



# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Committee Room 8

Meeting commenced 1805

### In Attendance

**Members:** Greg Mulholland MP (in the Chair); Lord Hoyle; Mark Pawsey MP; Derek Twigg MP

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** Maurice Oldroyd

**Organisational Associate Members:** Ralph Rimmer (RFL); Sue Taylor (BARLA); Ikram Butt (BARA)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Stephen Johnson; David Ballheimer; Martin Coyd OBE; Gary Slater; Ron Knox

**Other:** James Hall; Ray Meli (Hong Kong Rugby League)

**Secretariat:** Mark Ramsdale; Jack Baker

### Apologies

**Members:** Yvonne Fovargue MP; Sir Hugh Bayley MP;

**Honorary Life Members (all, no affiliation):** Sally Bolton; David Hinchliffe; Mike Stevenson; Spen Allison

**Organisational Associate Members:** David Gent, Nigel Wood (RFL); Mike Smith (Hull KR); Tony Colquitt, Adrian Smith, Calum Irving (Oxford RL)

**Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation):** Richard Jones; Steve Evans;

### Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous Group meeting were considered an accurate account.

### Matters Arising

The Secretariat raised the following on-going activities not covered by the meeting's agenda:

- Secretariat investigating measurement metrics for media coverage investigation.
- Secretariat meeting representatives of the National Arboretum with RFL Director David Gent on 11 March.
- A private Group meeting will take place with RFL Director of Operations and Legal, Karen Moorehouse, and RFL COO Ralph Rimmer. Secretariat will organise post-General Election. Details will be circulated.
- The RFL lead on Sky Try, the partnership between the RFL and Sky Sports to engage with 700,000 young people, will be in Parliament in March. Details will be circulated by the Secretariat.
- Group Officers have accepted two offers of support for the Group's Annual Dinner in November, including from the RFL. Details will be announced in due course.
- Communication with the LGA regarding Associate Membership. Secretariat to develop offer for officers to review/approve or take to subsequent meeting.

Ralph Rimmer gave the group an update on recent developments at the RFL:

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Committee Room 8

- A good start to the season in both Super League and Championship. Some excellent games so far. Spectators up 16% and viewers up 10% on 2014.
- World Club Series a great success, despite results. Good media coverage.
- Sky Try launched. Intention to extend beyond Super League Clubs in near future, and take the scheme outside “traditional footprint”.

Issue of reduced BBC coverage was raised by The President, which was welcomed.

## Correspondence

- The Group received emails from overseas governing bodies regarding greater involvement with the Group.  
**Action: Secretariat to develop new form of Associate Membership for review/approval.**
- Email was received through the website alleging discrimination from the RFU. Specifically that South London Storm have been prevented from returning to their old ground, a rugby union club where other sports are played, on explicit instruction from the RFU.  
**Action: Letter to clubs supporting positive outcome for all parties. Group are happy to support South London Storm in finding a location.**
- From a campaign criticising the BBC’s exclusively Rugby Union @BBCRugby twitter feed. Relatedly, with regard to poor Rugby League coverage by the BBC.  
**Action: Letter to the BBC supporting establishment of separate BBC Rugby League account on twitter to mirror Rugby Union account. Also calling for better Rugby League coverage by the BBC.**
- An invitation to the Chairman and Secretariat to attend a private screening of the Water Diviner, directed by one of South Sydney Rabbitohs owners.
- A formal offer of support for the Group’s Annual Dinner was made and agreed.
- Various correspondence between the Secretariat, the RFL and the office of Mary Creagh regarding coaching courses. The RFL are now in direct contact.
- The RLEF has made the Group aware of a split in Italian Rugby League after recent visit to Westminster by players operating outside the national governing body.  
**Action: After General Election, the Chairman will invite parties to meet and offer support.**
- Continued correspondence relating to Keighley Cougars. An update was provided from the RFL.
- The Secretariat has put the charity MIND in contact with the RFL after the Chairman’s letter questioning the lack of information on the work of Rugby League in MIND’s public materials.

## Pending

- Letter to all MPs in which Associate Members reside.  
**Action: Agreed to be sent in the next Parliament**
- Letter of support for Whinmoor Warriors in response to a consultation by Leeds City Council.  
**Action: Letter to be sent to Leeds City Council.**

## Group Activity Report

### Parliamentary

The Secretariat provided references to rugby league in Parliament since the previous meeting:

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Committee Room 8

In response to a question posed by Lord Pendry on Government initiatives to support findings by the Culture and Major Events Consortium and to work organisers to provide more cultural content when staging major sporting events, Lord Gardiner of Kimble made reference to the dance programme that ran alongside the Rugby League World Cup 2013.

#### Public

The Secretariat attended a private screening of the Water Diviner, a film directed by one of the owners of South Sydney Rabbitohs.

At the time of the meeting, the Group had 1,385 followers on Twitter.

[Secretariat's note: the Group's twitter name is @UKParliamentRL]

### **Political Animals Report**

The Political Animals played a Journalists XIII at a snow-covered Wigan Warriors' training ground on Sunday 22 February, winning 10-6 in a tough but enjoyable game in aid of charities Rugby League Cares and Joining Jack.

[Secretariat's note: over £1000 has been raised, double the original target].

Group Member Lisa Nandy MP performed a ceremonial kick-off and the Chairman Greg Mulholland MP was joined by another Group Member Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP as well as councillors and Associate Members of the Group including Kris Radlinksi and Andy Johnson representing Wigan Warriors, and Brian Carney.

**Action: A letter to Wigan Warriors from the Animals thanking them for hosting the game.**

### **AOB**

**Action: Secretariat to invite Rugby Oldham to speak.**

Declaring an interest, the Secretariat noted that tickets are still available for the Rugby League Varsity Match on 6<sup>th</sup> March.

Main business concluded at 1836

### **Presentation: Ray Meli and James Hall, Hong Kong Rugby League**

The Chairman welcomed Ray Meli and James Hall from Hong Kong Rugby League.

Opening, Hall thanked the Group for providing the opportunity to speak.

Hong Kong Rugby League (HKRL) was formed two and a half months previous and substantial progress has been made with much potential for this rapid growth to continue.

HKRL run weekly Touch Rugby League sessions, with around 170 players involved, and have over 1800 followers on Facebook. An exhibition game is planned for ANZAC day to showcase rugby league, as is a Rugby League 9s tournament.

There is plenty of rugby league experience on the ground in Hong Kong. Notably, Jason Fairleigh (brother of ex-North Sydney, Newcastle, and St Helens player David), and Shaun McManus (son of St Helens RFC owner Eamonn, who worked in Hong Kong for many years) are involved. Moreover, there is a large community of expatriates, both from Australasia and the UK, who are familiar with the game.

Our Supporters





# All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group

## Ordinary Meeting Minutes

### 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Committee Room 8

HKRL is seeking to achieve national governing body status to unlock funding, sponsorship and access to facilities, crucial in Hong Kong. Discussions are taking place with the RLIF.

Whilst the aim is to provide rugby league to all (full 13-a-side, 9s, touch, schools, “knee-high”), schools rugby league is seen as crucial to the development of Hong Kong Rugby League. Schools have pitches, thus can provide access to facilities that would be difficult without governing body status. Furthermore, a large number of teachers in schools in Hong Kong are familiar with the sport. There are relatively limited opportunities for children in sport, providing potential for strong Schools Rugby League.

The schools programme will be linked to a “knee-high” scheme, which will be aimed at young children, with an emphasis on fun, fast exercise with a rugby ball.

It is hoped that a national side will be able to compete in fixtures with other Asian nations in the near future. There is a domestic competition in development, possibly beginning as early as next year. Hong Kong has a lot of talented sportspeople, and so there is the basis for a strong competition.

The possibility of staging a major event such as the World Club Challenge has been discussed previously, with big events such as the 7s competition working well for rugby union. There is an estimated 140,000 British and Australian expatriates in Hong Kong, which would help to promote domestic rugby league in the territory.

Related to the national team, it was hoped that a 9s tournament could be hosted in Hong Kong for Asian nations, with teams from Europe and Australasia invited. A similar model exists in Thailand.

Hong Kong is seen as the gateway to China, a route through which it was felt rugby league could take advantage.

Closing, Hall and Meli reiterated the potential for growth for rugby league in Hong Kong, and that they hope to make this a reality.

On behalf of the Group, the Chairman thanked Hall and Meli, and noted the Group would look forward to observing the development of the sport in Hong Kong.

Opening to questions, Hall and Meli were asked about relations with rugby union in Hong Kong. They are treading lightly, focusing on achieving accreditation. In the future, they hope to sell the benefits of rugby league to the rugby union authorities to build a good working relationship.

On coverage of rugby league, the NRL and State of Origin are shown on satellite television. Both receive much coverage due to the large Australian expatriate community. There is the potential for Super League coverage, with the RFL in negotiations over coverage.

There are individuals interested in coaching and refereeing, and the association hopes to secure funding from the RLIF to develop both to help implement their plans. The 9s concept is one that the association thinks has a lot of potential, and would be a good product to market in Hong Kong.

The Chairman thanked Hall and Meli, before closing the meeting.

**Meeting closed at 1917**

Our Supporters

