

**STATEMENT FROM CHRISTOPHER DORE**

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, WEST AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS AND THE NIGHTLY.**

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Dear Media Watch,

It's clear from your questions, that you don't have an entirely full-proof grasp of the issues you're asking about.

The West Australian does not have any beef with a team from the wealthy lower north shore of Sydney given a lifeline to re-locate to Perth. Not at all. Good luck to them.

Like all parochial West Australians, we will cheer them on and hope for their success when they hit the park.

We do, however, have a problem with the State Government paying for it to happen.

Rugby League is just not a thing in WA. It is a complete non-event. There is no significant, profitable fan base in this town, and nor is there ever likely to be one.

If Premier Roger Cook was not a lifelong tragic of the game embarking on a personal mission to bring a team to Perth, at almost any cost, it is very unlikely that it would be happening at all.

That is a fact. Why? Because the sums don't add up.

The NRL were not prepared to give the license to a private consortium, knowing it wouldn't work, instead preferring the safety of the Government cash cow. (Cook's phrase not ours)

And how do we know that? Well, neither the State nor the NRL will release any credible figures, and the headline numbers each bandied about are ridiculous – there is a gap between their respective numbers in the order of \$25 million.

Hardly reliable data. In fact, the NRL claim there are 200,000 North Sydney Bears fans ready to regularly march across the Nullarbor to bring millions of tourism dollars to WA.

I know this is hard to grasp from reading the NRL-Las Vegas-loving boys at The Daily Telegraph who inhale every word uttered by their messiah Peter V'landys, but they have taken you for a ride if you believe the spin.

Just as the Melbourne Storm had zero impact on AFL in Melbourne - hasn't lost a fan, a sponsor's dollar or a prospective junior, the idea that somehow our coverage at The West Australian is dictated, or even remotely influenced, by some fanciful proposition that a rugby league team in Perth would diminish the AFL and therefore somehow have a financial impact on the broadcaster is laughable. It also misses the point that the NRL are desperate for Seven to be a bidder for the free-to-air rights when they next come up – before the Bears play their first game.

I know it's hard to understand working at the ABC, but most hard-working people actually care how their taxes are spent.

No one in WA has made a case for why the State's \$65 million -- and rising -- is a good idea for a marginal sport when there are so many other sports in WA that do have support, significant grassroots players and a future – such as football, basketball and netball, all of which could benefit more than giving money to the NRL to pump up their next broadcast rights deal.

Even rugby union has a far better case for having a sustainable team in Perth than rugby league. And that is a marginal proposition at best. The Western Force average 7000 fans a game at HBF Park, the new home of the Bears.

Imagine for example what \$65 million could do to help young indigenous Australian rules footballers – the game we actually play here -- throughout WA.

The West Australian has no issue with North Sydney moving to Perth, and we will no doubt cover the team as we cover the NRL now.

We do care about our readers, and I can confidently say that the overwhelming majority of them don't know anything about rugby league, don't care for it in the slightest and haven't a clue about the Bears.

What they do care about is how the State Government spends their money.

One positive for WA though – perhaps the imported Bears players might spare some time – in between signing autographs for fans – to teach the Fremantle Dockers and the West Coast Eagles players how to tackle.

Christopher Dore

Editor-in-Chief, West Australian Newspapers and The Nightly