Ron Graham, Chairman

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It has been another year of evolution and progress for the Australian Rugby Union and the code in Australia.

The expansion of the Super 14 competition proved a great success. Congratulations to Western Australia who have certainly embraced rugby through their new franchise, the Western Force. We look forward to an exciting second year in the competition for all four Australian provincial teams.

Australia tasted international success in 2006, our Under 19s team achieving a thrilling 17-13 victory over New Zealand in the World Championship in Dubai in April. Our Women's team, the Wallaroos, also flew our banner proudly in overseas competition, finishing seventh in the Women's Rugby World Cup in Canada.

Australia in 2006 assumed the leadership of SANZAR, the secretariat overseeing the operation of the Rugby Unions of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Australia's caretaker role will continue into 2007 and I take this opportunity to thank my colleague and ARU Board member Peter McGrath for his chairmanship of this important aspect of our rugby infrastructure. I am also pleased to see the continued strengthening of ties with the International Rugby Board. Australia continues to have a strong voice on the international rugby stage. I would like to thank former Wallaby coach Rod Macqueen and former Wallaby captain John Eales for their valued contributions on behalf of Australia as consultants to the IRB. It is their expertise which paves the way for expansion and strengthening of the code, not only here in Australia, but among Tier 2 countries.

Preparations for the Rugby World Cup 2007 in France have also been extensive.

The Tri Nations competition, won by New Zealand and the Qantas Wallabies' Spring Tour to Europe gave coach John Connolly and his team a barometer of where the National team sits ahead of the World Cup.

I know you join me in wishing John and the Wallabies good luck and good fortune in France in September/October of this year.

Rugby continues to grow at an exciting rate in Australia. When I reported on the growth of rugby this time last year, the game was being played by 176,000 at the grass roots level. I am delighted to say that rugby is now being played by 193,000 people across Australia, the expansion in WA a highlight.

The major structural changes to the ARU Board took effect mid-year, with the key pillars being the non-alignment of ARU Directors to State bodies and the appointment by the ARU Board of two Directors.

Gary Flowers worked tirelessly for the ARU as Managing Director & CEO throughout 2006, his first full year at the helm, overseeing impressive growth at grassroots level and expansion of the game at the elite level. I offer Gary our thanks for his continued and valued leadership. 2007 will no doubt unearth the fruits of he and his team's labour.

On that note, my final thanks to the staff of the ARU. 2006 saw our relocation to wonderful new headquarters at St Leonards. It is from these well-designed offices that we will see rugby expand to even greater heights in the years to come.

Here is to great success for Australian Rugby in 2007.

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