

4 February 2026

WRU proposals to reduce number of professional men's regional sides

Good afternoon, Ms Jewell

I am writing to you in your role as the chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee.

I would like to ask if the committee has considered calling in the proposals by the WRU to cull a men's regional rugby team, as you will be aware the Welsh Affairs Committee at Westminster has already met with the WRU and in their opinion, there is a risk of the WRU *"throwing the baby out with the bathwater"* and *"There seems to be an immense disconnect between the WRU and fans"*

The lack of transparency throughout this process has been astonishing.

If you have been following this debacle you will know that initially the WRU were of the opinion there was sufficient funding for all 4 regional sides, following their bailout of Cardiff they changed this to only sufficient funding for two sides, then subsequently changed this to three sides, all despite their assertions that they have turned around the finances of the union putting us in a better financial position than we were when they first suggested a new funding model for all four regions. The improved financial offering to the proposed three sides is still far less than the playing budget of other sides in the URC, English premiership, or the top 14 in France, so the uplift would not be enough to retain marquee players.

The public consultation document was amateurish and provided no metric for measuring fans preferences for the number of sides, instead there was a series of questions designed to elicit positive response to improved outcomes for the Welsh national side, of course every rugby fan in Wales wants our teams to do better, but many believe as do I that this is achievable by repairing the player pathways rather than cutting a region.

In Richard Collier-Keywood's evidence to the Welsh Affairs committee he stated that the pathways have been repaired and this would mean that better quality players would start to come through the pathways, he also stated the Union is now on a much firmer financial footing due to new financing deals- which he stated to the committee were not contingent on the reduction of regional sides.

If these players come through, and I believe they will, then there will be an increase in talented Welsh qualified players so all four regions would benefit from improved

performances, and this could only benefit the national team. If on the other hand they cut a region we will never know whether the improvements came from the revamped pathways or from the reduction in the number of teams- what is being proposed is therefore a permanent and draconian solution to a temporary problem, Welsh rugby has seen similar bad times before, and come back to win Grand slams.

What is certain is that if a region is lost, we will also lose a lot of dedicated rugby fans, and whilst I do not in any way decry or fail to respect the passion of the fans who attend Wales games, many of those fans do not attend any other rugby games. The real fans are those who turn up week in week out to watch regional, SRC or local rugby, and many of those fans are turning away from the game due to the year-on-year mismanagement by the WRU. Whilst this may seem like conjecture, please look at the ticket sales for the forthcoming six nations!

There is no successful international side in the world with just two regions, the two most notable are Scotland and Italy neither of whom has ever won a significant trophy/ tournament.

You may not be aware that Abi Tierney (WRU CEO) has met with CF10 (Cardiff Supporters group) but has refused a request to meet with the Ospreys Supporters Club, this is clearly a divide and conquer ploy, she is hoping if she can mollify one set of supporters who are vocally against the reduction in teams, she can isolate the Ospreys fan base. Where is the equality and transparency ? it is clear that the Ospreys and their supporters are persona non grata with the WRU board.

You may have seen that criticism of this proposal is not limited to Welsh rugby fans, social media sites are awash with ex-players including Welsh, English Irish and Australian former internationals and coaches expressing disbelief at this latest turn of events.

If they cut a region, the direction of travel is set. If (when!) they get it wrong the barriers to entry are far too high to walk this back and create another region, so they will only have one option and that will be to cut again.

If on the other hand they take a more incremental approach and wait to see whether their improved pathways and financial security bear fruit they would still have the opportunity to make cuts further down the line hopefully with actual evidence and a more transparent and structured approach.

On a personal note, if the Ospreys, or any other region, are closed down, I will never again spend a single penny to watch rugby that will benefit the WRU in any way. I

will of course always support Welsh Teams, but will never attend the stadium, attend away games, buy merchandise, pay to watch Welsh Rugby at any level, or even watch any game on TV that is not free to air, and this from someone who has travelled as far afield as Japan supporting Wales and attended three world cups. and more six nations and other Welsh fixtures (home and away), than I can remember. I have heard similar sentiments expressed by many fans and I personally know people who stopped attending all rugby when the Celtic Warriors ended in 2003 and have never done so since.

I do not know whether it is within your remit to call in this proposal, but I would hope that the committee would do everything in its power to ensure that the WRU do not blindly and wilfully destroy the game in Wales and in particular make them consider the economic and cultural effect of removing professional rugby from any region, rugby is such a vital part of Welsh culture.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this, I would only be too happy to do so.

Kind Regards

Ritchie

Ritchie O'Connell