



Welcome everyone to the Business Review of the 2014 rugby league year.

I start by paying my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, The Gadigal people of the Eora nation, their elders past and present and their emerging leaders.

The intention of the Business Review is to let our game's key stakeholders know how the business performed in 2014 and what we're focusing on in 2015.

BUILDING A STRONGER GAME

In my remarks I'll comment on the results for 2014 and some observations on where our focus has been and where it will go during the next year.

After this, our CEO Dave Smith will present to you in some detail on the business, and Todd Greenberg, our Head of Football, will talk to the football.

Last year when we reported our results, it was the end of Dave's first year as Chief Executive and the end of the first year of our new broadcast rights deal.

Today we are further down the road, the achievements are many, but the challenges are also clearer to us all - as is the thinking on how to address them.

2014 in almost every aspect was a very good year and we should all feel the game of rugby league is in good shape and is getting stronger.

The metrics to support this are very clear as you will see on the following slides.



Of fundamental importance, financial performance has once again been very strong.

Dave will take you through this in some detail shortly, but we are extremely pleased with the \$49.9 m surplus we have delivered while we are simultaneously building the capability a professional organisation of this nature requires.



There are two particular highlights worth dwelling on.

At the end of 2014, only two years into our plan, we had \$50m in our Sustainability Fund, clearly well on track to our 5 year \$80M target.

And 2014 saw us move into investing back in the game with \$28.1m from the Growth Fund applied to support our strategic priorities - the vast majority of which was directed to the benefit of clubs and leagues.

These two points represent the vivid realisation of the fundamental tenant of our Game Plan - to secure the game's financial future and to invest to grow.



In 2014 we applied Growth Funds to great success to kick start a new wave of club memberships and we are extremely proud of our Clubs who, combined, managed to reach a new record of 254,000 members.

All of the clubs have actively participated in the 2015 business planning workshops Dave and his team have conducted.

These have sought to have the NRL become more aware of the opportunities and constraints of each club, to review each club's financial plan in the context of the new funding model and the likely terms of a new Licence Agreement, and to inject greater consistency where appropriate into club operations and reporting.

I'm told that without exception, the engagement between our teams and the outcomes achieved were seen as very positive.

The additional support we are proposing in 2015 under the reforms developed last year is an important recognition of the financial imperatives clubs face.

Covering the salary cap with the grant in 2013 was very significant and was the clear requirement of all clubs given to the incoming Commission in 2011.

Beyond this, providing incentives in the funding plan for 2015 acknowledges and rewards the investments our clubs are making to drive growth and the steps they are taking to improve governance and operational management.

However some of our clubs undoubtedly operate in a more challenging environment than others and we have provided additional funding and support to help a number of them improve their businesses.

In the Rugby League ecosystem, where interdependency of stakeholders is fundamental to the health of our code, this is an issue that has implications for all NRL clubs.

As a Commission the decisions we took to do this were made with a firm view about what was, and is, in the best interests of the game and the ARL Commission's 2014 Financial Reports reflect the loan assistance we provided to clubs in 2014.

When I reflect on the Commission's first three years, it's clear that change is occurring in our clubs -
in boards,
in management,
in governance and
in attitude.

In this context, and without detracting in any way from the efforts in all our clubs, I'd like to particularly thank new chairs...

Marina Go
at Wests Tigers,

Rebecca Frizelle
at the Titans,

Allan Hawke
at the Raiders

and Brian McGuigan
at Newcastle,

and the new directors who have joined them, for the way they have committed themselves to the task and the energy they have brought to challenging circumstances.

They do not necessarily have a long history in rugby league, but along with our other club boards, they have a commitment to what's right for their local community - and their rugby league club is at the centre of that.



Of course, the success of all of our businesses is built on the back of brilliant on field entertainment and 2014 gave us sensational rugby league.

The Dick Smith NRL Auckland Nines - an instant success.

An epic Holden State of Origin series with the Blues ending the Maroons 8 year run.

The closest NRL Telstra Premiership on record culminating in the Rabbitohs ultimate triumph.

And finally, the international game on display at its best in the Four Nations tournament hosted across Australia and New Zealand.

I acknowledge the on field excellence and commitment of our elite playing group that make all this possible.

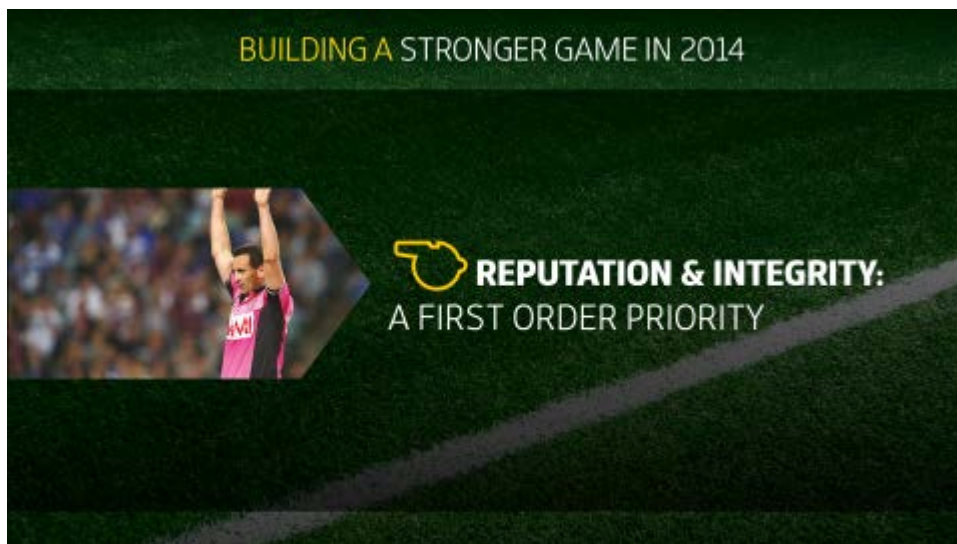
On the back of this, our attendance, broadcast and social media numbers were outstanding.

BUILDING A STRONGER GAME IN 2014



1.3m PARTICIPANTS:
WE'RE GROWING AUSTRALIA'S
LARGEST SPORTING COMMUNITY

In saying this we must also acknowledge the 1.3 million participants across touch and tackle from whom will come the next wave of elite players.



Importantly, 2014 saw the conclusion of the ASADA investigation and the NRL can commence 2015 with this episode behind us.

In saying this, it is important to recognise the quality of leadership exercised by Dave and his management team in dealing with it.

It was an extremely challenging process that needed great tenacity, intelligence and character to navigate.

So while we can look ahead with greater confidence now that the investigation has concluded, we have learnt many lessons.

Reforms that have been undertaken across the game, and at Cronulla, represent the upside from this challenging period.

Ensuring the integrity and reputation of our game is a first order priority for all of us - we cannot hope to capture the hearts and minds of our fans, and attract new participants and more investment if we cannot guarantee our game's integrity.

It is why the Commission and our executive team feel so disappointed when events such as those of this week emerge.

All the right words can be said but unless they turn into values that are real and that we live by, and actions that support them, we will always be treading water.

The Commission has been, I think, very clear that we won't accept the actions of those who bring this game into disrepute and we will take an increasingly hard line on this as Dave has indicated this week.

Such matters damage the reputation of all of us who are part of this game, diminishing the on field brilliance of our wonderful athletes and the 30,000 hours of off field community work they perform every year, and the excellence of the administrators and officials at every level of the game

We have an opportunity that can be very simply expressed and an opportunity that must not be lost.

4.2 million people watched State of Origin last year.

Of those, 1.2 million are rusted on fans.

We have an opportunity to convert the other 3 million from occasional viewers to fans.

If we do this, revenue will grow exponentially and the futures of our clubs and our leagues will be even more assured than they are today.

However very few of those 3 million will convert until they see consistently adult, professional and respectful behaviour at the heart of our culture.

I see this as one of our greatest challenges.

I've asked Commission members - clubs and states to set the highest standards for their off field and on field teams, and to lead by example.

At the end of the day it's Commission members communal reputation that determines our value
as individuals,
as teams,
as organisations and
as a game.

BUILDING A STRONGER GAME

In 2015 our strategic agenda will focus on several initiatives that will help in building a stronger game on and off the field including -

- increased investment in Club and Stadia infrastructure,
- enhancing our brand and reputation,
- reviewing the development of elite players and referees and the competition structures in which they operate,
- and very importantly, building value for our next broadcast rights deal.

Dave will expand on this in a moment.

So while it's always the case that the day to day occupies much of our minds and our friends in the media make sure this is the case, when I reflect strategically on last year, I remain very comfortable that we're heading in the right direction.

And when I think about where we will put our strategic efforts in 2015, I am very excited at the prospects.

In parallel I'm expecting another fantastic NRL year, continually strengthening State Cup competitions and a spectacular State of Origin series in which we'll head back to Melbourne for Game 2 and to the MCG for the first time in 18 years.

Ladies and Gentleman, as I hand you over to Dave, I look forward to working with you in 2015, enjoying our successes and meeting the challenges as we work together to continue to build a stronger game.

Thank you.



Can I add my welcome to the Chairman's and say that I am looking forward to the opportunity today to report to you on the results achieved in 2014.

Our results show financial strength...

That strength comes from the strength of our product, and principally from the contribution to that product of the formal members of the Australian Rugby League Commission.

It's an impressive product set - The Telstra Premiership, Holden State of Origin, the Dick Smith NRL Nines and Harvey Norman All-Stars, as well as our highly successful representative football.

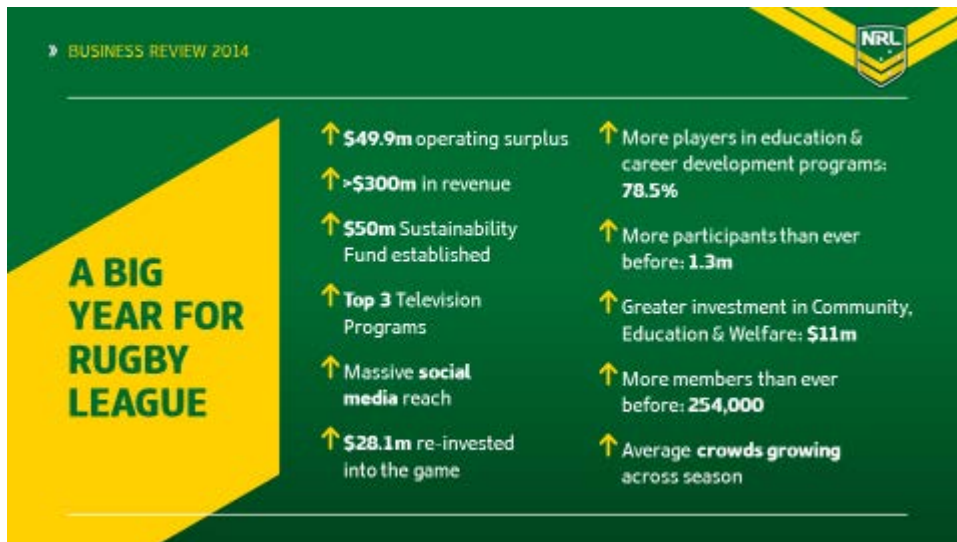
Our results show that this has been a big year for rugby league - financially and, just as importantly, in non-financial terms also.

We are ultimately a not-for-profit company.

Our charter is clear - we exist for a purpose - to foster the game of rugby league.

Success cannot only be measured by the bottom line alone.

But, first and foremost, we must run the business well so that we can generate the funds necessary to see the game of rugby league prosper and grow.



As you can see - it was a big year for the game.

Our financial performance has once again been very robust

Our strong profitability has been maintained

We have generated strong and diverse revenue growth

And now we are in a position to distribute those funds in furtherance of the game's agenda for growth.

I'll come back to each of those points shortly.

On this graphic you can see that in 2014 we owned the nation's top 3 television programs - bar none.

Rugby league locked out the podium:
no other entertainment property, let alone another sport got onto the dais.

And, against our peers, we claimed four out of the top five sporting programs.

Against a backdrop of fragmentation, our ability to aggregate a mass audience was unparalleled in 2014.

That's important for our future value.

Because while our big events are getting bigger, we are facing the challenges of a fragmented market.

We have broadly maintained ratings share in our core markets - Sydney free-to-air share was essentially in line with last year and Brisbane slightly down year on year.

On the flipside of fragmentation is the emergence of the digital opportunity.

We are growing our digital presence in concert with our partners at Telstra, and we are also massively expanding our social media assets.

We have already exceeded our 2017 Game Plan target for social media reach by 30%.

The commercial strength that I am highlighting here - built upon the quality of the product we are selling on behalf of the game - is enabling us to invest in our charter to support and develop the game.

And that's exactly what we are doing.

As you can see on the right hand side of this slide, we now have more participants than ever before - the rugby league community is now at 1.3m

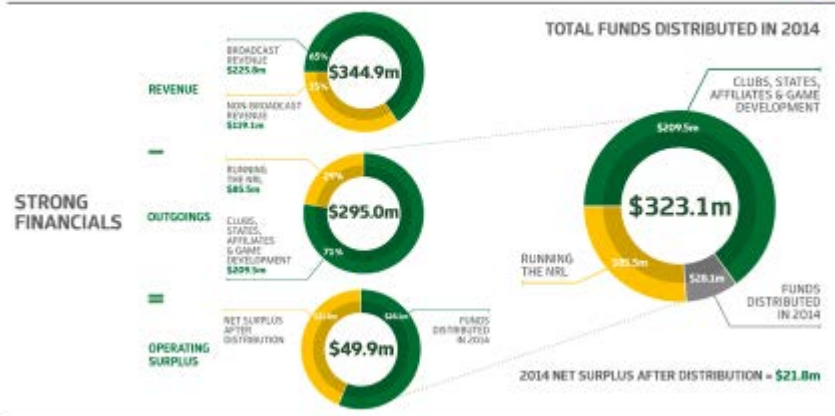
We are investing more in our community programs - and reaching more people than ever before...

We have more players in education, training and career development programs - now 78.5% and on track to meet our 2017 target.

Of course, our fans and members are our most passionate supporters and I'm proud to report that we now have more than a quarter of a million members, and despite operating in some tough trading conditions the game recorded around 3% growth in year on year crowds across the rugby league calendar.

Now let me turn, in more detail, to the financial performance of the game.

» STRONG FINANCIALS: \$49.9m SURPLUS IN 2014



Our financial performance is a growth story

Our revenue is growing, we are growing our capability to capture future value, and our balance sheet is growing in strength.

We are building future value, and positioning the business today for what lies ahead.

As you can see total revenues in 2014 were \$344.9m up from \$320m in 2013.

Of course this total revenue is supported by the locked in proceeds from our 5 year broadcast deal, but the growth in 2014 was driven exclusively by our growth in non-broadcast revenue.

The outgoings of the NRL, a mixture of grants and operating cost, totalled \$295m - of which more than \$200 million went to developing the game through grants to clubs, states, affiliates and our funding of game development activities.

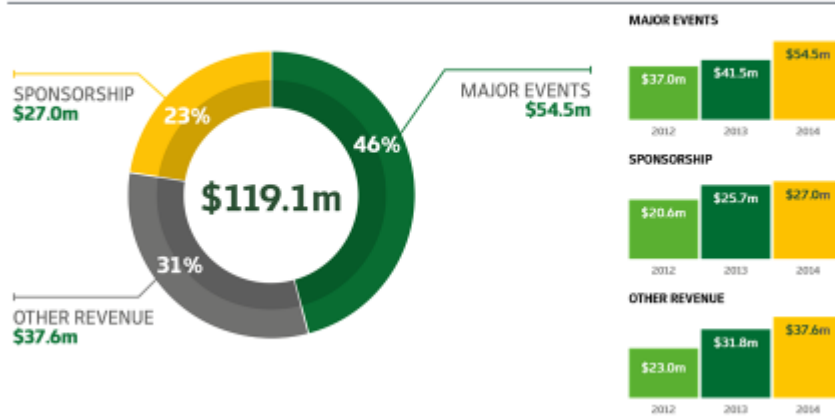
The result is a \$49.9m operating surplus - which provides the funds available for distribution.

In 2014, of the \$49.9m operating surplus, we distributed \$28.1m and, thus, retained \$21.8m in earnings as a net surplus - this remains available for future distribution.

In total, as you can see on the right hand side of this slide, the game distributed \$323.1m in funding in 2014.

Before going through that in some detail, I want to highlight the growth in our revenues.

» NON-BROADCAST REVENUE GREW BY 20% IN 2014



With our broadcast revenues locked in, our strategic priority at this point in the cycle has been to grow our non-broadcast revenues.

We have focussed on growth, and on improving the quality, diversity and sustainability of that revenue.

Non Broadcast Revenue reached \$119.1m in 2014, representing growth of 20% yoy or \$20 million.

And the compound growth for our non-broadcast revenue is 22% since 2012.

Our major events continue to deliver outstanding commercial success - better stadia deals and yield increases from premium seating tickets contributed to the returns from major events.

We achieved stronger results while also acting to preserve affordability at the entry level ticket prices.

Origin revenue was up 40% while Finals series revenue was up 8% and the Grand Final revenue was up 12%

We are seeking to invest in these premium events as we see a priority to enhance the premium experience.

Sponsorship grew again year on year...

The increase this year means we have overseen compound growth in sponsorship of 15% since 2012.

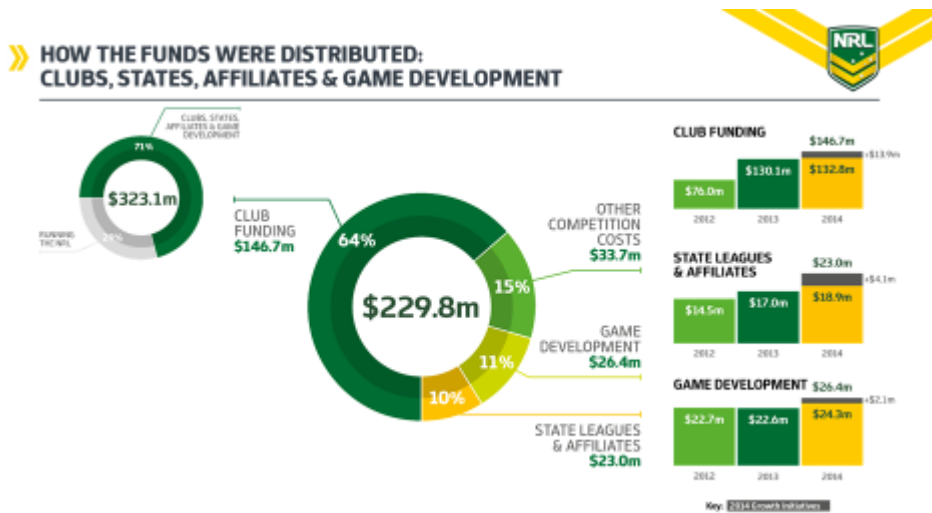
And, we are investing in new capability to drive results in this area by moving away from a fully out-sourced model in 2015.

Other revenue growth was driven by increased licensing revenue as well as better returns from growth in the sports betting market.

We have also invested in a statistics business.

Our new statistics model is building a new business for the game, while reducing costs for clubs.

Owning this vital IP is strategically important for the game, and provides new opportunities for monetising our IP.



Turning now to how the funds were distributed...

The strong revenue growth I've just outlined provided the platform for ensuring that key areas of the game were beneficiaries of increased funding in 2014.

Of the total distribution of funds, by far the biggest proportion is distributed back into the game: to clubs, to states and to grassroots game development programs.

In 2014 we enhanced the distribution in these key areas with additional funding set aside for our growth agenda.

Total distributions in 2014 in this category grew by \$32 million to \$229.8m, up from \$198m in 2013.

Key highlights:

As you can see on the right hand side total support to clubs in 2014 was more than \$146million or 64% of all funding.

This included an additional \$450 000 paid to each NRL club in 2014 - accounting for a \$7.2million uplift in direct financial support.

We also invested in a centrally supported membership program which drove additional revenue directly to clubs, as well several initiatives to support game day attendance.

Together this support totalled \$4.8m in 2014.

Another key initiative last year was seeding the investment in establishing the Clubs and States Services Unit.

Importantly, we see that unit forming a part of our standard operations in the future, and being focussed on supporting all clubs to grow sustainably.

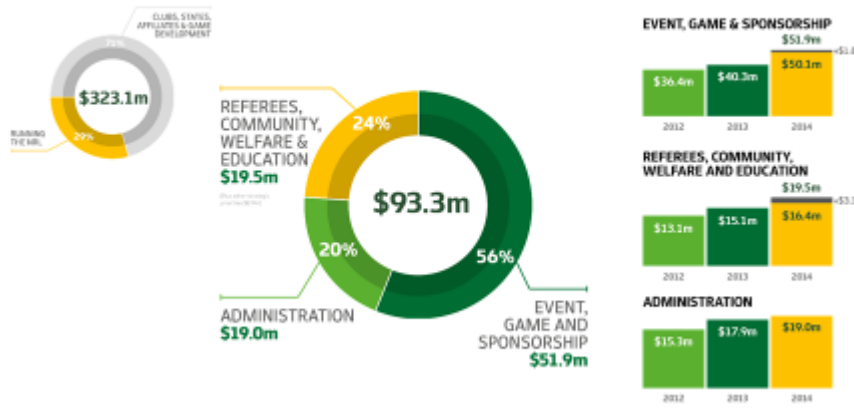
In 2014 the unit was focussed on facilitating a number of restructures and providing support to the NRL clubs who faced difficulty in their operations.

The work of this unit was vital to the game, and doubtless saved the game from very extensive losses in the 10's of millions.

We also increased base funding to the states this year, and further boosted this allocation with \$3.6m which was invested in the State Cup competitions of NSW and Qld.

A further distribution was made in support of NSWRL strengthening their operations AND support has been committed to the QRL for the establishment of a new team in the Intrust Super Cup.

» HOW THE FUNDS WERE DISTRIBUTED: RUNNING THE NRL



As you can see from this slide, the cost of running the game is less than 30% of all funds applied at \$93 million.

And of this amount, the biggest slice - just under \$52 million - is used to generate the revenue from our non-broadcast activities.

Non broadcast revenue was up \$20.1m in 2014 - while you can see the cost base has increased by \$11.6m.

So, the growth in Revenue Expense for our Events & Sponsorship is returning a strong dividend... And as I said earlier, this is an area where we see the need to invest further to grow.

At the start of my remarks, I also pointed to the fact that we are continuing to increase funding to our community and education & welfare programs.

We are also committed to investing in our referees and Todd will have more to say on this shortly.

In 2014, the allocation of funds to Referees, Community, Education & Welfare programs increased by nearly 20% - up from \$15.1m in 2013 to \$19.5m.

This reflected our planned funding increases to education and welfare programs for our players, support for Men of League and our response to Alex McKinnon's injury.

In terms of our administrative expenses, these have risen by \$1.1m in 2014, or just over 4% of total expenditure growth.

The administrative expenses of the NRL account for less than 6% of the total funds distributed by the game in 2014.

Additional employee costs in the central administration have largely been off-set by other savings achieved in the way we run the business.

The increase reflects the step up in capability that was required in the organisation to meet the requirements of a modern professional sporting business

We budgeted for this increase in 2014, and we came in on budget.

My commitment to maintain administrative costs at CPI levels over the cycle remains and I will ensure that the way we run Rugby League Central is as efficient as possible, and we are targeting further cost initiatives in 2015.

» SURPLUSES HAVE ENABLED THE BALANCE SHEET TO BE STRENGTHENED



Ladies and gentlemen...

The surplus funds we have generated over the last two years have strengthened the game's financial underpinnings.

The game set a target to build an \$80m Sustainability Fund over the current five year cycle and at the end of fiscal 2014 we already have \$50m under professional funds management.

That \$50m in reserves is invested with a clear mandate, and while it is early days the fund is already generating healthy returns.

In fact, the game's balance sheet now has net assets of nearly \$85m two years into this rights cycle.

Over the last two years the NRL's balance sheet has been significantly strengthened.

That's important for any business - and for our game it has meant we have the capacity to respond to future challenges and indeed future opportunities.

The NRL clubs are the foundation of our success.

As you can see the overall profitability of the NRL clubs remains challenging in a tough trading environment.

Ensuring that we have 16 strong and sustainable NRL clubs must be our collective priority - and our collective responsibility.

Each club board has a responsibility for a significant entity - and the fans of each club expect each club to be run well, in keeping with professional standards.

Simply put - we expect what the community expects.

As I explained earlier - distributions to clubs have increased in 2014.

Over the balance of this rights cycle, I anticipate that our club funding reforms will direct an additional \$28million in increased funding to participate in the competition.

This will ensure all clubs have certainty over their future grant funding from the NRL through to the end of this cycle, and importantly, the clubs will have their total salary cap exposure covered for the next three years.

In addition, we are also making available up to \$250k per club in incentive payments - which means up to \$4m per annum in further funding.

Our growth agenda needs to align with the value drivers of our game - the 16 NRL clubs are fundamental to the game's success. We cannot hope to grow sustainably as a whole if we do not have 16 strong and sustainable clubs across the league.

It is important to put in context why the investment priority - at this point in time - has needed to be to clubs.

Historically, NRL football clubs have been funded by League's clubs.

The operating environment for these leagues clubs has changed - demographics and policy changes have reduced profitability.

Tens of millions of dollars from leagues clubs that might have flowed into the game historically has not eventuated.

As such some clubs across the league have - unsurprisingly - experienced funding pressures.

» CLUBS AND STATES LOAN PORTFOLIO



Clubs, States and Affiliates Loan Portfolio

	CLUBS	STATES	AFFILIATES	TOTAL	LOWEST LOAN	HIGHEST LOAN
NO. OF LOANS	3	0	2	5		
VALUE OF LOANS (\$m)						
Total	14.3	0	0.4	14.7	0.1	7.5
Drawn	10	0	0.4	10.4	0.1	5.2
Undrawn	4.3	0	0	4.3	0	2.3

Key terms: Loan recipients at 31 October 2014:
 Term: At call to 7 years Clubs: St George Illawarra Dragons,
 Security: Unsecured, priority and secured Wests Tigers and Gold Coast Titans.
 Interest: Arms length/market-based

In response to this structural change in the market, the game needed to step in to assist some clubs with funding support, and also with other support - to restructure and overhaul some operations.

This time last year I said I anticipated that the NRL would have loan outstandings across the portfolio of around \$15million - in fact I can report that the loan book for 2014 was \$14.7 million, of which \$10.4m has been drawn down as the table demonstrates.

To be clear, loans are advanced on commercial terms and include the requirement for operational and organisational reform.

Our support extended to the need to acquire the Newcastle Knights in 2014, and recently the Titans, to ensure they continue to compete in the NRL premiership.

We are not long term owners of these businesses and as we reform their operations, in partnership with their local communities, we will look to secure new owners of these proud clubs.

I consider it important that we are transparent about these activities - and that we recognise - collectively - the whole-of-game interest in ensuring club sustainability.



Beyond the opportunity to report on our financial results, I also want to address another area of strategic importance.

The reality for this business is, just like any business - our brand is the key to unlocking commercial opportunity.

As John said, we are a professional sporting organisation and we must expect of ourselves - and of each other - appropriate standards of professionalism.

We must do this for one simple reason - it is what the community expects.

In 2014 we concluded our response to the ASADA inquiry into Cronulla - the legacy of that episode is in part positive: new rules and an enhanced commitment to testing and player safety are in force.

Our registration system is now much more extensive - and properly so.

We have strengthened our banned substances testing program by bringing it under the direct control of the NRL and we are now the first professional sport in Australia to routinely test for prescription drugs.

In 2014 the Integrity Unit also conducted a pro-active audit into wagering activity - that resulted in enforcement measures, and a commitment to continuous education.

We weren't merely acting in response to calls - we acted deliberately and pro-actively.

The Integrity Unit is not meant to be a shadow police force.

Now, while much good work was done, we must acknowledge that this is not easy work.

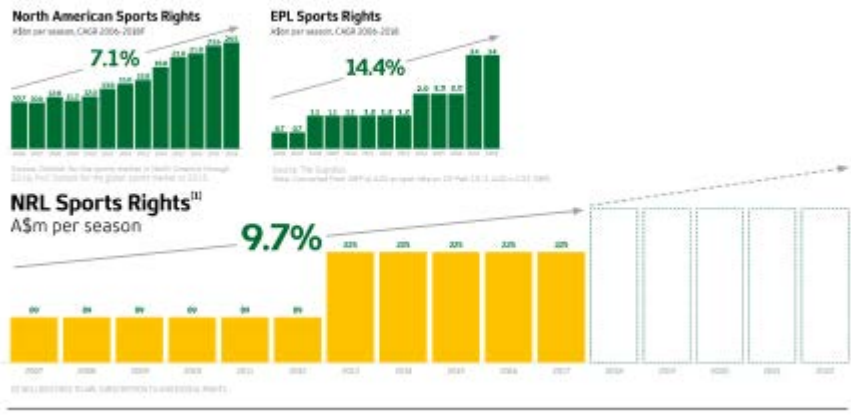
It is an ongoing task, and we must insist on upholding our own standards.

In 2015, we are investing in new capabilities in the Integrity Unit - its work is vital to upholding the standing of the game.

Our stakeholders -
our fans, our viewers, our sponsors and our partners - all have high expectations of our game. I remain committed to meeting those expectations.

When we get this right, we can and will unlock the full value of our future rights.

» THE DEMAND FOR SPORTS MEDIA RIGHTS CONTINUES TO INCREASE 



The reason we need to ensure we have a competition with a strong and sustainable portfolio of clubs, and the reason we need to ensure our integrity as a game is upheld is simple: our next rights deal has the potential to secure the game’s long term future.

The current deal overcame the historical under-valuing of our rights.

On our analysis we believe we are fairly valued in the marketplace today.

But we cannot be in position where we undervalue the game again as was the case in the past.

Around the globe, there is clear trend for the value of sports rights to be increasing.

We have an opportunity, and a responsibility to capture that value for our game.

That means more money into the game - to clubs, players, game development and the grassroots.

Rights are growing at high single digit growth rates - some forecasters see rights growth in the 10-15% range.

We should be aiming for growth in our next deal at the upper end of the range.

Now success isn’t guaranteed - a soft economic outlook and fragmentation in the market represent clear and emerging challenges to the bullish outlook for rights value.

One thing is certain - if we don’t have our own house in order, we will be undervalued in the market.

Our actions today - and each day - are determining our value in that marketplace.

So as I turn now to the conclusion of this presentation, let me say this: our future is

largely in our hands.

A BIG YEAR & BIGGER THINGS TO COME

- **Clubs** – the foundation of our success
- **Stadia** – a once in a generation opportunity
- **Rights** – building future value
- **Brand** – meeting the community's expectations
- Elite Player Development & Competition Structures
- **Referees** – custodians of the fans

To conclude: it was a big year, and bigger things are to come.

Our strategic and investment focus has needed to be on our **clubs** - they are indeed the foundation of our success.

Securing their sustainability is a vital platform for future growth.

We stand on the cusp of delivering massive investment into rectangular **stadia** in Sydney and in NQ.

We need to get the maximum return from this investment because these opportunities rarely arise.

It didn't happen by accident... we helped create this opportunity and we need to capitalise on it.

We are focussed on building a stronger game so we can secure our financial future.

That means staying committed to enhancing our **brand**, and building value into our future **rights**.

And we will, in 2015, have a dedicated focus on key strategic priorities in football - on **elite pathways, and our footprint and competition structures**, from the grassroots to the elite level.

And as Todd will discuss in his presentation - **refereeing** is a key priority in our 2015 agenda.

Ladies and Gentleman, rugby league is a big game.

We've had a big year, and big things are happening.

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you on our results,

to share with you some of our challenges, and to point to our priorities in 2015.

I look forward to reporting to you all again 12 months from now!



What a year 2014 was for us on the field - a season of power, speed and skill - like no other sporting contest.

The 2014 Telstra premiership was a stunning showcase of the skills and athleticism of our players.

We have something special - a remarkable competition played by 16 competitive clubs and hundreds of ultra-talented athletes.

Few global sports can generate adrenalin-charged intensity like ours.

The NRL is the best rugby league competition in the world.

The best players from around the world want to play here, and they do.

The Clubs and their Players are the real stars of this show.

They are our differentiators.

They make the on field product so attractive to watch and follow.

To witness the intensity and atmosphere in the crowd on a traditional derby reminds us why our fans too are pretty special - this is unique and it is remarkable.

Despite the challenges - we remain relevant.

We form part of the broader entertainment industry.

Today people have more choice than ever before.

All manner of entertainment is available without leaving the lounge-room.

We are not just competing with other in-season sports, but with a huge array of entertainment options.

The Telstra Premiership is one of the closest premier sporting competitions in the world and again delivered an exciting finish in 2014.

Looking back over the last decade, 2014 delivered...

The most amount of games with less than a 6 point margin (70 games or 35%).

The most amount of games with less than a 1 point margin (17 games or 8%).

The most amount of lead changes in a regular season.

12 teams in contention for the finals series with 5 rounds to go.

This hallmark sets us apart from other sports, guaranteeing close results and nail-biting entertainment throughout the competition for our fans, which fuels public interest and makes us attractive to broadcasters and our other partners.

While the credit for the competitiveness of our premiership must firstly go to our Clubs and Players, we should also acknowledge the effectiveness of our salary cap system and our elite pathways that combine to provide fans with an unpredictable and intriguing contest each and every season.

But we will continue to challenge ourselves to find innovative ways to preserve the competitive balance of the premiership, and great strength and point of difference.

The NRL is a high performance environment and the game invests significantly in that performance.

Ensuring our game continues to evolve for our fans and remains safe for our players is a primary focus for us.

In 2014 we implemented a series of rule changes that had a positive impact:

A modification to the quick tap rule and adjustments to the 20m restart delivered tangible results.

14% of 20 metre restarts now result in a try and 41% an attacking kick.

Changes to reduce time wasting has also yielded a positive result:

Ball in play has increase by nearly 2 minutes per game - which translates into an additional 6 hours of game time for fans across the season.

Whilst comparisons are difficult - our ball in play statistic is more than 50% higher than Super Rugby - evidence of the strength of our core product.

Our investment in game analytics and statistics assists us in making informed decisions, which will ultimately drive value for our fans.

For the first time in the game's history, we own our own data and we have the capability to utilize this data to make further improvements in our game.

In 2015 we will be introducing new standardized time keeping technology to keep the game moving and provide certainty to match officials, players and fans.

As you know, what makes Rugby League so special is not just the strength of our Telstra Premiership, but rather the breadth of content we offer throughout the calendar year.

2014 started with the inaugural Dick Smith Auckland Nines...
and what an event that proved to be - fast, fun and full of tries...

State of Origin ratings and crowd attendance were testament to the intensity, evenness and gladiatorial nature of the on field match-up, which is now known around the globe as one of sport's truly great rivalries.

6 million fans globally tuned into the Origin series on the game's official Facebook pages...

The Rabbitohs finally broke their premiership drought...

but we as a game broke several records during the Grand Final, now officially the most watched Premiership match in our history with nearly 4 million viewers and 9 million fans engaged on Facebook.

The season was capped off by a memorable and tightly contested 4 Nations competition, which showcased why the international game adds yet another dimension to our sport, both here and abroad.

Our players are our greatest assets -
A statement of fact and significance.

The game has constantly evolved, that is one of our great strengths.

The changes we have overseen are changes for the better, changes that benefit the playing group first and foremost.

As I said earlier, rugby league is a game played by some of the best athletes that you will witness on any sporting field.

The skills, strength and courage is remarkable.

Today, they are paid better than their predecessors.

And so they should be.

Today, their welfare is front and centre in our decision-making on rules.

And so it should be.

Our pro-active efforts in dealing with the dangers of concussion have been about putting the player's safety foremost.

Similarly, when it comes to removing lifting tackles and the shoulder charge.

The welfare of the playing group' has been paramount.

Again, as it should be.

In 2014 we successfully implemented a sideline concussion policy and deployed technology through sideline injury surveillance monitors to proactively address player injury risks and allow team doctors and trainers immediate access to replays to identify, assess and react to player injuries swiftly.

We recently announced a new chief medical officer and the establishment of a first class medical and player safety advisory group.

These are leading professionals in their field who will work inside the game to develop policies and provide ongoing education - another important step in injury monitoring and prevention.



Alex McKinnon's injury was a tragic accident that affected us all.

But it made us all proud to be part of the rugby league family.

We are a game that has a big heart.

The legacy of Round 19 and Rise for Alex will mean a better future for all players and we have also been working behind the scenes to come up with new arrangements that have the support of clubs and the players.

The modern player, for the first time, also has protection and surety in the standard playing contract - once again for the first time in the game's history.

Our new insurance arrangements will ensure that players who suffer injuries that extend beyond their playing term are also supported.

The establishment of a whole-of-game Players' Foundation is underway.

It is our intention that Rd 19 this year, and in to the future will support the Foundation and its charter.

That foundation will play an important role in providing assistance to players who suffer long term injuries.

That assistance will need to be measured, and of course it won't always be complete, but for the first time it will recognise the role that the game should play in the welfare of our players beyond their time on the field.

When all of this is taken into account, it is clear that the game has taken huge steps in recent time to recognise the players, not just through increased pay but in important aspects of everything else that comes with life as a professional footballer.



An NRL athlete's career will average 70 games and 5 seasons of elite professional football.

It is important that before, during and after their NRL careers players receive the appropriate support in managing the stress and challenges of becoming a professional footballer and preparing for a life after football.

Together with our 16 Clubs, we are proud of the big strides we are making in player welfare and career development - it is real and genuine.

In 2014 the Game invested over \$7.5 million into player welfare and education initiatives across three categories:

Social responsibility,
Career management

and Personal development - including mental health and cultural awareness.

We have set ambitious targets across all three areas of player development and we have invested in career coaches and welfare managers for each and every NRL Club.

We now have 78.5% (up 6% from 2013) of all NRL players enrolled in some form of education or training - and we are on track to achieve our 2017 target of 84%.

The effectiveness of our player welfare program was recognised by winning two awards last year.

The Australian Drug Foundation award for leading change in the culture of alcohol awareness in the game and the *Employer of the Year award* from the Career Development Association of Australia for breadth and of age and education.

We are often reminded about how much impact the actions of our players can have - that power was demonstrated with the NRL State of Mind Campaign featuring Nate Myles and Paul Gallen which reached an audience of 6 million people via social media.

Ground breaking work is being undertaken in this important area of the game



We are not just investing at elite level, we are also investing in our talent pipeline.

We take nothing for granted.

Taking a whole of game approach with the formation of the Commission has allowed us to consider how we invest in grassroots participation and elite player development in the long term and for the greater collective good of the game.

In 2014 we invested \$3.6 million in our two state competitions.

This investment will make a significant difference to the quality of these two vital platforms for elite player development.

This is not a one-off allocation but part of a \$10.8 million investment over three years.

This is the biggest single investment the Commission has made since its formation.

For the first time in our history, we are now collecting and analysing detailed performance statistics for both state competitions as we recognise they are key supports to the quality of the NRL Premiership.

Interestingly,
28% for NSW Cup and 26% of QRL Cup matches finished within a 6 point margin.

Both competitions have completion rates in excess of 70% and tackle efficiency rates above 85% - indicating an upward trend in on field performance.

The year finished with our inaugural State Cup Final was played before the NRL Grand Final and showcased the quality of football taking place in these two competitions.

It was a fitting showcase of the modern day elite pathway program, with the Holden Cup Final and State Championship delivering engaging and high quality contests on the game's biggest stage.



When the game was brought back together under the Commission, a whole-of-game approach to game development was made possible.

This was a significant step in what is a very deliberate program to create the biggest sporting community in Australia... the Rugby League community

That community embraces everyone who is involved in the game... Not just those who run onto the field.

We are talking about volunteers, officials, administrators... the mums and dads who turn up for duty each weekend... everyone who plays a role in Rugby League.

In terms of participation, last year we were able to extend our presence across every Australian State and Territory and across every demographic.

We signed a strategic alliance with Touch Football Australia.

This partnership represented the biggest boost to participation and game development in the history of both codes.

The figures are staggering and we can be proud:

There are 1.3 million people playing Rugby League - whether it's tackle, tag or touch.

That includes 400,000 women playing one of these versions of the game.

There has been a 31% increase in female club registrations in the last year alone.

Our under 6 mini football registrations have grown by 8% in two years and our Masters the over 35 participants - increased by 13% last year alone.

We continue to enhance the format of the game for our juniors and we have recently announced a range of innovative changes to the mini-mod form of the game, designed

to improve retention and participation.

So, you can see, there is a place on the field for everyone in our game.



And, off the field, we are thriving too.

We now have more than 18,000 accredited coaches - 17% up on last year.

A further 90,000 volunteers dedicate their time to Rugby League - and they remain the foundation that the game is built on.

In fact, from 2013 to 2017, the NRL will invest more than \$100 million in grassroots and game development.

Our research tells us that there's as many as 700,000 prospective players interested in taking up one form of the game in the next 12 months.

So to grow the game, we have to reach out to the rest of the community... particularly mums who have a lot to do with family decisions like what gets watched on TV and which sport their children will play.

So we have to win the hearts and support of women

We have taken the view that it's not enough to simply encourage women to play our game ...

They have to take a leadership role as well.



Community is the heart and soul of our Game.

Our intention to make a difference is demonstrated through our investment across three core themes:

Indigenous
Social Inclusion, and
Health and Well Being.

We need to focus our voice on what matters, to those in our family, and those in the Australian and Pacific community.

Community carnival 2014 reached
300,000 kids in
900 schools across 400 towns.

All received the Tackle Bullying message.

At our learning centre in 2014 we engaged 6,000 kids in community related program.

It doesn't often get recognised but I want to call it out today - last year our Players and Ambassadors spent over 31,000 hours in the community.

Thank you to the Clubs and Players who continue to give back and thank you to our many community partners who allow us the great privilege to be deeply involved in your causes.



As Dave and the Chairman set out earlier, the business of rugby league is in great shape.

When it comes to the football on the field, our focus in 2015 is on the game's long term development.

We are looking ahead to what rugby league might look like in the next decade and beyond.

The Competition Committee - which includes some of the best minds in the game - are going to be front and centre in this work.

We take nothing for granted.

This year we will focus on our footprint - and, as you know, when Shane joins us very shortly the questions of where, when and how will be a big part of his focus, along with our elite player pathways.

That has to include a consideration of all ideas, including a draft.

We recognise that referees are the custodians of the fans - rugby league's professionalism and its high performance culture have accelerated in recent years and we are committed to applying the same discipline, accountability, measurement and resources to our referees.

That includes investments in technology and analytics, such as a potential central command centre.

Big things are happening across our game - and the great news is that rugby league is only going to get better.

2014 was a big year - and 2015 is already shaping up to be bigger again!

As Dave mentioned we're really proud of the work our clubs and states are doing.

