved.

The tour also included matches between the Australian and Fijian Defence Force Rugby League teams and was supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.







## Ox & Palm Pacific Test Invitational

The 2019 Ox & Palm Pacific Test Invitational was played at Leichhardt Oval in Sydney, with a women's Test match between Fiji and Papua New Guinea featuring for the first time.

Fiji Bulikula celebrated their maiden women's international debut with a resounding 28-0 victory over the Papua New Guinea Orchids.

The first of the men's fixtures saw Toa Samoa secure their first international win in three years with a 24-6 win over Papua New Guinea in front of 8,408 fans.

In the final match of the day, Fijian flyers Maika Sivo and Suliasi Vunivalu scored entertaining doubles as Fiji Bati cruised to a 58-14 victory over Lebanon in Robbie Farah's final representative appearance.





## Downer Rugby League World Cup 9s, Sydney 2019

The inaugural Downer Rugby League World Cup 9s was held at Parramatta's Bankwest Stadium on 18-19 October 2019.

The tournament featured the most exciting players from the National Rugby League (NRL) and National Rugby League Women (NRLW), with 12 nations in the men's competition and four in the women's.

Australia proved too strong for New Zealand in the men's final, while New Zealand upset the previously undefeated Australian side to be crowned women's champions.

More than 30,000 fans packed into Bankwest Stadium over the two days to watch the feast of football, with another 250,000-plus viewers watching the live broadcast on Fox Sports.







More than 30,000 fans  
packed into Bankwest Stadium  
over the two days



Section Two

# Our Players







02



## Milestones

The record-breaking feats of Cameron Smith continued in 2019. Smith made history at AAMI Park in Round 17 when he became the first player to reach the milestone of 400 NRL appearances in the Storm's clash with Cronulla.

Smith overtook Hazem El Masri as the highest point scorer in premiership history during Melbourne Storm's clash with the North Queensland at 1300SMILES Stadium. Smith also became the first player to captain a team in 300 games when the Storm met the Broncos at Suncorp Stadium.

Sydney Roosters halfback Cooper Cronk played in his ninth grand final; a figure surpassed only by Norm Provan and Brian 'Poppa' Clay, who both played in 10 grand finals in the 1950s and 1960s. Cronk joined Hall of Famers Eddie Lumsden and Ron Coote with nine grand final appearances. Cronk also became the fourth player to reach the 350-game mark.

Canberra Captain Jarrod Croker became the second youngest player to play 250 NRL games when the Raiders met the Sydney Roosters at GIO Stadium. Croker also broke the Raiders club try-scoring record when he crossed against St George Illawarra at WIN Stadium and became the Raiders most-capped captain in his team's preliminary final against South Sydney at GIO Stadium.

Cronulla Captain Paul Gallen surpassed Andrew Ettingshausen's record for most first-grade games for the Sharks when he took the field against North Queensland at 1300SMILES Stadium. St George Illawarra prop James Graham played his 400th club game in England and Australia when he took the field against Parramatta at Netstrata Jubilee Stadium.

Nathan Cleary broke the Panthers' club record for most points in a game, with a 34-point haul against the Knights (four tries and nine goals). Mitchell Moses broke the Eels' record for most points in a finals match, with a 20-point haul (two tries and six goals) in the Eels 58-0 elimination final victory over the Broncos, which was a record winning margin for a finals match.













## The 300 Club

Five players were inducted into the exclusive 300 Club in 2019 – Benji Marshall, Gavin Cooper, Adam Blair, Darius Boyd and Robbie Farah.

Only 39 players have reached the 300-game milestone.

Four players from the 300 Club farewelled the game in 2019.



**Cooper Cronk**

Sydney Roosters



**Paul Gallen**

Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks



**John Sutton**

South Sydney Rabbitohs



**Robbie Farah**

Wests Tigers

## Coaches

During the 2019 season, Melbourne coach Craig Bellamy achieved his 300th win as a coach when the Storm defeated St George Illawarra at WIN Stadium.

Bellamy becomes only the fourth coach to reach the mark behind Wayne Bennett, Tim Sheens and Brian Smith. He also became the only coach after Bennett to win 300 with a single club.





## Hall of Fame

**The 2019 NRL Hall of Fame recognised for the very first-time outstanding contribution to the sport of rugby league off the field.**

The 'Contributor' category was established to celebrate persons that have been instrumental in pioneering the game since 1908 across the three areas of Administration, Print Media and Broadcast Media.

Alongside the annual player inductions, the first members recognised in the Contributor category were James Joseph Giltinan (Administration), Peter "Chippy" Frilingos (Print Media) and the 'voice of rugby league' Ray "Rabbits" Warren (Broadcast Media).

The Hall of Fame also welcomed 'Player' inductees for 2019; St George Illawarra Dragons enforcer Craig Young, Kiwi legends Ruben Wiki and Stacey Jones, and Newcastle Knights stalwart Danny Buderus.

The selection process for both categories commenced in April 2019 with select panels engaged to evaluate the extended lists of potential candidates. The Player inductees were determined firstly by an independent Screening Committee, with a shortlist advanced to the official Voting College for a final vote. The Contributor nominations were assessed by an independent History Committee in April before the final list of candidates were put in front of a seven-member Selection Panel for a final vote in June.

All selection panels were assembled with the objective of achieving a cross-section of representation on and off the field.













## 2019 Retiring Class

The following players were recognised as the Official Retiring Class of 2019:

Name	Club	Name	Club
<b>Cooper Cronk</b>	Sydney Roosters	<b>Will Matthews</b>	Gold Coast Titans
<b>Paul Gallen</b>	Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks	<b>Greg Bird</b>	Gold Coast Titans
<b>Sosaia Feki</b>	Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks	<b>Blake Ayshford</b>	New Zealand Warriors
<b>Greg Inglis</b>	South Sydney Rabbitohs	<b>Manu Vatuvei</b>	New Zealand Warriors
<b>John Sutton</b>	South Sydney Rabbitohs	<b>Trent Hodkinson</b>	Manly Warringah Sea Eagles
<b>George Burgess</b>	South Sydney Rabbitohs	<b>Tim Mannah</b>	Parramatta Eels
<b>Jeremy Latimore</b>	St George Illawarra Dragons	<b>Manu Ma'u</b>	Parramatta Eels
<b>Gareth Widdop</b>	St George Illawarra Dragons	<b>Kaysa Pritchard</b>	Parramatta Eels
<b>Robbie Farah</b>	Wests Tigers	<b>Greg Eastwood</b>	Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs
<b>Robbie Rochow</b>	Wests Tigers	<b>James Maloney</b>	Penrith Panthers
<b>Sam Tagataese</b>	Brisbane Broncos	<b>Shaun Kenny-Dowall</b>	Newcastle Knights
<b>Shaun Fensom</b>	Brisbane Broncos	<b>Nathan Ross</b>	Newcastle Knights
<b>Michael Gordon</b>	Gold Coast Titans	<b>Matthew Scott</b>	North Queensland Cowboys





## The Dally M Award

James Tedesco capped off an NRL stellar season taking home his first Dally M medal.

In a season where the dynamic fullback would shine in almost every match for the Sydney Roosters, Tedesco would see off challenges from Melbourne Storm's Cameron Smith, last year's medallist Roger Tuivasa-Sheck and Brisbane Broncos giant Payne Haas to take the premiership's highest honour. Haas, who was brilliant in his first full season in the NRL, would take out Dally M Rookie of the Year honours which in season 2019 featured a long list of outstanding debutants.

The women's top award was awarded to St George Illawarra Dragons supergirl Jessica Sergis who has stamped herself as one of the NRLW premiership competition's most exciting talents.

In other awards, Melbourne's Craig Bellamy took home Coach of the Year honours while his skipper was recognised as the premiership's top Captain.

Parramatta cult hero Maika Sivo was crowned Top Try-scorer of the year and awarded the prestigious Ken Irvine Medal. The Roosters representative centre Latrell Mitchell was named the Top Point-scorer while Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs inspirational Captain, Josh Jackson, was awarded the coveted Provan Summons Medal for his great display of sportsmanship during a premiership match against the Wests Tigers in which he consoled a dejected Paul Momirovski after a failed conversion to win the game.





Award	Winner
<b>Dally M Medal – Best &amp; Fairest</b>	James Tedesco (Sydney Roosters)
<b>Dally M Female Player of the Year</b>	Jessica Sergis (St George Illawarra Dragons)
<b>Dally M Coach of the Year</b>	Craig Bellamy (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Dally M Captain of the Year</b>	Cameron Smith (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Dally M Rookie of the Year</b>	Payne Haas (Brisbane Broncos)
<b>Dally M Fullback of the Year</b>	James Tedesco (Sydney Roosters)
<b>Dally M Winger of the Year</b>	Ken Maumalo (New Zealand Warriors)
<b>Dally M Centre of the Year</b>	Latrell Mitchell (Sydney Roosters)
<b>Dally M Five-Eighth of the Year</b>	Cameron Munster (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Dally M Halfback of the Year</b>	Mitchell Moses (Parramatta Eels)
<b>Dally M Hooker of the Year</b>	Cameron Smith (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Dally M Prop of the Year</b>	Payne Haas (Brisbane Broncos)
<b>Dally M Second-rower of the Year</b>	John Bateman (Canberra Raiders)
<b>Dally M Lock of the Year</b>	Cameron Murray (South Sydney Rabbitohs)
<b>Dally M Interchange of the Year</b>	Brandon Smith (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Provan Summons Medal</b>	Josh Jackson (Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs)
<b>Ken Irvine Medal – Top Try-scorer</b>	Maika Sivo (Parramatta Eels)
<b>Top Point-scorer</b>	Latrell Mitchell (Sydney Roosters)
<b>Peter Frilingos Award for 'Headline Moment of the Year'</b>	James Tedesco – Winning try in State of Origin







## RLPA Awards

Award	Name
<b>The Players' Champion</b>	James Tedesco (Sydney Roosters)
<b>The NRLW Players' Champion</b>	Jessica Sergis (St George Illawarra Dragons)
<b>Dennis Tutty Award</b>	David Gower (Parramatta Eels)
<b>Rookie of the Year</b>	Payne Haas (Brisbane Broncos)
<b>Male Academic Player of the Year</b>	Russell Packer (Wests Tigers)
<b>Female Academic Player of the Year</b>	Vanessa Foliaki (Sydney Roosters)
<b>Indigenous Academic Excellence Award</b>	Josh Addo-Carr (Melbourne Storm)
<b>Pasifika Academic Excellence Award</b>	Jayson Bukuya (Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks)
<b>The 300 Club</b>	Benji Marshall (Wests Tigers) Robbie Farah (Wests Tigers) Darius Boyd (Brisbane Broncos) Gavin Cooper (North Queensland Cowboys) Adam Blair (New Zealand Warriors)





## Player wellbeing and education

### 2019 Wellbeing program delivery

415 wellbeing workshops were delivered in 2019 including mandatory education programs on Concussion, Anti-Doping, NRL Rules, Social Responsibility, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Transitioning players into retirement.

The program reached 100 per cent of NRL players.

### Individual player wellbeing plans

In 2019, 79 per cent of players had an active individual wellbeing plan, on track to meet the 2022 goal of 90 per cent of players. This has risen from 60 per cent in 2017.

### Player career engagement

In 2019, 86 per cent of NRL contracted (top 30) players, and 91 per cent for NRL (Development List) players are career engaged. This combined score of 87 per cent is on track to meet 2022 target of 90 per cent.

Further, the Wellbeing and Education Committee has recommended to the ARL to increase mandatory career engagement minimum standards for all NRL U20 contracted players for the 2020 season.

### RLPA and Club Education Grants

Access to RLPA education grants was again lower than 2017 levels with only \$400,000 being released during the 2019 season, however given the 2018 change in rules and with the increase in club paid education grants (TER), there is a lag in players receiving these.

Further, the RLPA grants have also been extended to include NRLW players and will increase for the U20 players. It is anticipated, based on the recent uplift, that access will increase in 2020.

Between club paid grants (TER) and RLPA grants, over \$1 million has been provided to players in 2019.

### Wellbeing employee development

One hundred per cent of Wellbeing and education employees have completed or are undertaking mandatory minimum Wellbeing and Education Manager qualifications, with 350 club staff having completed the Mental Health First Aid training.

A wellbeing and education manager network has been created delivering psychological support and promoting self-care.

### Psychological support

Dr Lyndel Abbott has been engaged to work across the game providing clinical supervision of all Wellbeing employees, oversight of the EAP Service and Wellbeing delivery, and introducing primary and secondary prevention assessment tools, with further policy recommendations in development.

The EAP service provided by Benestar has significantly increased awareness and use in 2019 with over 1240 hours of support provided to NRL players, their immediate families and employees.



## NRL Academic Team of the Year

Many players have achieved excellence on and off the field by working towards or completing a qualification in 2019.

The criteria for selection includes consistent NRL playing performances, commitment and progress in an educational program that is preparing players for a post-footy career and a positive influence on the other players within their club.

**Vanessa Foliaki – Sydney Roosters**

Currently completing a Bachelor of Psychology, Massey University

**Matthew Lodge – Brisbane Broncos**

Completed a Diploma of Business and currently completing a Bachelor of Business, Swinburne University

**James Tamou – Penrith Panthers**

Currently completing a Cert III in Carpentry and Cert III & IV in Fitness and completed Small Business, EABS

**Will Hopoate – Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs**

Completed a Diploma of Community Services and Cert IV in Community, Granville TAFE

**Brett Morris – Sydney Roosters**

Currently completing a Cert III in Carpentry and Completed Cert IV in Small Business, Gympie TAFE

**Daniel Alvaro – Parramatta Eels**

Currently completing a Cert III in Carpentry, Meadowbank TAFE

**Toafofoa Siple – Manly Warringah Sea Eagles**

Completed a Bachelor of Education in High School Teaching, University of Auckland

**Jamie Buhner – Newcastle Knights**

Currently completing a Bachelor of Sports Business Management, ACPE

**Coen Hess – North Queensland Cowboys**

Currently completing Master of Business Administration and completed a Diploma of Hospitality and Diploma of Business Management, CQU

**Chanel Harris-Tavita – New Zealand Warriors**

Currently completing a Bachelor of Business, Auckland University of Technology

**Keegan Hipgrave – Gold Coast Titans**

Currently completing a Bachelor of Business, QUT

**Russell Packer – Wests Tigers**

Currently completing a Masters Business Administration, UNSW

**Robbie Rochow – Wests Tigers**

Currently completing a Bachelor of Engineering, UNSW





## Match Officials

A total number of 21 NRL referees officiated in more than 200 men's and women's Premiership, Origin and International fixtures in 2019.

Belinda Sharpe made history as the first female match official to referee in an NRL Telstra Premiership match. Belinda officiated as the Assistant Referee in the Round 18 match between the Brisbane Broncos and the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs at Suncorp Stadium.

Two other match officials made their referee debut in 2019, Adam Cassidy in the Round 1 match between Wests Tigers and the Manly Warringah Sea Eagles, and Todd Smith in the Round 17 match between the St George Illawarra Dragons and the Canberra Raiders.

**Ben Cummins and Gavin Badger both officiated in their 350th NRL match as NRL referees in 2019.**

Bill Harrigan is the only other referee to have achieved the milestone.

Ben Cummins and Gerard Sutton were appointed as the referees for the NRL Telstra Premiership Grand Finals between the Sydney Roosters and the Canberra Raiders. It was the fifth grand final appearance for both Cummins and Sutton.

Kasey Badger officiated in her second NRL Holden Women's Premiership Grand Final, her first as Head Referee. Daniel Schwass, as Assistant Referee, officiated in his first NRL Holden Women's Premiership Grand Final.

## Milestones

### 350 Games

Ben Cummins  
Gavin Badger

### 100 Games

Chris Sutton  
David Munro

### Grand Final Referees

Ben Cummins  
Gerard Sutton  
Nick Beashel and Chris Butler  
Jared Maxwell and Ben Galea

### NRL Holden Women's Premiership

Kasey Badger  
Daniel Schwass  
Jordan Morel and Karra-Lee Nolan  
Steve Chiddy and Bryan Norrie

### Col Pearce Medal

Gerard Sutton



Belinda Sharpe made history  
as the first female match  
official to referee in an NRL Telstra  
Premiership match.









## 2019 Vale

The rugby league world was saddened by the passing of several servants of the game in 2019.

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Ken McCrohon

---

Bryan Orrock

---

Ray Laird

---

Jim Paterson

---

Quentin Pongia

---

Nick Yakich

---

Noel White

---

Tony Paskins

---

Eddie Lumsden

---

Bob Heaney

---

John Payne

---

Billy J Smith (Broadcaster)

---

Steve Reilly

---

Ted Allard

---

Peter Armstrong

---

Alfie Walker

---

Lindsay Drake

---

Eric Barnes

---

Doug Jones

---

Peter Leis

---

Jeff Fyfe

---

Hugh O'Doherty

---

John Chalk (Administrator)

---

Doug Blinkhorn

---

Doug McKinnon

---

Richie Powell

---

Ron Lovett

---

Peter Moscott

---

Hugh Hazard (Doctor)

---

Hugh Waddell

---

Bob Smithies

---

Ray Preston

---

Max Cole

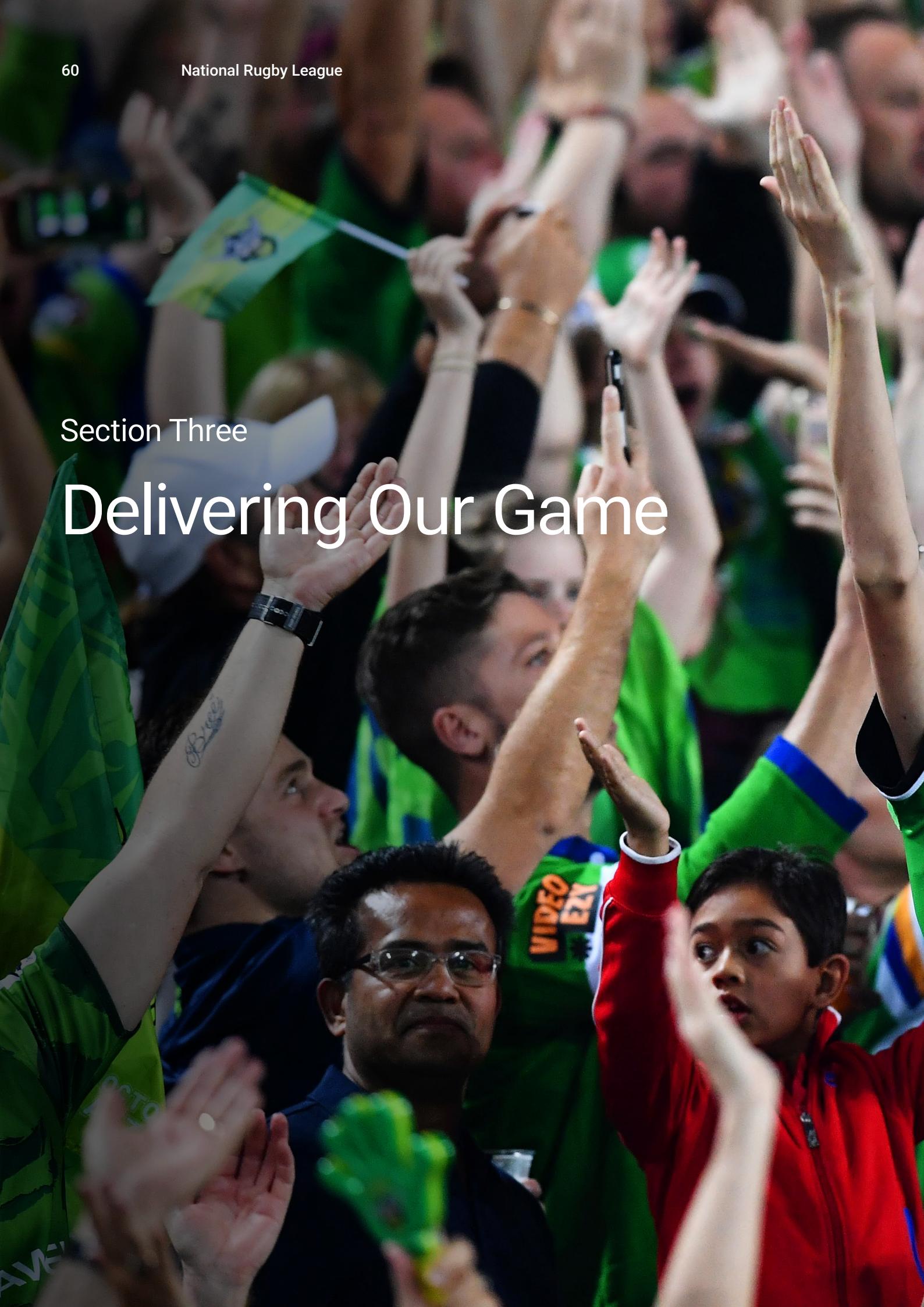
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Dick See



## Section Three

# Delivering Our Game







03



## NRL Clubs

















A major focus in 2019 was to continue to leverage the new club funding model and reduce total club deficiency to help create greater club sustainability across all 16 NRL Clubs.

The financial health of all 16 clubs remained a major focus in 2019 with a total revenue growth of 3.9 per cent year-on-year (YOY) across all 16 clubs. Sponsorship revenue increased by 7.1 per cent YOY and membership revenue grew by 5.3 per cent which is a great result for the health of our sport.

There was also an increased focus on reducing costs across administration and football expenses in 2019, down 13.6 per cent YOY and 15.9 per cent YOY respectively.

The overall financial strength of clubs remains a critical pillar to the overall success of the competition and this will remain a primary objective over the remainder of the current broadcast rights cycle.

### NRL Club Membership

		2018	2019	% Change
	Broncos	35,987	34,793	-3.32%
	Bulldogs	19,570	18,343	-6.27%
	Cowboys	23,437	21,029	-10.27%
	Dragons	21,348	21,028	-1.50%
	Eels	25,145	25,258	0.45%
	Knights	18,017	20,665	14.70%
	Panthers	20,446	20,627	0.89%
	Rabbitohs	29,198	29,626	1.47%
	Raiders	20,055	20,121	0.33%
	Roosters	16,050	16,384	2.08%
	Sea Eagles	12,362	12,440	0.63%
	Sharks	15,619	15,826	1.33%
	Storm	25,101	25,211	0.44%
	Titans	6,792	6,517	-4.05%
	Warriors	9,764	10,768	10.28%
	Wests Tigers	20,709	20,739	0.14%
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>319,600</b>	<b>319,375</b>	<b>-0.07%</b>



## Broadcast Partners



2019 continued to deliver strong results across television and radio both domestically and internationally with more content on air than ever before.

The Nine Network continued to showcase rugby league across free-to-air and 9Now, Fox Sports across their subscription service Fox League, and Telstra continued to deliver our game to fans' mobile phones via the NRL App. In 2019 we also added the new Australian sport streaming service Kayo Sports to our suite of broadcast partners.

Sky NZ aired regular content into New Zealand with strong weekly national audiences.

We would also like to thank our four radio partners and their regional affiliates for another successful year of coverage – Macquarie Media, Southern Cross Austereo, Crocmedia and ABC Radio.





## Season Highlights



**Magic Round** in Brisbane, saw 16 teams converging on Suncorp Stadium on the one weekend, bringing hype, excitement and something different to the draw and our television audiences. Fox League's Bryan Fletcher and Nathan Hindmarsh spent almost three days in a bubble, with live crosses in-broadcast to give their insights on the newly created festival of football.



**State of Origin I** from Brisbane was the highest-watched national television program in 2019 reaching a national audience of 3.23 million on Channel 9. SOO II (Perth) and SOO III (Sydney decider) rated third and fourth of the most-watched programs in 2019. The NRL Grand Final rated sixth with a total national average audience of 2.66 million viewers.



**Women's State of Origin** saw a 10.2 per cent YOY growth in national television audience to 818,000 viewers, claiming top spot for the highest women's sport coverage of 2019. A fantastic result for our women's game. We also saw the introduction of two standalone matches in the Holden Women's Premiership from Leichhardt Oval and Mt Smart Stadium, which drew audiences of 164,662 and 179,4410 respectively. The total national audience for the Holden Women's Premiership reached 1,615,382 including 624,252 for the Women's Grand Final.





**NRL Fan Fest** launched in Grand Final week in Martin Place, where a flurry of avid supporters had the opportunity to meet their favourite players and participate in fun activities in the CBD. All our broadcast partners heavily supported this new event and we were proud to launch NRL Fan Fest Radio via the Crocmedia radio network.



**Parramatta's Bankwest Stadium** held the first-ever Downer Rugby League World Cup 9s event which was broadcast exclusively on Fox Sports with an average audience of over 100,000 per game. The women's grand final saw 143,415 viewers and the men's grand final 158,502.

New light-up goal posts and an increase in player/coach access brought an element of colour and excitement to the atmosphere and looked terrific within the broadcast.



## Commercial Partnerships

In 2019 Telstra continued its long-term relationship with the NRL and its strong support of Australian Rugby League.

Telstra's support covers many areas across the game, including naming rights partner of our elite men's competition, major partner of our digital network, a proud supporter of our clubs, and in 2019 becoming a major partner of our women's game.

The NRL Commercial team achieved a five per cent uplift in corporate investment across traditional partnerships, whilst achieving 40+ per cent uplift in digital investment through NRL.com.

The Commercial team worked closely with our Partners to implement a range of market leading activation and leveraging campaigns in 2019.

From in stadium to in store, partners developed a deeper, more meaningful connection with rugby league fans, whilst driving a larger return on investment.

Major investors in the game, including KFC, DrinkWise, Chemist Warehouse, Schick and Hankook tyres recommitted to the sport for future years, while we welcomed new partners in KARI Foundation, Downer, Gallagher, Nestlé, AirAsia, the Cancer Institute NSW and Flight Centre.



ABInBev



Holden



Harvey Norman





## Selected 2019 Highlights

### Telstra Tracker

In 2019, Telstra, Channel Nine and NRL Digital expanded the Telstra Tracker footprint and achieved a world first by integrating technology into Women's State of Origin. Telstra Tracker delivered revolutionary insights to fans on physical performance, for example, the impact of high speed efforts.

The content utilised data from the Telstra Premiership to highlight top speeds and total metres run, providing analysis and comparisons for the biggest stage in football in State of Origin.

### KFC

KFC featured strongly in 2019 through its Video Referee partnership, Friday Night In-Goal branding and the KFC Viewer's Verdict campaign. Viewer's Verdict is the ultimate fan engagement platform which empowers fans to play a real-time fan-version of the NRL video referee. KFC empowers fans to be immersed in their favourite sport and decide whether it's a 'Try' or 'No Try' during the time the official decision is pending. With great prizes on offer throughout the season, the campaign achieved thousands of sign-ups and verdicts and was supported by media across NRL Digital, KFC owned channels and Fox Sport.

### Nestlé (Soothers)

Developed a creative campaign talking to fans screaming support at Origin and soothing a sore throat.

Partnership came to life across channels including broadcast (LED signage), digital (display and social) and at-match (concourse screaming booths).

### Nestlé (Milo)

Milo (PNG) continued its support of League Bilong Laif, the NRL's premier junior participation program in the Pacific.

The NRL is now working with Milo on a new modified games project that expands this delivery from the school yard and into Saturday morning club rugby league.

### AirAsia

Another example of NRL working with a new brand to deliver targeted campaign objectives.

AirAsia invested in State of Origin LED, a comedic branded content series starring Nathan Hindmarsh and Petero Cioniceva, and a social media content franchise sponsoring the high-flying moment of each Origin fixture. Successfully activated in conjunction with one another, these assets drove brand awareness higher, educated on key services provided and ensured AirAsia appeared as a "fun" brand.

### Flight Centre

Invested in the women's program through branding (signage and ball) and digital advertising content. Flight Centre also invested as an inaugural partner of the Rugby League World Cup 9s. This partnership included branding and in-stadium activations delivering travel messages in multiple languages while showcasing the best on offer in regard to tourism within each playing nation's country.



# Major Events

2019 brought with it some exciting opportunities for fans to engage with our game, as numerous new, and reimagined events defined the year for the NRL.









The NRL Season started with a refreshed All Stars concept, which saw our men's and women's Australian Indigenous teams take on the New Zealand Māori teams at AAMI Park. 18,000 fans witnessed the game for the first time in Melbourne. Throughout the week, Indigenous players shared their culture with local fans and children from surrounding schools.

In May, the NRL gathered all 16 NRL Clubs in Brisbane for the inaugural Magic Round at Suncorp Stadium. The creation of Magic Round Brisbane was one of the game's boldest quests. The weekend of festivities was a huge success, with 135,000 fans attending eight matches across four days. Brisbane's CBD swelled as more than 24,000 fans travelled interstate to enjoy a truly unique event, which included a fan zone, music acts, partner activations, merchandise, and much more. The venue, its precinct and Brisbane came to life with thousands of visitors dressed in their team's colours enjoying this historic weekend. Through NRL Travel many fans had access to unique experiences, including behind-the-scenes tours, player meet and greets, private functions, and unique merchandise.

The Holden State of Origin series quickly followed Magic Round in Brisbane with Game One being played at Queensland's home ground, Suncorp Stadium. In front of a packed house Queensland secured a one-nil series lead with a hard-fought, come-from-behind win 18-14.

For the first time, the State of Origin spectacle made its way to Perth, where a record crowd of 59,700 West Australians enjoyed the unique atmosphere that comes with sports greatest rivalry.

Local entertainment act Eskimo Joe warmed up the crowd ahead of a thrilling game, creating a unique experience for the many local fans. With the game came numerous opportunities for both teams and players to engage with the local community.

Like Magic Round, through NRL Travel, fans from the eastern states could take part in unique rugby league experiences, with an added West Australian flavour. NSW took the win 38-6 which levelled the series.

The State of Origin decider was held at ANZ Stadium in early July with the series coming to a nail-biting finish with James Tedesco scoring a try in the 80th minute to win the match 26-20 to claim the 2019 State of Origin series. In all, the Holden State of Origin series saw more than 190,000 fans across Brisbane, Perth and Sydney – a great result for the game.







Over the dedicated representative weekend in June, the second Holden Women's State of Origin saw New South Wales retain the Trophy at a packed North Sydney Oval with 10,515 attending. Fans again stormed the field post-match to congratulate their heroes in what has quickly become a traditional highlight of this fixture.

The rep weekend also included men's and women's International Rugby League at Leichhardt Oval. Local talent from respective nations entertained the crowd throughout the day while Fiji celebrated their maiden women's international debut in style with a 28-0 victory over Papua New Guinea.

The Fiji Men's team also tasted victory over Lebanon. To finish off the triple header event, Samoa were too strong for Papua New Guinea.

With the return of suburban venues in week one, and Bankwest Stadium coming on line, the 2019 Telstra Premiership Finals series offered fans a unique way to celebrate their club's success, providing home clubs the opportunity to showcase their clubs' rich culture, community and heritage.

Manly's Brookvale Oval hosted in week one of the finals with over 15,000 fans witnessing Manly defeat Cronulla. Canberra hosted a sold-out preliminary final for the first time at their home ground, GIO Stadium.

**The highest ever NRL crowd at the stadium, more than 26,000 people, witnessed the Canberra Raiders make their first Grand Final in 25 years.**

Grand Final week dominated Sydney, as the inaugural Martin Place Fan Fest drew families of fans from across greater Sydney into the CBD to meet the teams, take part in unique partner experiences, and listen to media personalities analyse and debate the upcoming Grand Final.



As tens of thousands of Raiders fans joined the local Roosters fans at ANZ Stadium for the year's pinnacle event, the unique fan culture of both teams was celebrated throughout the day, providing attendees with one of the most electric Grand Final atmospheres in recent years.

Grand Final day was a truly memorable day of entertainment with both the women's and men's champions becoming back-to-back Premiers. The Brisbane Broncos secured two from two Holden Women's Premierships with a compelling win over the St George Illawarra Dragons. For a first time on Grand Final day, at half-time of the women's match the crowd was entertained by legendary female performer Christine Anu.

Soon after highly acclaimed superstar band OneRepublic belted out their biggest hits to the 82,922 packed into ANZ Stadium, the Sydney Roosters achieved rare back-to-back Telstra Premiership titles over the gallant Canberra Raiders. In a special night, patriotic fans from the Roosters Chookpen and the Raiders who travelled shook the stadium's foundations with their distinctive Viking Clap.

The year was capped off with the inaugural Word Cup 9s which brought 16 nations together over two days at Sydney's new Bankwest Stadium, Parramatta for the fast and furious format that is 9s rugby league.

Four nations competed in the women's tournament with New Zealand defeating Australia to take the title, while 12 countries contested for the honour of being crowned Downer Rugby League World Cup 9s 2019 Men's Champions. In a fitting finale, Australia was able to overcome a determined New Zealand to square the ledger with our great rivals with a World Cup title going to each nation.

On the domestic scene, our last major event was hosted regionally at Wollongong's WIN Stadium where trans-Tasman rivalry returned to a 13-a-side format test match. An enthusiastic crowd of 18,104 witnessed a Junior Kangaroos team littered with established first grade players prove too classy for France, while the Jillaroos and Kangaroos both proved too strong for their New Zealand adversaries.

The success of all our major events in 2019 would not have been possible without the support of Tourism and Events Queensland, Tourism WA and Destination NSW as well as our commercial and broadcast partners. We thank them all for their support.

For 2020, the Holden State of Origin achieves another new milestone as it heads to South Australia for Game One, while the Women's State of Origin heads north for the first time to Queensland's Sunshine Coast. The Club Nines is back and will kick off the football calendar in February in Perth.





## Consumer Business

Our continued focus has been on creating a diversified range of options for our fans.

- » Additional ticket inclusion products that incorporate unique merchandise, food and beverage offers and exclusive access areas in stadiums.
- » Continuing to ensure young families are welcome at NRL major events with a separate family-only zone at the Grand Final including a family fun pack to allow young families to enjoy the Grand Final.
- » Magic Round was a success for the NRL with over 135,000 fans enjoying the action across a full round of rugby league at Suncorp Stadium. Ticket pricing was a key feature of the event design with fans able to access every game in great seats in the inner bowl for as little as \$99.
- » Our hospitality business expanded as compared to the previous year through a wider range of products and greater access to hospitality assets in venues. Coupled with additional sales through in-house sales the hospitality business is well positioned to continue to grow as new assets are made available in new venues.
- » The NRL Travel business continued to grow in its second year of operation, particularly for events in new destinations, such as Origin in Perth. The business is expanding into partnering with regional tourism operators to provide further reasons for our fans to extend and enjoy their travel to NRL major events.
- » The NRL's online retail store leveraged the investment in the NRL's digital platform, increasing turnover by 94 per cent over the prior year. Growth in sales and margin is planned through continual coordinated ranging and marketing.
- » The NRL's Magic Round event range has been nominated by Licensing International Australia for our unique range of products and in-stadia presentation.







Nationally, club rugby league grew by 1.23 per cent. This was largely driven by female participation which continued its strong upward trend with 18.4 per cent growth across all ages.



# Participation

This year the number of participants registering to participate in community rugby league programs and competitions increased, driven by strong growth in introductory programs and female club rugby league participation.

In 2019, the NRL introduced the Community Rugby League Participation Plan. The plan will deliver greater variety and flexibility, including more contact and non-contact formats to maximise our appeal to new participants and better experiences and pathways for existing participants.

Critical to broadening rugby league's appeal is our new Junior Participation Program 'League Stars'. League Stars is a non-contact skills program that provides the perfect introduction for primary school children.

**Our dedicated Game Development team delivered 540 League Stars programs to over 11,000 registered participants throughout the year.**

The League Stars program provided over 8000 participants with their first taste of rugby league and provides the foundation for future participation growth in contact and non-contact competition formats.

The Player Development Framework project was tested in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Toowoomba and Victoria throughout 2019.

The framework provides rugby league with alternative models of delivery, additional registration options, varying competition structures and increased choice for aspirational participants. The framework proposes a number of interventions including; tag rugby league for first-year participants (under 6 years); the TackleSafe program in the U7 age group, which is a six-session program designed to build a child's confidence and competence in both tackling and being tackled; a weight-related competition guide for regions where population demographics are suitable to offer a weight-related option; and an 18-month registration window targeted towards participants who would benefit from playing alongside players more closely aligned with their own stage of development.

Feedback gathered from participants and parents throughout 2018 and 2019 indicate these interventions have had a positive impact on the participant's competence and confidence, leading to a more positive rugby league experience overall.

Nationally, Club Rugby League grew by 1.23 per cent. This was largely driven by female participation which continued its strong upward trend with 18.4 per cent growth across all ages.

This amounts to a total of 28,000 women and girls that registered to play club rugby league across tackle and tag formats in 2019. The strongest performing age segments for females were the 10–12 years group (+27.8 per cent) and the 13–15 years group (+24 per cent).



Alternative Competitions, which include Rugby League 9s and other recreational formats, and Masters Rugby League, continued to grow in 2019. Growth in these categories provides further evidence of the changing participation landscape and the strong demand for alternative rugby league formats.

The NRL is committed to improving the support provided to volunteer administrators by developing a purpose-built, best-in-class competition management system for community rugby league. The new platform, MySideline, provides greater functionality and an improved ease of use for volunteers. The registration experience for new and returning participants has also improved. MySideline went live in December 2019.

The NRL continued to support community rugby league by educating, supporting and developing volunteer coaches. In 2019, our dedicated Game Development team delivered 489 Coach Education courses as well as providing additional support through the Coach Development Program and our digital Coaching Resources to over 13,000 registered coaches nationally.

A redevelopment of the Coach Education programs was also undertaken in 2019. The new programs have been led by the latest available research and are designed to ensure coaches are equipped with the

best possible information. This allows them to provide their players with a positive experience relative to their age and stage of development.

**To ensure our club rugby league participants get on the field each weekend, the NRL continued to invest in the recruitment, support and development of match officials in 2019.**

Throughout the year, over 1700 new referees were formally trained across 600 courses delivered nationally. This year also marked the introduction of two key initiatives, the Women in League Officiating Program (WILOP) and the Battlefields to Footy Fields (B2F) Program. WILOP delivers a targeted program for aspiring female referees while B2F aims at providing education, support and officiating opportunities to retired defence force personnel.

The NRL would like to thank the thousands of volunteers, as well as the State governing bodies throughout Australia, for their tireless work to grow rugby league. The NRL will continue to work collaboratively with them to deliver greater variety and more participation opportunities to the broader community.

## Highlights

### Club Rugby League

**1.23%** Total growth across all age segments

**18.4%** Growth in Females

### Masters (over 35 years)

**23%** Year-on-year growth

### Alternative Competitions

**28%** Growth in Alternative Competitions

### Affiliated States

**12%** Growth in Alternative Competitions



## League Stars



The NRL's new national introductory rugby league program – League Stars – was launched in July 2019 with over 200 boys and girls participating in official launch events held concurrently in Sydney and Brisbane.

League Stars introduces boys and girls aged five-to-12 to the basic skills of rugby league through a structured program delivered after school and during the school holidays. League Stars focuses on getting new participants and families involved in rugby league through fun, developmentally appropriate non-contact activities and games.

In developing League Stars, the NRL undertook extensive consumer and market research and consulted with a variety of stakeholders and subject matter experts to best understand the diverse needs of families that are living increasingly busy lives. The program addresses traditional barriers to participation and provides greater accessibility for parents and children to sample rugby league for the first time.

League Stars has made a positive impact in 2019 with over 11,000 registered participants consisting of 81 per cent registering to rugby league for the first time. Our Game Development Officers have delivered over 500 programs nationally in the short period the program has been in market.

League Stars is the perfect introduction to rugby league for new participants and provides the platform for future participation growth.

### Highlights

**11,237** Participants

**9347** New participants

**2657** Female participants

**539** Programs







# NSW Rugby League



NSW Rugby League (NSWRL) enjoyed another outstanding season of success in 2019 with the Brydens Lawyers NSW Blues defending the Holden State of Origin Shield for the first time since 2005.

Brydens Lawyers NSW Blues coach Brad Fittler found himself in unfamiliar territory after losing Game One in Brisbane and he reacted by making seven changes to the team for the must-win Game Two match in Perth. The move paid off with the Brydens Lawyers NSW Blues scoring an emphatic win which former NSW coach Phil Gould described as “the best NSW performance I’ve seen in over a decade”. The deciding Game Three in Sydney was a typical Origin thriller with the Blues scoring a try through Wally Lewis Medallist James Tedesco in the final minute to seal a memorable series win.

It marked the first time the Blues had come from a game down to win the series since 2005. Tedesco later becomes the first NSW player in history to win back-to-back Brad Fittler Medals.

The Harvey Norman NSW Women’s team continued their recent dominance against Queensland after defending their State of Origin Shield and extend their winning streak to five consecutive interstate challenges.

The match was played in front of more than 10,000 fans at North Sydney Oval and the women’s team dug deep after overcoming a halftime deficit to score an impressive win in the second half.

It was a night of double celebration with the NSW Women’s Under-18s team winning the inaugural women’s Under-18s Origin match that was played before the main game.

The NSWRL’s pathways teams enjoyed mixed success with the Under-20s team scoring a decisive win while the Under-18s suffered their first defeat since 2015. The Under-16s did not play a match against Queensland but scored an impressive win over an Under-16s Pasifika team.



The game continued to thrive at the grassroots level with the NSWRL recording increased participation for the second successive year.

There were more than 42,000 participants across the Sydney Metropolitan and NSWRL affiliated leagues. Monarch Blues Tag, a non-tackle competition, attracted 100 new teams to take the total number of teams serviced by NSWRL to 2600. The game continued to attract female players with a 25 per cent increase recorded in female rugby league participation.

The NSWRL moved into the multi-million-dollar Centre of Excellence to offer the men's, women's and pathways teams a world-class facility for their Origin preparations. The state-of-the-art Centre of Excellence was also used by NRL Clubs, including North Queensland Cowboys and Newcastle Knights, top sporting codes including the Wallabies and English football giant Leeds, and NSWRL referees. It was also made available for students from visiting schools to demonstrate the facility could be used by anyone in the state of NSW.



The centre was officially opened in February by the NSW Minister for Sport, the Hon. Stuart Ayres, and included a full-sized training and playing field with direct access to a gymnasium, a change room which allows Brydens Lawyers NSW Blues to make eye contact with every player, recovery facilities and medical treatment room, a hydrotherapy room and a tunnel linking the centre to ANZ Stadium, which the men's Origin team used for Game Three.

The Canterbury Cup NSW continued to go from strength to strength with the Grand Final between the seventh-placed Newtown Jets and the eighth-placed Wentworthville Magpies proving to be a thriller after the Jets won in extra time. The Jets would frank that form after conjuring another miracle final play to win the NRL State Championship against the Burleigh Bears. The Canterbury Cup NSW also proved to be a ratings winner for commercial broadcaster Nine and Gem and pay-TV network Fox League for Fox Sports with ratings up by more than 10 per cent across the season and the Grand Final returning the highest ratings ever for the competition.

The NSWRL and the Country Rugby League (CRL) made history in October after agreeing to merge, making it the first time in more than 80 years that Rugby League in NSW is governed by one body.

The decision sees the formation of a new board and brings forward by 12 months a memorandum of understanding between the two parties to merge, allowing more funding and resources to grow the game of rugby league across the state.

The season finishes on a high for the NSWRL after Chief Executive David Trodden is named the NSW Sports Administrator of the Year at the NSW Sports Awards. It is the second time in as many years the NSWRL is recognised at the prestigious awards after taking out the Organisation of the Year in 2018.





## NSWRL Highlights

- » The Brydens Lawyers NSW Blues stage a clinic for children from around the region in Armidale before a camp to begin preparations for the 2019 Holden State of Origin series
- » Hogs For The Homeless toured several areas across regional NSW in February and managed to raise more than \$60,000. Since the concept started in 2013, more than \$760,000 has been raised for Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets
- » The NSWRL receives Federal and State Government funding for its Try League program, which introduces Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to the game of rugby league
- » True Blue legends Tommy Raudonikis and Steve Mortimer are inducted into the NSWRL The Star Hall of Fame at the annual True Blues dinner
- » The NSWRL Pioneers hold off the Queensland Rangers to win a thrilling match at Davies Park in Brisbane
- » The NSW Wheelchair Rugby League team wins the inaugural State of Origin title and makes it five in a row for interstate challenges
- » The NSWRL celebrates the 75th edition of the All Schools Carnival with 150 staff and volunteers managing more than 200 games and 12 grand finals in 48 hours
- » The state's premier schoolgirl rugby league competition, the Katrina Fanning Cup, attracts 480 girls from across NSW and is refereed by an all-female team of 40 officials for the first time
- » The NSWRL unveils its jersey for the 2020 Holden State of Origin series which includes a traditional sky-blue strip, an alternate jersey for Game One in Adelaide, and a captain's run jersey which reflects the team's values







# Queensland Rugby League



It was a ground-breaking year for women's rugby league in Queensland with the rise of the state's flagship team and significant participation growth across all levels of the female game.

There was a noticeable spring in the step of Queensland's leading women's players right from the start of the season after Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk announced the team would be rightfully known as the Queensland Maroons.

The players embraced the official name change in line with the men's team; and immediately set out to wrest the Holden Women's State of Origin Shield back from New South Wales.

The Harvey Norman Queensland Maroons put in a gallant effort, only to fall narrowly short of victory in front of 10,000 fans at North Sydney Oval.

With next year's women's Origin clash to be played on the Sunshine Coast, thousands of young Queensland fans will have the opportunity to embrace their home-grown heroes.

**Female participation grew by 29 per cent in 2019, with the Queensland Rugby League (QRL) and its regions able to deliver a host of programs and initiatives thanks to funding support from the ARLC.**

Like the state's flagship female team, the Maroons men's team suffered a heartbreaking loss to the Blues after an epic series decider at ANZ Stadium.

There was a lot to like about the performance of the Maroons though, with Queensland unearthing a wave of fresh young talent under the guidance of coach Kevin Walters.

Walters and his charges once again inspired a generation of future Maroons through their involvement in numerous community activities, including a visit to Charleville, some 750km west of Brisbane.



Community leagues were once again a major focus for the QRL, with the South East, Central and Northern regions overseeing competitions and programs throughout the state.

With support from the NRL and Queensland Government, Intrust Super Cup games were taken to Nanango, Pittsworth, Cloncurry, Thursday Island, Ilfracombe and Ingham as part of 'Get in the Game' Country Week.

Proudly presented by BHP, the Country Week Round provided a substantial financial boost for local clubs and leagues; and generated a groundswell of community spirit as the travelling Intrust Super Cup clubs engaged with local participants.

The Intrust Super Cup was taken out by the Burleigh Bears, who defeated the Wynnum Manly Seagulls in front of a sellout crowd of 7788 at Redcliffe's Dolphin Stadium.

Grand final day provided a fabulous showcase of QRL pathways, with the Sunshine Coast and Wynnum Manly playing out a thrilling Hastings Deering Colts match.

Earlier in the season, the Auswide Bank Mal Meninga Cup was won by Tweed Seagulls, who went on to claim the national title with victory over the Illawarra Steelers.

The Tweed line-up featured numerous rising Queensland stars who also played key roles in the state's Under-18 team.

**The QRL ran another successful representative program, with the state Under-18s, XXXX Queensland Residents and Queensland Murri Under-16s all registering strong wins.**

This success wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Queensland Academy of Sport, as well as partners including Auswide Bank, Intrust Super, XXXX ISC Sport, Hastings Deering and Harvey Norman.





## QRL Highlights

- » 62,009 male and female players registered to play club rugby league
- » 29 per cent growth in female rugby league with 7459 registered club players
- » Intrust Super Cup attracted 1.4m viewers across the year with two additional broadcasts on FOX Sports the primary driver of an 8 per cent increase in viewership
- » Queensland Maroons were supported by 17, 078 Members in 2019
- » QRL secured \$400,000 in funding from the ARLC to drive women's and girls' competitions and programs throughout the state
- » 1,284,600 Queensland Maroons social media followers









# Country Rugby League



One third of all nationally registered players participate in Country Rugby League (CRL) competitions and a 13 per cent increase now sees more than 13,000 women competing in CRL competitions.

The continual growth of female participation saw CRL record an increase, with more than 60,000 registered players representing more than 500 clubs across Regional NSW. An additional 2500 players participated in alternative competitions, such as the women's 9s.

The success of the Andrew Johns and Laurie Daley Cups Junior Representative competitions continued – which featured live streaming of every game with over 800,000 views and a 12-team competition, as well as 10 franchises linked with NRL clubs.

These competitions allow young players from regional areas to compete at a representative level and to be part of an NRL pathway, while staying at home among important support networks.

Further highlights included the CRL Newcastle team winning the NSWRL Harvey Norman Women's Premiership as well as the Tathra Sea Eagles winning their first First Grade Premiership in 66 years and being nationally recognised as the Grassroots Club of the Year, while Muswellbrook-based Bianca Johnston was also nationally recognised in the Women in

League Award and Riverina product Tess Staines gained selection in the Champion NSW under 18s State of Origin side and the Australian Prime Minister's XIII women's team.

## CRL Highlights

- » Successful tours for CRL representative teams in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom
- » The CRL junior and senior representative season culminated with a fantastic day of rugby league at Glen Willow Stadium in Mudgee where the Northern Rivers Titans claimed their first Andrew Johns Cup title and the Illawarra South Coast Dragons their first Laurie Daley Cup title, while Illawarra continued their dominance in the men's Under-23s final and the Riverina Bulls claimed the inaugural women's Tackle title
- » CRL Newcastle defeated last year's champions Mounties 24-10 and claimed their maiden Harvey Norman Women's Premiership title at ANZ Stadium in front of a vocal crowd
- » The Under-14s and Under-15s CRL Country Championships were held in Wagga Wagga and Port Macquarie and is, for many of the 800 players involved, their first step in the representative rugby league pathway.



# NRL across Australia – Affiliated States



## Victoria

Rugby league in Victoria took a major step forward in October with the announcement of a \$12 million centre of excellence to be built at Seabrook Reserve in Broadmeadows. The new home for rugby league in Victoria is part of a multi-million-dollar State Government initiative in partnership with the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board and local council.

The development – due to commence in 2020, will include a show pitch, three community access competition pitches, a pavilion and car parking. It will be the new administration base for NRL Victoria and home for local club Northern Thunder.

Participation at the community rugby league level grew by 12 per cent in 2019, including a 10 per cent rise in male players and a 17 per cent rise in female players. NRL Victoria also trialled the Player Development Framework on behalf of the governing body. Positive feedback and indicators from the trial concluded the initiatives delivered by the NRL Victoria team assisted participation growth.

It was a clean sweep for NRL Victoria at the 2019 Combined Affiliated States (CAS) Carnival, taking out all four divisions for the first time in history



## Northern Territory

2019 saw the opening of the new purpose-built rugby league stadium in Darwin, Territory Rugby League Stadium. The stadium was opened by ARLC Commissioner, Megan Davis and NT Minister for Tourism, Sport and Culture, Lauren Moss.

Player participation grew by 6.5 per cent overall with a 10 per cent rise in female players and 5 per cent rise in male players.

In July, Belinda Howie, ARLC NT Chair, resigned after five years in the position. Howie was instrumental in securing NT Government support for the new stadium at Warren Park.

### Highlights

- » Hosted 2019 Combined Affiliated States Carnival
- » Hosted NRL Premiership fixture Parramatta Eels v Canberra Raiders fixture at TIO Stadium
- » The town of Katherine hosted the Macquarie Sports Clinic, attracting over 250 children from regional and remote areas
- » Litchfield Bears won the A grade grand final for the second consecutive year





## Western Australia

The State of Origin shifted to Perth for Game Two where it was played at Perth's Optus Stadium. A record crowd of more than 59,000 people watched the game.

The HBF Stadium in Perth will host the reincarnation of NRL Nines in February 2020, with all 16 NRL Clubs and four NRLW teams taking part.

The rugby league footprint expanded in 2019 with growth in regional areas including Albany, Kimberley and Pilbara; however, community rugby league participation overall fell by 1.79 per cent in Western Australia in 2019.

Fremantle Roosters continued their dominance of the NRLWA Smarter than Smoking Premiership, winning their third consecutive premiership in the men's competition. Ellenbrook Rabbitohs proved too strong for Fremantle Roosters in the women's grand final.



## South Australia

Rugby league growth was achieved with an increase of over 19 per cent in community rugby league club participation.

The on-field success in 2019 was complemented by several significant announcements, including State of Origin to be played in South Australia for the first time at Adelaide Oval in 2020 and the appointment of Justin Dooley as NRL SA State Manager.

The inaugural women's rugby league competition was formed in Adelaide with 50 new female players joining the club rugby league community.

A spring rugby league Nines competition was a huge success and attracted more than 150 players who did not participate in the winter club competition.



## Tasmania

The NRL game development team continued delivery of rugby league programs in schools throughout Tasmania. There was growth in the non-contact version of the game, particularly in Launceston and Hobart.







# Touch Football Australia

During 2018-19, the National Rugby League (NRL) and Touch Football Australia (TFA) alliance made big advancements.

A Jim Doyle-led review of the partnership has led to a more comprehensive overarching strategy to deliver outcomes for both codes and the collective community. We are now achieving greater alignment, particularly in the participation and digital sides of the businesses.

The review resulted in the creation of the NRL Non-Contact Strategy which is headlined by a new non-contact format, NRL League Touch, which takes Touch back to its roots, reintroducing the marker and a kick to appeal to different markets and to those who want to play a form of Touch that is closer to rugby league.

**The NRL Touch Premiership – Touch Football's elite televised men's and women's competition – continued for its second season in an expanded format.**

Two more NRL Clubs, the Sydney Roosters and New Zealand Warriors, joined the inaugural six clubs. Games were played over five months at major stadia around Australia and New Zealand and broadcast on Fox League, Kayo, NRL.com and Sky Sports in New Zealand.

**It was a year of many other highlights for Touch Football, including:**

- » Significant participation growth – Touch Football bucked industry trends by achieving huge growth in juniors as well as growth in seniors (see figures below).
- » The Australian national Touch Football teams were given a name, the Emus – the iconic Australian animal that sits alongside the NRL's Kangaroo on the coat of arms.
- » Australia's Emus won both the Open and Youth Touch World Cups in Kuala Lumpur, and TFA now holds all international silverware.
- » The men's and women's NRL Touch Premiership Grand Finals were played on the iconic Sydney Cricket Ground, where the North Queensland Cowboys took out the men's and Brisbane Broncos the women's
- » Touch Football became more inclusive than ever during the period, with TFA launching the All Abilities program that allows for people with intellectual and physical impairments to take part in Touch skills sessions and games along with their family, friends, carers and even elite Touch footballers.

## The year in numbers

**697,576** Total participants

**9.8%** Growth in Full-Active Junior Members

**2.4%** Growth in senior participation

**52** NRL Touch Premiership games were played across 13 stadiums



## Section Four

# Developing Our Game



# 04



# NRL Digital Network

The NRL Digital Network, which is developed and run by the NRL in partnership with Telstra, NRL Clubs, QRL and NSWRL, has continued to grow in 2019.

The network maintained momentum, continuing its double-digit, year-on-year growth across average weekly audience, page views and video hours watched in 2019. NRL Club and State digital properties have been the breakout story in 2019 – together, they attracted 30 per cent more traffic in 2019.

A massive 1.3 million fans have registered to the NRL account, enabling a tailored experience and benefits across the NRL network. The fan identity platform saw 55 per cent growth this year.

Throughout the year, focus on video and entertainment content captivated fans and promoted the positive stories behind the game. Fans were gripped by the emotional video tribute, 'Long Walk to 300', which saw Benji Marshall's former team-mates and members of his family surprise him prior to playing his 300th game.

NRL opened up the archives to NRL account holders for the first time this year, with full match replays of every Grand Final since 1966 and every State of Origin game up to the 2017 series made available for every fan to watch via NRL TV for free.

Greatly improved live streaming technology and infrastructure was launched and used to deliver more live content to fans than ever before. The new technology enabled clubs and states to stream, as well as NRL.com to produce live coverage such as the weekly Graham Annesley press conference and various major events shows.

Non-televised games of the NRL Touch Premiership were available for fans to watch live on NRL.com, as well as the Junior Kangaroos match up against France, which was produced and streamed end-to-end by the NRL.

Collaboration with NRL media partners meant more exceptional content delivered to fans, including a Nine Sunday Footy Show collaboration focused on Belinda Sharpe's debut match and a behind-the-scenes special on Brad Arthur produced alongside Fox League.

The Telstra NRL App continues to be a central part of the NRL digital offering. After a huge 89 per cent growth in 2018, Telstra Live Pass streaming subscriptions increased another 25 per cent year on year in 2019, with the Raiders earning the title of most-streamed team this season.

This refined fan offering has resulted in a strong repeat audience. A survey of around 18,000 users found that four in five engage with the Network at least once a week. The Network's Net Promoter Score (NPS) increased by 11 points in 2019 with young audiences the most highly satisfied and engaged. Under 18s scored the Network an impressive NPS of 43.

NRL's social footprint was further amplified this year, hitting a cumulative social media audience of 4.9m and over 40 per cent growth against 2018, with major growth coming from Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, which are hugely popular with younger audiences.

The Network played a key role promoting participation, community and the women's game, proudly doubling the coverage dedicated to women, community and grassroots this year.



The women's game clocked record audiences when an incredible run and chase from Tiana Penitani and Kelsey Gentles in the Women's World Cup 9s went viral, reaching over 129 million people worldwide on Facebook.

In 2020, NRL Digital will work closely with clubs, states and Telstra to better engage fans and continue to foster the returns on the significant investment made by the game and its partners.

This work has begun, with the major digital transformation of the game's Grassroots Participation digital platforms under way. Advances in marketing automation this year have proven the Network's capacity to drive traditional revenue streams and will be intensified next year. Digital innovation in game-day experience, such as the Telstra NRL App Light Show that delighted fans this year, will be concentrated on improving and transforming the fan ticketing experience.

Overall the Digital Network will be worked harder in 2020 as a core service provider and driver of value across the game and its stakeholders.

### The year in numbers

56%	Growth YoY in NRL accounts
1.3m	NRL accounts
2.8m	Average weekly unique visitors to Network, 13.4% growth YoY
25%	Growth YoY in Telstra NRL Live Pass Subscriptions
2x	Growth in coverage on women's, community and grassroots
43	Net Promoter Score from users under 18 on network
4.96m	Cumulative social media footprint
45%	Social media footprint growth against 2018
30%	Growth in traffic (page views) on club and state digital properties YoY



## Integrity and Compliance

Through policy innovation, strong new rules and firm action, the NRL confirmed its commitment to the integrity and reputation of rugby league during 2019.

Over the course of 2019 the NRL confronted the issue of player behaviour and its impact on the reputation and health of the game. Following a difficult off-season which caused significant damage, the NRL responded with new measures designed to address matters that threaten the good standing of the game among our fans, participants and in the community.

In addition to firm penalties for breaches of the game's Code of Conduct, the Australian Rugby League Commission introduced a new policy – the No-Fault Stand Down – which ensures that players facing serious criminal charges do not represent the game on-field while whilst those matters are determined. A balanced policy, which respects the individual's presumption of innocence and ensures training and pay while active, the No-Fault Stand Down is an Australian first and among the most innovative integrity measures in world sport. The policy was confirmed by the Australian Federal Court in May 2019 and is a key measure available to the game in safeguarding its reputation.

### The NRL rules and integrity unit

The ARLC and NRL remain committed to ensuring that the positive contribution of the vast majority of our elite players, officials, administrators and volunteers is not undermined by the poor decisions of a few.

The NRL's responses in this area are made possible by the NRL's robust governance framework, the NRL Rules, which regulate both on-field and off-field conduct. The rules are administered by the NRL Integrity and Compliance Unit, a multidisciplinary team created by the rules and based in a secure area of Rugby League Central. In 2019, the NRL continued to invest in the unit's personnel, support and capabilities to ensure the NRL's efforts in this area are sport-leading.

### Key relationships strengthened

The NRL's strong relationships with regulators, law enforcement and wagering operators were further strengthened during 2019, with subject matter experts from the Integrity Unit appointed to several advisory panels on the delivery of the Federal Government's National Review of Australia's Sports Integrity Arrangements (the Wood Review). In April 2019 the NRL partnered with the Council of Europe and the Australian Government to support and promote a South Pacific regional platform to combat sports corruption. The NRL continues to place a high premium on its relationship with our government, regulatory and law enforcement partners in presenting a unified front against integrity risks in Australian sport.

The NRL's extensive network of Integrity and Product Fee Agreements with Wagering Operators continued to provide critical information-sharing and risk management procedures in this important area.



NRL Chief Operating Officer, Nick Weeks.

## A committed response to performance-enhancing and illicit drugs

The NRL conducts comprehensive drug programs across our clubs to ensure a safe and fair environment in which our players can compete. The NRL's ASADA-approved anti-doping program focuses on eradicating performance-enhancing drugs from our sport, while our illicit and hazardous drug program, developed with the Rugby League Players Association, addresses the use of illegal and dangerous drugs by players, backed by a thorough wellbeing, diversion and rehabilitation process.

Improved education initiatives also brought home the risks and consequences of the use of performance-enhancing drugs to hundreds of players and officials across our game.

## Salary cap and accredited agents

2019 saw the completion of the second year of the current Collective Bargaining Agreement and its improved financial benefits for players, delivered via the mechanism of the NRL's competition-balancing salary cap. Administered by their Integrity Unit's salary cap team, the salary cap limits each club's player-spending to \$9.6 million, underpinning the close competition witnessed in the 2019 NRL season – while a football department salary cap serves a similar purpose across club personnel and equipment.

Over 2019 the NRL demonstrated its commitment both to fostering compliance through education and assistance for clubs, and to enforcement in calling the Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks to account for breaches of the salary cap rules.

The first year of the NRL's new Accredited Agent Scheme saw increased accountability for Player Agents in the vital role they play in the development and support of our players. The scheme, administered with the Rugby League Players Association, requires improved compliance and professional standards from this important group of rugby league stakeholders.



Section Five

# Our Community







05



# The NRL Community

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

It is our community that binds us together, underpinning everything we set out to achieve both on and off the field.

In 2019, the NRL continued to lead and inspire people to be the best they can be by providing pathways to live positive, respectful and healthy lives. We aim to do this in every area that our game has a presence or aims to have a presence.



## Meet our NRL Community champions

This year the NRL recognised Holly Summers, a young Indigenous leader who has bounced back from adversity to become a role model in her community.

The rising star has overcome struggles with mental health to become captain of her school, succeeded in the Titans' School to Work and Deadly Futures programs, and received the Peter Doherty Award for outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander senior STEM student. Summers is also a talented player – turning out for the Parkwood Sharks and the Gold Coast under-18s.

NRL Head of Football Graham Annesley, Titans Captain, Ryan James, and Indigenous leader Preston Campbell visited Pacific Pines High School to present Holly with the NRL's Young Person of the Year Award and celebrate with her surrounded by friends and family.

Since 2007, the NRL Community Awards have become an essential way to celebrate those making a positive difference within the game. This year, the NRL brought the awards back to local communities across Australia, visiting six winners from Melbourne to Normanton.

**"Holly's one of those young people that try to use their story, their journey, in order to help people and create awareness of some of the issues in our community."**

**Preston Campbell.**







## Measuring impact

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is an internationally recognised approach used to measure and value the impact of a program or organisation. It is a form of cost-benefit analysis that examines social, economic and environmental outcomes created and the costs of creating them.

The NRL again engaged Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to independently look at the investment made in four community-based programs and the outcomes experienced by participants this year.

SROI analysis tells a powerful story about the impact each program is having on the NRL fan base and wider community. When the total investment from the NRL, government and corporate sponsors is compared to the social value created, the result is a ratio of greater than 1:4. That is, for every \$1 invested, \$4 was generated in social return.

This is an aggregate of four programs that individually generate:

**State of Mind – \$3.26**

**School to Work – \$4.19**

**Voice Against Violence – \$5.49**

**In League In Harmony – \$4.29**

SVA found that much of the social value generated can be considered unique. Without the profile and reach of the NRL, it would be difficult to replicate the impact being created. The analysis demonstrates that, across the NRL's programs, significant outcomes are being generated for individuals, communities and government.

## State of Mind

NRL State of Mind supports the rugby league community with positive mental health through face-to-face sessions. It is designed to increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma and enable connections to be made.

In 2019, the NRL continued to engage with grassroots clubs across the country. Contracts to deliver the program in New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia were completed, with the program taking positive mental health messages to regional and remote areas including the Pilbara and the Kimberley, Weipa, Alice Springs and Mount Gambier.

In Queensland, the team undertook the largest blitz of deliveries yet culminating in 213 grassroots clubs completing the four-step program across three years.

In Western Australia, the NRL delivered on its commitment to take every club in the state through the program. Participants celebrated this achievement through the help of the Hon. Roger Cook with an on-field recognition taking place during State of Origin II as the game's biggest rivalry arrived in Perth. Additionally, all clubs across the Northern Territory have been recognised this year.

These deliveries wouldn't be possible without the support of the Australian, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australian Governments.

Thanks to support from the Australian Government, the NRL commenced a three-year project to deliver messaging focused on Indigenous mental health. This began at the 2019 All Stars, with Indigenous and Maori teams, plus Youth Summit attendees, participating in State of Mind workshops and various activations taking place during the week.





## Don't Stay On The Sideline

The NRL launched its latest Power for Change campaign at State of Origin I in Brisbane, highlighting one of the biggest health issues in Australia.

Don't Stay On The Sideline encouraged the Australian public to start a conversation and look out for their mates. Statements from players were complemented by a powerful video piece encouraging the rugby league community to treat their mental health in the same way they do their physical health, thereby reducing the stigma and enabling help-seeking behaviours.



The campaign received an overwhelmingly positive response online – reaching 1.6 million people and achieving more than 1 million views, 4 million impressions and close to 3000 shares. Game-day activations took place throughout the series and, off-field, NRL Community Advocates shared their stories.

**\$3.26** was the social value created for every \$1 invested in the State of Mind program.



**\$1 » \$3.26**

This represents a slight decrease from last year's ratio, primarily due to a net decrease in participants per dollar spent as the program invested funds to reach less populous rugby league communities in remote areas. The key driver for the program's value was the significant number of individuals reached through the Don't Stay on the Sideline campaign.



## School to Work

The NRL's School to Work program, which provides young Indigenous Australians with work experience, mentoring and leadership opportunities, maintained its high success rate in 2019.

The program, funded by the Australian Government through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, engaged with 1100 students in 2019, helping them complete high school and transition into further study, training or meaningful employment thanks to the one-on-one support received from Project Officers.

The NRL took a new approach to celebrating success this year with graduation ceremonies delivered at a local level. Given the program's geographic spread, this provided an opportunity for the 11 NRL Clubs involved in the program to celebrate their student's achievements and recognise the teachers, advisors, employers and education institutions which have had such a lasting impact on each student.

This year, the NRL celebrated its partnership with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) by sharing the stories of School to Work graduates who are pursuing careers in the ADF. Starting with a launch event at WIN Stadium, each participating club promoted the partnership during Round 16 with Josh Addo-Carr, Wade Graham and others lending support.

Many positive stories came out of the program in 2019, including Jared Clarkson contributing to the game in full-circle, taking on a journalist internship at NRL.com. Sarita Singh winning the 2019 Zonta Young Women in Public Affairs Award, William Paulson received the Titans NAIDOC Certificate and Kirralee Smith was selected as her school's first-ever Indigenous School Captain.



This is in-line with last year's ratio. The key driver for this social value was the number of education and employment outcomes achieved for young people – the primary goal of the program, representing most significant outcome for all stakeholders.









## Voice Against Violence

NRL Voice Against Violence supports the rugby league community to stand up, speak out and take action to prevent violence against women and children. This year the program continued to expand and innovate within Australia and beyond.

NRL Community Advocates from the Manly-Warringah Sea Eagles, Wests Tigers and Brisbane Broncos led workshops during the inaugural Magic Round, while Cronulla Sutherland JRL became the first district in the country to take every under-16s squad through the program with a helping hand from local junior Kyle Flanagan. Workshops were also delivered in Western Australia to over two hundred young people in a single weekend.

Following Prime Minister Scott Morrison's visit to Suva for the PM's XIII fixtures, the Australian Government committed funding to help the NRL deliver workshops to every local club in Fiji.

The NRL aligned this tour to the crucial message of stopping violence against women and children. Australian, Fijian, ADF and Fijian Army teams took part in workshops, with leading players also delivering the message during community visits.

The NRL continued to embed the program within Tonga as the Tongan Army and Police took part in workshops, empowering figures in authority to call out inappropriate behaviour and ensure the communities they represent are free of violence. In Papua New Guinea, the program has been nominated for a 2019 Peace and Sports Award for its outstanding contribution to peace, dialogue and social change through sport.

The program was delivered to 64 communities in Australia and 31 communities across the Pacific. This reach would not be possible without the support of Holden and the Australian Government.





## Numbers to Lives

The Numbers to Lives campaign was again aligned to the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. A video piece featured Alan Tongue, David Shillington, Josh Reynolds and Simaima Taufa delivering a workshop to the Minto Cobras, driving home the message to young males that statistics are just numbers until you put real lives to them.

Across social media, the campaign achieved just under 3 million impressions and reached 2 million people with a powerful call-to-action. This was complemented by over 100 pieces of content across the NRL's digital network, using the common language of sport to educate on the prevention of violence.



This is a significant increase compared to last year's ratio. The most valuable outcome identified for the program was the increased awareness and understanding of domestic and family violence achieved through the Numbers to Lives campaign.



## In League In Harmony

The NRL's In League In Harmony program continues to go from strength to strength across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. The social inclusion program is delivered over six school-based sessions and addresses issues such as disengagement, racism and bullying.

This year the program was delivered at almost 70 high schools, Juvenile Justice Centres, and Intensive English Centres. Participants were empowered to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity among their peers and the wider community. In March, during the NRL's Inclusion Month, In League In Harmony participants across the country united to take part in Harmony Day Festivals. Community members were invited to experience a Harmony Walk, Wheelchair Rugby League, performances by multicultural groups and more.

The NRL is committed to fostering an inclusive game in which everyone feels welcome – no matter what. As part of this, the NRL used Harmony Day to launch a handbook, developed in conjunction with Sport Australia and Play By The Rules, which provides grassroots clubs and associations with a range of actions to ensure everyone has the opportunity to be actively involved in the game.

The successes of the program would not be possible without the support of the Australian, New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian Governments.



This is a significant increase compared to last year's ratio. The key driver in achieving greater social value was the evidence of increased cohesiveness among students in the classroom and the impact the program had in improving student behaviours.



## Youth Advocate and Pacific Youth Programs

The Youth Advocate Program empowers young people to be advocates for social change. This year, in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, the next generation of leaders gained the confidence to make their voices heard through workshops, courses and project management opportunities.

In October, five Youth Advocates had the opportunity to perform at the 2019 Rugby League World Cup Nines. The group performed a combination of songs from each of the 12 competing nations, using pop-culture to highlight cultural harmony and providing the NRL an opportunity to engage with fans about inclusion.

The delivery of the program in New South Wales would not be possible without the support of the New South Wales Government.

Aligned with the NRL's Pacific Test, the Pacific Youth Program promotes and celebrate the game's impact on Pacific communities.

The Pacific Youth Summit theme 'Awaken the Warrior' was designed to empower Pasifika youth to become responsible leaders in their communities. Pasifika junior rugby league players from across Sydney took part in the three-day program, with lucky participants also chosen to be involved in game-day activities at Bankwest Stadium.



## NRL Community Advocates

Some of the game's biggest stars were announced as NRL Community Advocates this year, helping support the State of Mind and Voice Against Violence programs.

13 new players were announced in 2019, joining the 19 continuing in their roles from last season.

After thorough training from our expert partners, these self-nominated players worked throughout the year to amplify awareness of mental health and violence prevention among their rugby league community.



Name	Club
<b>Darius Boyd</b>	Brisbane Broncos
<b>Brisbane Broncos</b>	Brisbane Broncos
<b>Siliva Havili</b>	Canberra Raiders
<b>Joseph Tapine</b>	Canberra Raiders
<b>Jayden Okunbor</b>	Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs
<b>Aiden Tolman</b>	Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs
<b>Kyle Flanagan</b>	Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks*
<b>Josh Dugan</b>	Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks
<b>Dale Copley</b>	Gold Coast Titans
<b>Michael Gordon</b>	Gold Coast Titans*
<b>Joel Thompson</b>	Manly Warringah Sea Eagles
<b>Max King</b>	Melbourne Storm
<b>Christian Welch</b>	Melbourne Storm
<b>Dale Finucane</b>	Melbourne Storm
<b>Hymel Hunt</b>	Newcastle Knights

Name	Club
<b>David Klemmer</b>	Newcastle Knights
<b>Michael Morgan</b>	North Queensland Cowboys
<b>Jake Granville</b>	North Queensland Cowboys
<b>David Gower</b>	Parramatta Eels
<b>Daniel Alvaro</b>	Parramatta Eels
<b>Frank Winterstein</b>	Penrith Panthers*
<b>Wayde Egan</b>	Penrith Panthers*
<b>Dane Gagai</b>	South Sydney Rabbitohs
<b>Braidon Burns</b>	South Sydney Rabbitohs
<b>Tariq Sims</b>	St George Illawarra Dragons
<b>Angus Crichton</b>	Sydney Roosters
<b>Paul Momirovski</b>	Wests Tigers
<b>Ryan Matterson</b>	Wests Tigers*
<b>Josh Aloiai</b>	Wests Tigers

\*Moved clubs or retired ahead of the 2020 NRL Telstra Premiership

## Road to Regions

Dale Finucane and Isabelle Kelly were among a host of players who hit the road in February to visit more than 60 regional towns across New South Wales and Queensland.

The visits were part of the NRL's annual Road to Regions initiative, providing an opportunity for stars of the game to meet some of their biggest fans throughout rural and regional Australia.

Players took part in skills clinics and school-based lessons, promoting physical wellbeing through participation in sport and mental wellbeing through the delivery of cyber-safety messages and the State of Mind program. With the likes of Anthony Don and Talesha Quinn returning to their hometowns, the focus was on inspiring communities in the traditional heartlands of rugby league.

The support of the New South Wales and Queensland Governments helped expand the reach of the program in 2019.



## Champions on and off the field

Raiders forward, Sia Soliola, and Warriors star, Honey Hireme, were awarded this year's Ken Stephen and Veronica White Medals for their inspiring off-field work.

For the first time, these two prestigious awards were celebrated during the biggest occasion in the rugby league calendar, with current nominees and former winners also recognised during Grand Final day to highlight the genuine impact players make within local communities.

2019 marked the 31st iteration of the Ken Stephen Medal, while the Veronica White Medal was presented in its inaugural year. Named after former Jillaroo and president of the Australian women's rugby league, the new award recognises the incredible contributions that female rugby league players make off the field.





# The NRL Community

## Indigenous Programs

The genuine connection between rugby league and the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities continued to grow in 2019.

### **Some successes across the year included:**

- » The NRL publicly pledged its support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Statement was issued in 2017 on behalf of First Nations peoples and is an incredibly important proclamation calling for the establishment of a First Nations Voice in the constitution and a Makarrata Commission on agreement-making and truth-telling.
- » Katrina Fanning was appointed as the new chairperson of the Australian Rugby League Indigenous Council (ARLIC). The NRL also welcomed new members in Leann Wilson, Toby Adams, Hannah Hollis, Tallisha Harden, Preston Campbell and Phil Gyemore. ARLIC represents the views of Indigenous peoples and acts as a sounding board for the game in the development of policies and procedures.
- » For the first time, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Invitational team competed at the Australian Schoolboys U15s Championships. The team was coached to a historic grand final victory by former NRL players Tom Learoyd-Lahrs and Dean Widders. The NRL will aim to include similar participation in all future junior elite championships, with a strong emphasis on culture and heritage.

## Indigenous Round

The NRL celebrated Indigenous Round in May, aligning with the commencement of National Reconciliation Week.

Thanks to the continued support of NRL Clubs, this year's round was one of the most inspiring yet. Every player and match official wore specially designed jerseys and Welcome to Country ceremonies occurred at all matches. Highlights included School to Work students at the Dragons and Bulldogs forming on-field guards of honour, Sharks staff and players taking part in cultural awareness sessions, and the Roosters hosting a cultural arts program for local schools.

In Newcastle, the Knights held a cross-code Long Walk with Indigenous Ambassadors Preston Campbell and Michael Long leading participants from Ford Oval to McDonald Jones Stadium. The walk marked the first time the game has worked with The Long Walk, a charity inspired by Michael Long's efforts to get the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples back on the national agenda.







## All Stars

A revamped NRL Harvey Norman All Stars was back on the calendar in 2019 with the New Zealand Māori All Stars taking on the Indigenous All Stars in historic male and female double-header.

Supported by the Victorian Government, the fixtures were the culmination of a week-long celebration of rugby league's commitment to promoting Australian and New Zealand First Nations cultures and recognising the remarkable contribution that Indigenous and Māori players have made to our game. Four unique designs were emblazoned across each jersey, created by artists from communities in Australia and New Zealand.

Off the field, the Indigenous Youth Summit was another huge success with almost 70 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth coming together across four days to attend workshops focusing on culture, leadership, education and employment.







## Reconciliation Action Plan

The Australian Rugby League Commission continue to implement its 2018-2022 Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) – the highest of four levels for RAP.

PwC Indigenous Consulting recently audited the NRL's RAP implementation. Through consultations and analysis of the scorecard monitoring system, it found that a significant number of targets have been met or are on-track to being met.

Actions	Targets met	Assessment
Relationships	24/25	●
Respect	19/20	●
Opportunities	22/22	●
Tracking	7/8	●

Several targets and achievements by the NRL were found to align or exceed best practice, including:

- » A 5 per cent employment cohort (exceeding the 3 per cent set by the Australian Public Sector Commission in the commitment to employment parity);
- » Aboriginal voices and participation embedded with the governance structures of the NRL who shape and advise on matters that directly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aligning to core rights outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People);
- » Commitment to achieving 15 per cent representation within playing group cohorts (juniors, women and men);
- » Moving beyond the core business of the NRL and influencing in broader community activities is demonstrating commitment beyond the 'business as usual' for the NRL and aligns strongly with the five pillars of reconciliation as identified through RA."

Source: 'Independent review of the RAP activities for 2018'  
– PwC Indigenous Consulting.



## Pacific Outreach

The NRL Pacific Programs continued to grow in popularity across the Pacific Islands of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Fiji, Samoa and Tonga in 2019.

The NRL team comprises of 50 full-time and casual staff who are all locals and therefore familiar to their communities, well connected and may be considered as influencers. These 'influencers' use the power of rugby league to engage and develop Pacific communities to improve health, gender equality, social cohesion and participation opportunities for people with a disability.



### Some highlights from our program in 2019 include:

- » League For Life (League Bilong Laif) delivered to over 58,000 students across the Pacific.
- » The Voice Against Violence program is now operational in PNG, Fiji and Tonga – 45 workshops delivered to more than 1000 participants.
- » The PNG VAV program recognised by the International Peace and Sport Awards for making an outstanding contribution to peace, dialogue and social change in PNG through sport.
- » The annual Prime Minister's XIII fixture was played in Fiji for the first time ever and was further strengthened by the inclusion of the Australian Defence Force Rugby Leagues men's and women's teams into the four-match fixture.
- » Government support for rugby league in the Pacific has received a boost through the announcement of the PacificAus Sports Program.

### PacificAus Sports Program funding support includes:

- » Kaiviti Silktails to enter the NSW Ron Massey Cup in 2020.
- » NRL trial games in the Pacific. The first Pacific NRL trial in 2020 will see the Bulldogs take on the Sharks in Port Moresby, PNG.
- » PNG Orchids participation in the first-ever women's international at the Pacific Test fixture and also their involvement in the World 9s.
- » Extended funding support for NRL Voice Against Violence program in Fiji.



## Australian Defence Force Rugby League

2019 saw an even greater working relationship develop with the ADF across the Pacific. The NRL and ADF entered into a memorandum of understanding that will see the ADF provide assistance for rugby league capacity building activities involving coaches, referees, trainers and administrators with a series of workshops across the Pacific.

## Success of Pacific Nations teams in International fixtures

### Some highlights include:

- » Tonga defeating Australia 16-12
- » Tonga defeating Great Britain 14-6
- » Fiji Bulikula defeating PNG Orchids 28-0 in their maiden international
- » PNG Kumuls defeating Great Britain 28-10
- » PNG Orchids defeating England 20-16 to record their first-ever International victory



Section Six

# Financial Results 2019









# Financial Results 2019

## Overview

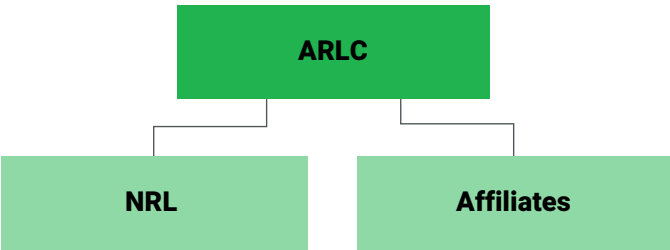
The following table presents the current corporate structure and illustrates what is consolidated into the statutory financial statements.

The structure remains unchanged from 2018. The financial commentary separates the ARLC and NRL entities (“Controlling Body”) and the subsidiary entities (“Controlled Entities”).

The following financial commentary relates to the underlying operations and results of the Controlling Body and excludes broadcast contra.

## Revenue

- » Broadcast revenue: 2019 results reflect the second year of the 2018-22 broadcast cycle. Revenue increased by \$6.6m or 2% to \$324.6m and will continue to increase by approximately 2% per annum over the remainder of the cycle, in line with increased costs related to servicing broadcast rights over the same period.
- » Non-Broadcast revenue: Increased by \$25.0m (14%) in 2019 to \$203.9m. The largest contributor to the uplift being Major Events (\$16.6m), as a result of the new Magic Round and an improved Origin series and Premiership Grand Final. Corporate partnership revenues also increased.



The above subsidiaries of the ARLC are all 100% owned. Affiliates comprise of ARLC WA Ltd, ARLC SA Ltd, ARLC VIC Ltd, ARLC NT Ltd and NRL Foundation Ltd.

## Expenditure

- » Event, Game and Sponsorship: Increased \$19.4m (23%) to \$103.2m. The increase was largely attributable to direct costs on increased revenues from Major Events (\$11.6m). The remainder of the increase was in Digital (\$2.9m), Sponsorship servicing (\$1.0m) and Marketing (\$1.0m). The increase in Digital operating costs was largely offset by a reduction in capital expenditure of \$2.3m.
- » Football: Increased by \$3.2m (15%) to \$25.0m, primarily due to legal costs incurred in defending player claims made against the NRL. There was also an increased investment in player welfare, injury surveillance and refereeing.
- » Community and Player Welfare: Increased by \$1.2m (7%) to \$17.2m. This was due to an expansion of government-funded programs: notably In League In Harmony and State of Mind. On player welfare, there has been more investment in counselling and training courses and increased investment into Players' retirement funds.
- » Integrity and Salary Cap: Reduced by \$0.5m (13%) to \$3.4m due to lower legal, professional services and tribunal costs.
- » Administration: Increased on a like-for-like basis by \$1.0m (5%). This increase relates to further investment in IT infrastructure and support, media capability and new investment in the Game Footprint strategy.
- » Insurance and Finance Costs: Decreased by \$1.2m (9%) to \$12.8m. Interest costs on advanced funding from Broadcasters reduced by \$1.9m. This was partly offset by increased insurance premiums of \$0.7m.



## Distributions

As a result of continued strong growth in Non-Broadcast performance and ongoing cost management, total funds available for distribution increased by \$7.8m in 2019 to \$346.6m. Actual distributions totalling \$316.5m reflect a \$20.5m uplift on 2018.

- » Clubs: Distributions to Clubs increased by \$5.4m (2%). This was largely due to the increase in participation payments of \$3.8m. The remainder of the increase relates to the reversal of a 2017 loan impairment in 2018.
- » States: Distributions to States increased by \$9.8m (21%). This largely relates to new investment in Grassroots initiatives (\$6.7m). There was also an increase in base funding to the Major States (QRL and NSWRL) along with some initial funding provided to Asia Pacific Rugby League for the establishment and operation of the Oceania Cup from 2020.
- » Development: Distributions increased by \$5.3m (15%), due to new investment in Grassroots initiatives (\$2.9m) and the introduction of Pathways and Development Officiating in this category (\$2.4m), which includes Staff Costs (\$1.7m), Travel and Accommodation (\$0.4m) and Operational Costs (\$0.3m).

## Consolidated Result

The Consolidated Result includes the Controlling Body and its Controlled Entities.

Total Consolidated Revenue (excluding contra) disclosed in the Financial Statements is \$531.5m (2018: \$499.9m) and Total Funds available for Distribution was \$348.3m (2018: \$338.2m).

Total distributions on a consolidated basis totalled \$318.1m (2018: \$292.3m) with an overall surplus of \$30.2m (2018: \$46.0m).

The difference between the Consolidated surplus and the Controlling Body surplus is \$0.1m (2018: -\$3.1m) and is due to:

- » Consolidated surplus of Controlled Entities of \$0.1m (2018: -\$0.3m).
- » 2018 included Gains on the Sale of previously owned entities of \$3.4m.

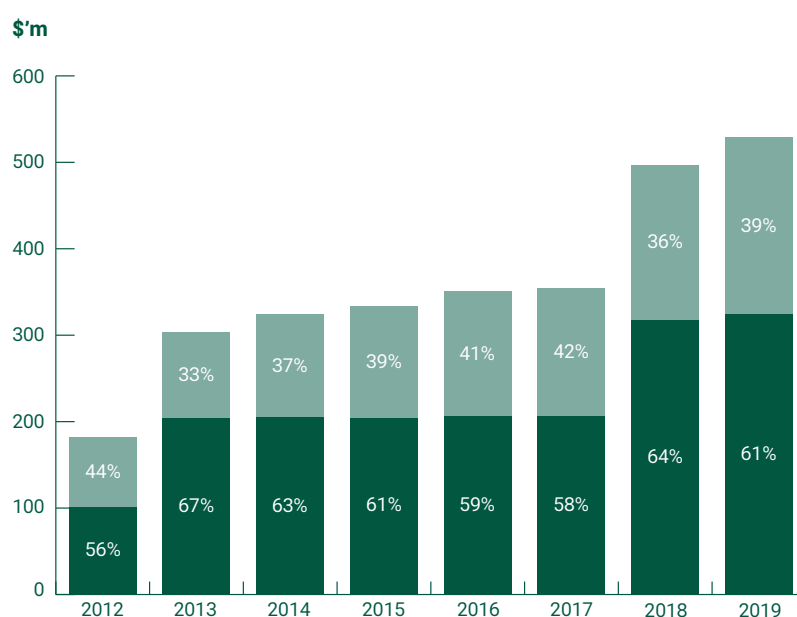
# Key Financial Indicators

## Revenue

≈ **14.0%**

on 2018 to \$204 million  
(Non-Broadcast Revenue)

■ Broadcast Revenue (excl. Contra)  
■ Non-Broadcast Revenue

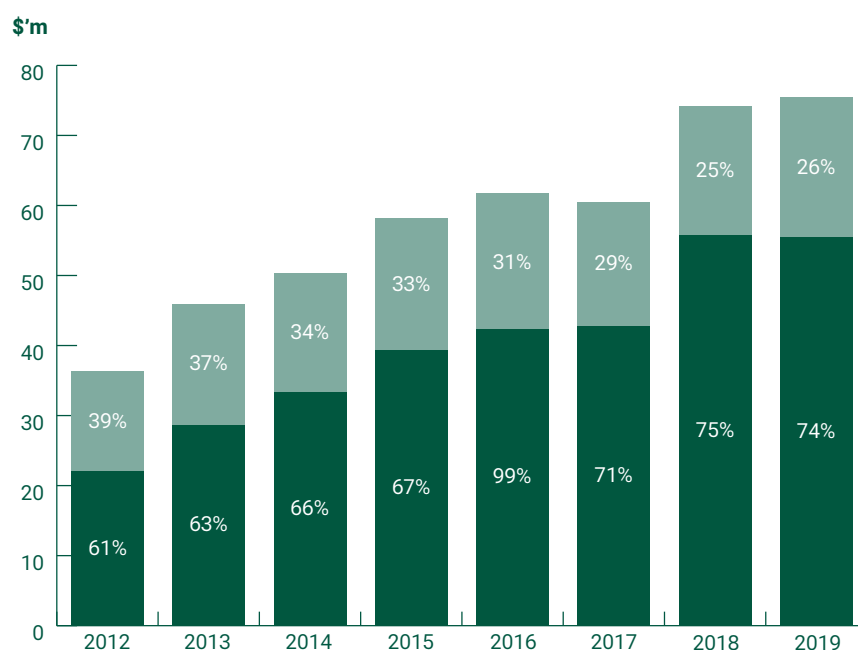


## Core Expenditure

≈ **1.5%**

on 2018 to \$75 million

■ Administration  
■ Other Expenses



### Notes

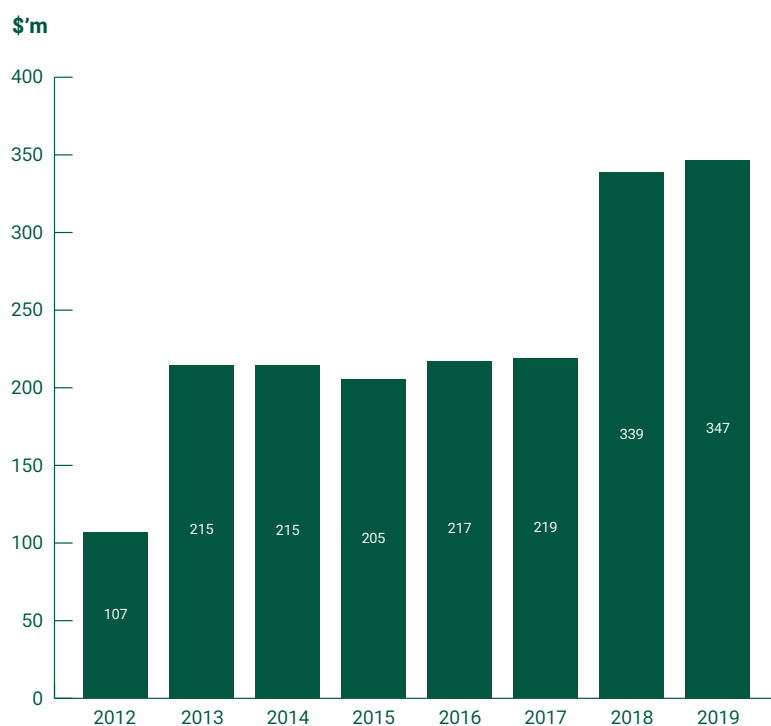
Operating expenditure, excluding revenue related expenses and exceptional items.



## Available for Distribution

≈ **2.3%**

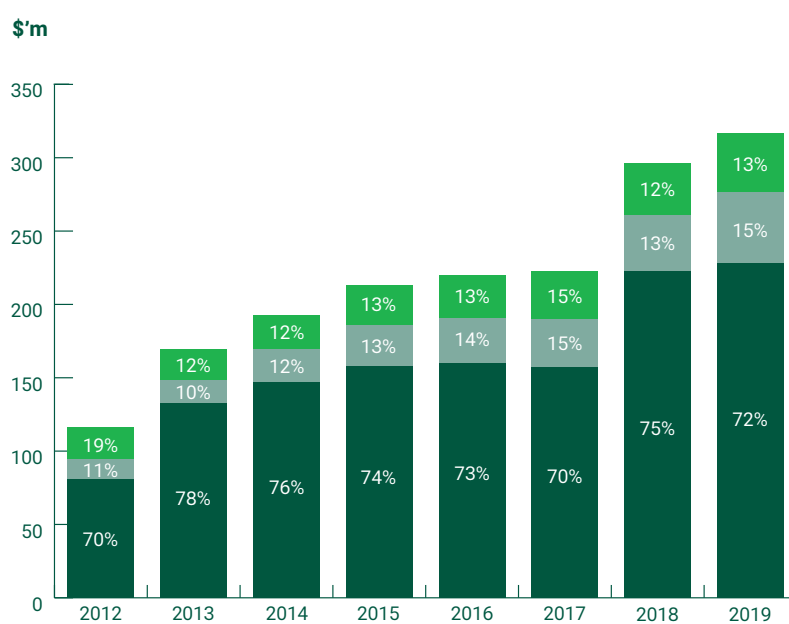
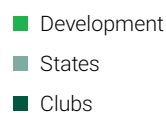
on 2018 to \$347 million



## Distributions

≈ **6.9%**

on 2018 to \$317 million



# Financial Summary

## The Controlling Body 2012–2019: Underlying Operating Performance

### Profit & Loss (\$'000)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Broadcast Revenue (excl. contra) <sup>1</sup>	101,600	204,345	205,000	204,735	206,345	206,198	317,992	324,595
Non-Broadcast Revenue	80,000	99,030	119,024	129,270	144,160	147,946	178,850	203,896
<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>496,842</b>	<b>528,491</b>
Event, Game and Sponsorship (excl. contra)	(39,400)	(44,489)	(59,064)	(70,514)	(71,524)	(74,812)	(83,757)	(103,184)
Football	(9,100)	(9,597)	(13,034)	(16,089)	(19,427)	(20,063)	(21,845)	(25,042)
Community and Player Welfare	(11,500)	(14,474)	(14,907)	(16,726)	(16,860)	(16,350)	(16,010)	(17,179)
Integrity and Salary Cap	(450)	(2,240)	(2,516)	(2,595)	(3,221)	(3,776)	(3,864)	(3,375)
Administration	(13,373)	(15,550)	(16,995)	(18,951)	(19,390)	(17,714)	(18,559)	(20,342)
Insurance and Finance	(977)	(2,365)	(2,897)	(3,900)	(2,802)	(2,561)	(13,986)	(12,757)
<b>Funds Available for Distribution</b>	<b>106,800</b>	<b>214,660</b>	<b>214,611</b>	<b>205,232</b>	<b>217,281</b>	<b>218,868</b>	<b>338,821</b>	<b>346,613</b>
Clubs	(81,000)	(132,280)	(146,663)	(157,965)	(160,176)	(156,948)	(222,760)	(228,132)
States and Affiliates	(13,500)	(16,300)	(22,914)	(27,847)	(30,473)	(32,784)	(38,111)	(47,940)
Development	(21,700)	(20,739)	(23,192)	(27,516)	(29,276)	(32,850)	(35,125)	(40,433)
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>(9,400)</b>	<b>45,341</b>	<b>21,842</b>	<b>(8,097)</b>	<b>(2,644)</b>	<b>(3,713)</b>	<b>42,825</b>	<b>30,107</b>

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> New accounting standard AASB 1058 was adopted from financial year 2018 onwards. This allowed for recognition of broadcast revenue in line with increasing servicing costs. This approximates to a 2% year-on-year increase in broadcast revenue through the 2018-22 cycle. This is a change of methodology from prior to 2018 when broadcast revenue was largely recognised on a straight line basis.

### Balance Sheet (\$'000)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Assets	110,740	188,074	194,816	197,261	261,193	242,613	259,792	279,927
Total Liabilities	91,390	123,383	108,282	118,824	185,400	170,534	154,537	144,564
<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>	<b>105,255</b>	<b>135,363</b>



## The Controlling Body and the Group (Consolidated)

Profit & Loss (\$'000)	2018		2019	
	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>
Broadcast Revenue (excl. contra)	317,992	317,992	324,595	324,595
Non-Broadcast Revenue	178,850	181,947	203,896	206,869
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>496,842</b>	<b>499,940</b>	<b>528,491</b>	<b>531,464</b>
Event, Game and Sponsorship (excl. contra)	(83,757)	(84,697)	(103,184)	(103,731)
Football	(21,845)	(23,701)	(25,042)	(25,737)
Community and Player Welfare	(16,010)	(16,010)	(17,179)	(17,220)
Integrity and Salary Cap	(3,864)	(3,864)	(3,375)	(3,375)
Administration	(18,559)	(18,973)	(20,342)	(20,358)
Insurance and Finance	(13,986)	(14,463)	(12,757)	(12,757)
<b>Funds Available for Distribution</b>	<b>338,821</b>	<b>338,231</b>	<b>346,613</b>	<b>348,286</b>
Clubs	(222,760)	(218,196)	(228,132)	(228,132)
States and Affiliates	(38,111)	(37,239)	(47,940)	(46,640)
Development	(35,125)	(36,843)	(40,433)	(43,300)
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>42,825</b>	<b>45,954</b>	<b>30,107</b>	<b>30,214</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 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).

Balance Sheet (\$'000)	2018		2019	
	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>	Controlling Body <sup>1</sup>	Consolidated <sup>2</sup>
Total Assets	259,792	246,630	279,927	268,767
Total Liabilities	154,537	159,248	144,564	151,171
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>105,255</b>	<b>87,382</b>	<b>135,363</b>	<b>117,596</b>

**Notes**

This Balance Sheet is based on a Profit & Loss which excludes broadcast contra. This explains the difference between this Balance Sheet and the Concise financials.

1. Controlling Body includes ARLC Ltd and NRL Ltd.
2. Consolidated represents the Controlling Body and it's Controlled Entities 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).

## Financial Statistics 2012–2019

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Broadcast/Total Revenue	56%	67%	63%	61%	59%	58%	64%	61%
Non-Broadcast Margin	51%	55%	50%	45%	50%	49%	53%	49%
Administration/Total Revenue	7%	5%	5%	6%	6%	5%	4%	4%
Clubs/Total Revenue	45%	44%	45%	47%	46%	44%	45%	43%
Distributions/Total Revenue	64%	56%	59%	64%	63%	63%	60%	60%



## Clubs and States (\$'000)

	2018			2019		
	Base	Other	Total	Base	Other	Total
Payments to Clubs	210,032	5,796	215,828	213,846	7,606	221,452
Benefits to Clubs						
Club Travel	–	2,531	2,531	–	2,883	2,883
Other Club Benefits <sup>1</sup>	–	1,401	1,401	–	797	797
Distressed Club Fund	–	3,000	3,000	–	3,000	3,000
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to Clubs</b>	<b>210,032</b>	<b>12,728</b>	<b>222,760</b>	<b>213,846</b>	<b>14,286</b>	<b>228,132</b>
Payments to States	22,158	15,953	38,111	23,045	23,595	46,640
Benefits to States	–	–	–	–	–	–
<b>Total Payments and Benefits to States</b>	<b>22,158</b>	<b>15,953</b>	<b>38,111</b>	<b>23,045</b>	<b>23,595</b>	<b>46,640</b>

### Note

1. Other Club Benefits include Fans & Member Initiatives, Club Services, and Music Royalty Fees.







Section Seven

# Concise Financial Report 2019







07



# Directors' Report

The Directors present their report for the Australian Rugby League Commission Limited ("ARLC" or "the Company") for the year ended 31 October 2019.

## 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.

### **The Hon. Peter Beattie AC**

(retired as Chairman on 30 October 2019)

Mr Beattie is Chairman of the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund, Ambassador for Life Sciences Queensland, joint adjunct professor at the University of Queensland's Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, and the Institute for Molecular Bioscience and former Chairman of GOLDOC. 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 and Health Minister from 1995 to 1996.

### **Peter V'landys AM (Chairman)**

(appointed as Chairman on 30 October 2019)

Mr V'landys is Chief Executive and board member with Racing NSW, a position he has held since February 2004. Mr V'landys holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree majoring in Accounting and serves across a number of boards associated with the thoroughbred racing industry. Mr V'landys is also Chairman of the Fairy Godfather Foundation which assists people in Australia in necessitous circumstances. In 2014, Mr V'landys was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Racing industry.

**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 and a Non-Executive Director for Servcorp Limited.

**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. Mr Pearce holds an Order of Australia Medal for services to Rugby League and the community.

**Dr Gary Weiss AM**

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. Dr Weiss was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2019 for significant services to business and to the community.

**Professor Megan Davis**

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.

**Amanda Laing**

Ms Laing is an experienced media executive, working previously as Group General Counsel and Managing Director of Nine Entertainment Co. Ms Laing is a former board member of Australian News Channels (Sky News), Stan and Pedestrian Group. She is currently on the board of Sports Australia and is Chief Commercial Officer of Foxtel.

**Dr Chris Sarra**

(retired 28 February 2019)

Dr Sarra is the Director-General for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships for the Queensland Government, and founding Chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute. Dr Sarra chairs the People, Workplace Culture and Remuneration Committee.

**Mark Coyne**

(appointed 28 February 2019; resigned 27 July 2019)

Mr Coyne is the Chief Executive Officer of EML since 2012. Mr Coyne has over 25 years' experience in the personal injury sector, in both strategic and operational roles. Mr Coyne is a former rugby league player with St George, Queensland and Australia, playing more than 200 games for the Dragons (half of them as Captain), 19 State of Origin matches for Queensland and 9 Tests for Australia. Mr Coyne is a Board Member of the Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, a Patron of the NSW Children's Cancer Foundation and former Director of Police and Citizens Youth Club and NRMA Road Service.



**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 International Rugby League (IRL) 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 \$555,914,757 (2018: \$523,562,341). The Group's current year operating surplus was \$28,982,716 (2018: \$50,250,026).

**Dividends**

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

**Significant Events After the Year End**

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 that 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 \$276,347 (2018: \$238,706) 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 2019, the number of members was 25 (2018: 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	Board Meetings Attended
The Hon. Peter Beattie AC (retired as Chairman on 30 October 2019)	12	12
Tony McGrath	12	12
Wayne Pearce OAM	12	12
Dr Gary Weiss AM	12	12
Professor Megan Davis	12	12
Peter V'landys AM (appointed Chairman 30 October 2019)	12	12
Amanda Laing	12	11
Mark Coyne (appointed 28 February 2019; resigned 27 July 2019)	5	4
Dr Chris Sarra (retired 28 February 2019)	3	1

## 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.

## AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE COMMISSION LIMITED – CONCISE FINANCIAL REPORT



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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 2019, I declare to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- a) no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Corporations Act 2001* in relation to the audit; and
- b) 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

James Higgins  
Partner

Sydney  
6 February 2020

A member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited  
Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Directors.

Peter V'landys  
Chairman

Tony McGrath  
Director

Sydney  
6 February 2020



## Statement of Consolidated Comprehensive Income

Year ended 31 October 2019

	Notes	2019 (\$'000)	2018 (\$'000)
<b>Revenue</b>			
Broadcast		324,595	317,992
Broadcast contra		24,450	23,623
Game receipts		54,654	45,846
Sponsorship and Wagering		84,064	78,908
Digital revenue		24,066	23,593
Other	2	44,086	33,600
		<b>555,915</b>	<b>523,562</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
Event, game and sponsorship		(99,840)	(82,453)
Broadcast contra		(25,681)	(19,326)
Football		(25,580)	(23,540)
Community and player welfare		(17,219)	(16,009)
Administration, Integrity and Salary Cap		(22,217)	(21,363)
Clubs		(228,132)	(221,616)
States, Affiliates and New Zealand Rugby League		(46,640)	(37,239)
Development		(43,253)	(37,245)
Depreciation and amortisation		(5,613)	(3,955)
Insurance and Finance		(12,757)	(13,986)
Gain on sale of investments		–	3,420
		<b>(526,932)</b>	<b>(473,312)</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>		<b>28,983</b>	<b>50,250</b>
Income tax expense		–	–
<b>Net Surplus/(Deficit)</b>		<b>28,983</b>	<b>50,250</b>
<b>Other Comprehensive Income for the period</b>		<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>Total Comprehensive Surplus / (Deficit) for the period attributable to the members of ARLC Limited</b>		<b>28,983</b>	<b>50,250</b>

## Discussion and analysis of the Statement of Consolidated Comprehensive Income

The Consolidated net surplus decreased by \$21.3m to a surplus of \$29.0m.

Consolidated revenue up by \$32.3m to \$555.9m due to:

- » Consolidated broadcast revenue increased by 2% (\$7.4m) aligned to the inflationary value increase across 2018-22 cycle.
- » Increased game receipts (\$8.8m); government grants (\$7.0m); sponsorship and wagering revenue (\$5.2m); fines (\$1.5m) and various other income streams.

Consolidated expenditure increased by \$53.6m to \$526.9m due to:

- » Increased expenditure in Event, game and sponsorship (\$17.4m) which is directly related to increased revenues; Clubs (\$6.5m); Football (\$2.0m), Broadcast contra (\$6.4m), and States and Affiliates and Game Development (\$15.4m) as a result of the commencement of the new 'Grassroots investment fund' across all levels of the game.

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





## Statement of Consolidated Financial Position

Year ended 31 October 2019

	2019 (\$'000)	2018 (\$'000)
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	181,695	137,657
Trade receivables	11,924	12,299
Prepayments and other receivables	31,078	32,944
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>224,697</b>	<b>182,900</b>
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>		
Intangibles	11,434	10,373
Property, plant and equipment	17,702	18,639
Other receivables	18,000	39,015
<b>Total Non-Current Assets</b>	<b>47,136</b>	<b>68,027</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>271,833</b>	<b>250,927</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Trade payables	32,611	27,405
Other payables	105,055	113,017
Provisions	5,935	5,287
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>143,601</b>	<b>145,709</b>
<b>Non-Current Liabilities</b>		
Other payables	6,000	12,159
Provisions	1,570	1,380
<b>Total Non-Current Liabilities</b>	<b>7,570</b>	<b>13,539</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>151,171</b>	<b>159,248</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>120,662</b>	<b>91,679</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	2,228	2,228
Retained Surplus	118,434	89,451
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>120,662</b>	<b>91,679</b>

## Discussion and analysis of the Statement of Consolidated Financial Position

Consolidated total assets increased by \$20.9m to \$271.8m due to:

- » Increases in cash and cash equivalents \$44.0m, and intangibles \$1.1m.
- » Partially offset by decreases in prepayments & other receivables \$1.9m, and non-current receivables \$21m (due primarily to amortisation of advanced grants for 15 clubs paid in 2016-17).

Consolidated total liabilities decreased by \$8.1m to \$151.2m due to:

- » A decrease in other current payables of \$8.0m due primarily to a decrease in deferred revenue as a result of part of the \$100.0m advance payment received from the broadcasters in financial years recognised as income.

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

## Statement of Consolidated Changes in Equity

	Reserves (\$'000)	Retained Surplus (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)
<b>As at 1 November 2018</b>	2,228	89,451	91,679
Net surplus for the year	–	28,983	28,983
<b>As at 31 October 2019</b>	2,228	118,434	120,662

	Reserves (\$'000)	Retained Surplus (\$'000)	Total (\$'000)
<b>As at 1 November 2017</b>	2,228	48,850	51,078
New accounting standard	–	(9,649)	(9,649)
<b>As at 1 November 2017 (Restated)</b>	2,228	39,201	41,429
Net surplus for the year	–	50,250	50,250
<b>As at 31 October 2018</b>	2,228	89,451	91,679

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



## Statement of Consolidated Cash Flows

Year ended 31 October 2019

	2019 (\$'000)	2018 (\$'000)
<b>Cash Flows From Operating Activities</b>		
Receipts from ordinary operations	579,735	528,172
Payments to suppliers and employees	(316,817)	(274,973)
Payments to clubs	(214,464)	(205,955)
Interest received	1,378	1,129
Interest paid	(89)	(46)
<b>Net Cash Flows From/(Used in) Operating Activities</b>	<b>49,743</b>	<b>48,327</b>
<b>Cash Flows From Investing Activities</b>		
Payments for property plant and equipment	(963)	(2,162)
Payments for intangibles	(4,742)	(6,221)
Repayments of loans	–	5,818
<b>Net Cash Flows From/(Used in) Investing Activities</b>	<b>(5,705)</b>	<b>(2,565)</b>
<b>Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash and Cash Equivalents</b>	<b>44,038</b>	<b>45,762</b>
<b>Cash and Cash Equivalents at the Beginning of the Period</b>	<b>137,657</b>	<b>91,895</b>
<b>Cash and Cash Equivalents at the End of the Period</b>	<b>181,695</b>	<b>137,657</b>

## Discussion and analysis of the Statement of Consolidated Cash Flows

There was a net increase in cash holdings of the consolidated entity totalling \$44.0m due to:

- » +\$29m: Profit and Loss surplus
- » -\$22m: Difference between Broadcast cash received and revenue recognised
- » +\$12m: Difference between club grant cash paid and expense recognised (\$9m advanced grant amortisation and \$3m distressed clubs reserve)
- » -\$5m: Digital capital expenditure
- » +\$6m: Depreciation & amortisation
- » +\$20m: Improved working capital position (largely through reduction in trade receivables and increasing trade payables).

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





## Notes to the Concise Financial Statements

Year ended 31 October 2019

### 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

	2019 (\$'000)	2018 (\$'000)
Broadcast revenue	324,595	317,992
Broadcast contra	24,450	23,623
Game receipts	54,654	45,846
Sponsorship and wagering	84,064	78,908
Digital revenue	24,066	23,593
<b>Other Income</b>		
Merchandise royalties	12,232	11,440
Government income	20,071	13,053
Financing income	1,378	1,129
Sundry income	10,405	7,978
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>44,086</b>	<b>33,600</b>
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>555,915</b>	<b>523,562</b>

## 3. Events Subsequent to Balance Sheet Date

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



Peter V'landys  
Chairman



Tony McGrath  
Director

Sydney  
6 February 2020



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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 2019 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 2019. 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.





## THE FINANCIAL REPORT AND OUR REPORT THEREON

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on the financial report in our report dated 30 January 2020.

## 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*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ernst &amp; Young'.

Ernst & Young

A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read 'James Higgins'.

James Higgins

Partner  
Sydney  
6 February 2020









# Message from Sport Australia

John Wylie AM

Sport and physical activity has enormous influence on our nation's health, education, social, economic and diplomatic outcomes.

It's why Sport Australia and the AIS remain steadfast in our vision: to make Australia the world's most active sporting nation, known for its integrity, sporting success and world-leading sports industry.

Australia's commitment, outlined in the Australian Government's national sport plan, Sport 2030, is to reduce physical inactivity by 15 per cent. It's a huge challenge Sport Australia enthusiastically accepts.

We are making significant progress and Sport Australia's programs are benefitting sport, as well as broader community health and wellbeing, including tackling issues such as obesity. Our partnerships with National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) remain fundamental, but we are also engaging more than ever with other networks to grow our sporting industry. Collaboration with physical activity providers, healthcare providers and educators, and various levels of government can deliver more for sport and all Australians.

This was highlighted in 2018-19 when Sport Australia, on behalf of the Australian Government, delivered \$150 million in new participation programs. The \$100 million Community Sport Infrastructure grants program is enhancing hundreds of grassroots facilities across Australia. The \$28.9 million Participation grants program is encouraging innovative programs that help break the down the barriers to physical activity. The new \$22.9 million Better Ageing grants program is helping senior Australians 65 and older to get more active and socially connected.

Our national Sporting Schools program remains a key platform to address childhood inactivity and drive generational change. We have funded 7300 schools and recorded more than 5.2 million attendances since its launch in mid-2015. We continue to look at ways to maximise the impact of Sporting Schools and link it with our work in physical literacy. By teaching our children to run, throw, jump or kick, we put them on the path to better lives.

There is no success without integrity. We continue to encourage environments that are inclusive and welcoming. Increasing diversity in our industry is critical and we want to make sport the benchmark for a more equitable society.

All this work is emphasised by our national behaviour change campaign, Move It AUS. Our call to action is to 'Find Your 30' minutes of physical activity every day, and enjoy the benefits.

We are continuing to build the capability of the sports industry, addressing governance reform to bring out the very best in our sporting organisations. The One Management project looks at helping sports align their strategy, workforce and financial management.

The AIS, in partnership with the National Institute Network and National Sporting Organisations, is aligning Australia's high performance sport strategy too. The National High Performance Sport Strategy 2024 signals the first time all Federal and State/Territory sports agencies have signed up to a joint high performance strategy.

In November 2018, the AIS announced an updated investment model for high performance sport and through this improved framework, Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games sports

will benefit from a longer term approach to funding. Instead of annual grants to sport, for the first time the AIS is providing longer-term funding commitments to give sports more stability and certainty to plan ahead.

All this work is important with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics drawing near, and the 2022 Beijing Winter Games and Paris 2024 beyond that.

Enhancing athlete pathways and athlete wellbeing are primary areas of focus for the AIS, and are keys to creating long-term sustainable success. We have embedded 20 Athlete Wellbeing Managers across National Sporting Organisations, and, working closely with the AIS Wellbeing and Engagement team, we are delivering key programs and support from mental health programs, through to career guidance and connection to Australians at the community level.

The AIS is also leading collaborative sports research, applied technology and innovation initiatives, including the Gold Medal Ready program, a unique partnership with the Australian Army to help athletes perform under pressure.

From backyards to benchmark international events, we believe unquestionably in the power of sport and physical activity to reflect the very best in our culture and to be a powerful vehicle for change.

Thank you for all you do for Australian sport and best wishes for the year ahead.



**John Wylie AM**





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