

## Statement regarding World Rugby's ongoing support of the Pacific Islands

World Rugby recognises the special contribution that the Pacific Islands make to the global game, and the joy they bring to fans around the world with their passion, commitment and skill. Rugby puts the Pacific Island nations on the world stage in a way that no other activities do.

We also recognise the unique geographical, societal, economic and rugby challenges faced by the Pacific Islands, which is why we are committed to significant financial, administrative and operational support of the unions, their players and activities.

We also recognise the importance of the issues raised within the documentary, issues that have either been addressed or are in the process of being addressed in partnership with key stakeholders, in order to strengthen the long-term viability of the unions on and off the field of play.

While World Rugby is the biggest investor in the Pacific Islands and plays a unique role in a sporting context in the support of the three nations, it is important to note that the International Federation's support reaches way beyond the GBP£21 million direct funding it will invest in national team and development activities across the four-year cycle to Rugby World Cup (an increase of 50 per cent). World Rugby works tirelessly to provide a suitable environment that promotes the development of players for the national team, provides unions with a greater voice in decision-making processes and access to high level competitions (examples can be found below).

On the subject of eligibility, World Rugby Chairman Sir Bill Beaumont has expressed commitment to exploring the possibility of a 'homecoming' rule for Pacific Island players, something that can also be achieved via the Olympic qualification pathway.

There is already a clear pathway in place for the unions to have their say in World Rugby's decision-making processes, with both Fiji and Samoa having taken seats on Council under transformational governance reform, while their members are present across the committees structures, including sevens and high performance rugby.

Rugby is a growing, global sport with newly published Nielsen data finding there to be 877 million followers and 405 million fans worldwide in 2019, up 11 per cent and 18 per cent on 2018 figures respectively. World Rugby is committed to continuing to improve and evolve as the sport grows in order to support its 127 member unions and 6 regional associations around the globe, with a particular focus on emerging nations and women's rugby.

### World Rugby's support of the Pacific Islands explained

World Rugby provides the Pacific Islands and their players with a range of support programmes designed to provide optimal performance pathways, player education and support and a voice within World Rugby's decision-making bodies:

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** Direct World Rugby funding to Pacific Islands of £14 million for the four-year cycle to 2019, forecasted to increase to £21 million until 2023, representing a funding increase of 50 per cent. This includes provision of COVID-19 relief funding and Olympic preparation funding to safeguard rugby sevens programmes during this unprecedented period.

**A VOICE AT THE TOP TABLE:** There is a clear pathway for all unions to have representation on Council and Fiji and Samoa have rightly taken their place since transformational reform in 2015, while there is Pacific Islands representation on influential World Rugby Committees including the Sevens Strategy Group, Professional Game Committee, Regional Committee, Audit and Risk Committee and Regional Advisory Committee. This commitment also includes the awarding of women's leadership scholarships, promoting the best female leaders across the three nations. World Rugby also recently brokered a tripartite agreement that will transform Tonga's governance processes.

#### **COMPETITION COMMITMENT:**

**Pacific Combine:** The World Rugby-funded Pacific Combine programme gives emerging talent in the Pacific Islands access to some of the world's best coaches and strength and conditioning experts, preparing players for the modern elite rugby environment. Since its launch in 2018, 75 players have graduated from combines of which 42 have gained playing contracts and 16 have won international caps with players such as Frank Lomani (Fiji) and James Faiva (Tonga) starring at World Cup 2019 in Japan. The programme has placed players into teams in the Gallagher Premiership, Global Rapid Rugby, Mitre 10, Major League Rugby, PRO14, Superliga Americana de Rugby and Super Rugby.

**Fiji Drua:** The Fiji Drua team was set up in August 2017 to help the transition of Pacific Island-based players to test match rugby level and has successfully developed many players to senior international level. 13 Fiji Drua players were selected for the RWC 2019 wider training squad with six making the trip to Japan.

**Pacific Nations Cup:** World Rugby supported competitions the Pacific Nations Cup and Pacific Challenge provide important high quality competition opportunities for the Pacific Island Nations, and World Rugby is delighted that Fiji will participate in the Autumn Nations Cup in the northern hemisphere in 2020.

**PLAYER SUPPORT:** World Rugby and the International Rugby Players (via Pacific Rugby Players) runs programmes with players providing access to coaching and personal development courses, agent and contract education and mental wellness. No other playing group receives this level of support.

**THE RISE OF WOMEN'S RUGBY:** Fiji has successfully qualified for the women's edition of the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand in 2021, a clear indication of their progression in the 15's game and the sevens team has qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.