

Ms Delyth Jewell,

Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee.

The Ospreys Supporters Club Committee are writing to express our grave concern at the Welsh Rugby Union's planned restructuring of the elite men's game and indeed, the escalating decline of our national game. We firmly believe that the direction of travel is leading us towards the systematic destruction of rugby in Wales and if this continues, without intervention, we have genuine concerns that it will bring us to a point from which Welsh rugby will never recover.

In this letter we are outlining a number of concerns which we believe have not been adequately addressed through the consultation process or, in any form of communication since that process concluded. We believe there is an unacceptable lack of transparency which is disregarding and disrespecting key stakeholders impacted by these proposals.

### **The Consultation Process:**

- Within no more than six months, we went from a position where there was sufficient money for four equally funded teams (a view that was supported by CEO Abi Tierney) to a situation where four equally funded teams, was not even an option for consideration within the consultation document.
- The consultation document made a number of assumptions and assertions which at best, were ambiguous but in our view, were wholly inaccurate and misleading. Examples include:
  - Graph to depict the performance gap between Wales and other international sides. We queried whether this was data driven or aspirational. WRU representatives could not confirm that it was based on factual data and implied that it was aspirational.
  - Lack of context around the above graph – it suggested improvements would start from 2025/26 and that other unions progress would remain static. This seems unrealistic and for context and balance, these assumptions should have been made explicit.
  - Information was presented that did not provide like for like comparisons, drawing comparison between unions with differing numbers of pro teams. This distorted the information presented and in the interests of clarity and transparency, this should have been made explicit.
- The different models within the document attracted varying levels of funding, with the total available funding seemingly reducing when moving towards the optimal solution model. We do not believe the reasoning for this has been adequately explained in a way that supports the reduction in the number of professional men's teams.
- We believe that the structuring of the survey conducted to obtain feedback from supporters, was fundamentally flawed and not set up in a way that allowed for representative and balanced responses. For example, the theme of affinity and identity was not an option when outlining why you might follow a regional professional team. All questions had to be completed in order to proceed and if the options available did not reconcile with your personal views, "other" was not an option available to you.

- We have been approached by several supporters who stressed that the survey did not allow them to represent their views as part of this process. Many felt that it was actually more appropriate for them not to complete and submit a response.
- Publicly, we have been informed that the WRU received more than 7,000 responses to their survey. At the time of compiling this document, we have more than 8,000 signatures on a petition opposing the WRU's plans and urging an immediate halting of the process.
- On the basis of all of the above points, we would like to challenge Richard Collier-Keywood's assertion, that both he and the WRU Board, have the backing of the Welsh rugby public.

**Points of concern directly linked to rugby:**

- The WRU forecast turnover for 2024/25 was in excess of £104m. This figure is in the region of £19m more than the IRFU who successfully, run four competitive provincial sides. As supporters, we would like a full and transparent review of the money and how it is both distributed and spent within Welsh rugby.
- Should the WRU succeed in implementing their plan for changes to the men's professional game in Wales, are they able to provide fully costed information for all aspects and clearly outline how they intend to fund things such as setting up of a national academy? Also, can they clearly demonstrate the evidence which they have to support their decision-making processes and the committing of these funds? What is the proven basis for their assumption that their plans will see success return to Welsh rugby?
- We fully support the move to develop and grow women's professional rugby and acknowledge that not only is it the right thing to do, it would be negligent to ignore the growth potential in the women's game. However, given the fact that both the men's and women's professional games are currently at very different stages in their development, why are the WRU seeking to align both within the same strategy. In line with our overall concerns around financial transparency, we would like to see fully costed proposals from the WRU around how it intends to spend the money allocated to the women's professional game within their plans.
- If plans to reduce the number of professional teams are successful, what consideration has been given to the potential reduction in pathway capacity and the subsequent loss of opportunity?
- Can the WRU confirm that they have a definite robust plan for the future inclusion and development of schools' rugby? Can they provide assurances that they are capitalising on the existing and growth potential in this area?

**General points of concern:**

- Can those in attendance confirm how much the WRU has spent on consultancy fees since the current Chair and CEO have been in post? Can they also confirm whether or not there has been an offsetting reduction in executive salaries during that timeframe?
- Given the current state of Welsh rugby and the failing confidence and belief of the Welsh rugby public, do they believe the expenditure on consultancy constitutes value for money?
- What quantitative and qualitative assessment has been done on the economic, social and cultural impact of these proposed changes on the communities that their decisions will affect?

- What strategies are in place to ensure maximisation of revenue streams? Accepting that there are a capped number of international games within a season, what are the WRU actively doing to ensure that revenue from those opportunities is optimal?
- Also, can they confirm how much of an increase was realised through the extension of the stadium naming rights agreement with Principality and was this following a tender process to ensure that market value was properly achieved?
- Following numerous allegations which suggest a toxic culture within the WRU, do the current board members accept that years of reputational damage has contributed significantly to the situation that Welsh rugby finds itself in today?
- We accept that the current situation will also be as a result of years of mismanagement, underinvestment and inaction which predates the existing board. However, in a period now fast approaching three years, the CEO and Chair have done nothing to improve circumstances and the ongoing chaos has been created and presided over by them.
- Since the current Chair and CEO have been in place, many of the announcements around issues such as the plan to cut teams, the fact that Y11 were the preferred bidder for Cardiff Rugby and other such seismic announcements, have been broken via Wales Online on social media. These have, on occasion, been announced when regional players have been away from their home and their families in South Africa, and without players and staff being spoken to before issues are widely out in the public domain. It shows a total lack of respect for those whose livelihood and reputations are so heavily linked to Welsh rugby. It also shows a disrespect towards the public who invest so much financially and emotionally in Welsh rugby.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to consider the issues outlined and we hope that they go some way to conveying our concerns around the process and the way in which it has been overseen.

Yours Sincerely

Ospreys Supporters Club Committee