

## MAYORAL MEMO - 13 JULY 2022

While I sat at the pub last Saturday night watching the Wallabies go down to England, the conversation turned to the demise of Rugby Union in this nation. I posited that what we are seeing in 2022 started in 1995. Really? Rugby in the nineties was at an all-time high. The Wallabies won the World Cup in 1991 and 1999, the first nation to secure more than one World Cup. The Wallabies started their longest streak of Bledisloe Cup victories in the nineties (1998-2002) but we haven't won it since. The Super competition was expanded to the Super 12 in 1996 and Australia hosted the World Cup in 2003 where the Wallabies only just lost to a Jonny Wilkinson drop-goal in extra time. The Australian Rugby Union banked \$44.5 million profit from the event. To make Union even more attractive, Rugby League was tearing itself apart with the Super League war culminating in 1997 with parallel competitions.

Rugby should have been in a very strong position to become the premier football code in Australia.

But...

Rupert Murdoch paid \$550 million for the Pay TV rights to Rugby. Murdoch's Foxtel service began operations on 22 October 1995 so the

number of subscribers at the time was minimal. The administrators of Rugby believed they were saviours of the game by taking the big money on offer but they relegated the potential viewing audience to a much smaller number. Only those who could afford Pay TV could now watch Rugby. Even traditional GPS schools now had students watching other football codes because they were on free to air TV.

Take away the viewing audience and a generation later, you take away the game. In football codes in Australia, participation numbers show soccer is a clear leader with twice the number of players as AFL. AFL has more than twice the number of players compared to Rugby League with Union a distant fourth.

The lesson here for Union – and for Councils – is that you can never forget the people. Rugby is not owned by administrators but owned by the people.

In much the same way, Councillors do not 'own' Council. This Council is owned by you, the community. We are just in the fortunate position to be the current custodians of Council and we must always strive to hand Council on to the next custodians in a better position than we are in now. That means listening to the community and making decisions for the long-term benefit of the community. This group of Councillors has already shown itself to be open, transparent and communicative and whether it is in relation to the current state of water treatment or how public land will be utilised at Regand Park, you can continue to trust that your Councillors will consult and then make decisions for the community.

**Councillor Mathew Dickerson**  
**Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council**

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