



A Sport For All

“WRU IS IN THE LAST CHANCE SALOON”

Near the end of the grilling at the Senedd of our top two WRU officials, the chair Ieuan Evans and acting CEO Nigel Walker, came a chilling warning issued by Jenny Rathbone AM.

“I think you recognise you're in the last-chance saloon, because, if you don't change, I'm sure intervention will!”

The Situation

Sponsors are queueing up for explanations, and threatening to walk away from our game. The WRU was summoned to a Senedd enquiry, asking searching questions about culture and sexism, as well as governance reform.

There is no option other than to propose radical constitutional change, hence the proposed EGM next month.

How we have got here is a question for another time. Where we need to go to save our game is the only debate to be had.

The proposals being presented to the clubs are not only necessary to improve our game, they are being demanded by all our partners.

It may seem we are being dragged kicking and screaming into this process. The point is that if we all agree to go down this path it will help and improve us all.

In the last 30 years or so the world has been moving forward with regard to diversity, in particular, gender diversity. Unfortunately, the WRU is governed much as it has been for the last 100 years.

Hence a tsunami of change has arrived at the front door of the WRU – change that needs to be made to ensure its very survival.

A 'Review Panel' has been set-up to investigate the claims made by the BBC Wales programme focusing on serious allegations of sexism.

The 'Review Panel' will be chaired by Dame Anne Rafferty, a former Court of Appeal judge. She was nominated by Sport Resolutions UK and endorsed by the Commissioning Advisory Group, comprised of Sport Wales and the WRU.

They will deliver a series of recommendations once they have completed their investigation.

Nigel Walker: 'There will be a report and there will be a list of recommendations. As a body, we have committed to implementing those recommendations.'

WHAT THEY SAID AT THE SENEDD

Ieuan Evans – WRU Chair

We are determined to address this head on. As heartbreaking as this is, it needs to be done. We have to ensure that we reclaim ground, that lost confidence, that lost faith and trust in what we are as an organization.

We've been working closely with Welsh Government and Sport Wales, as well as talking to our staff, our players, our member clubs and our commercial partners about the next steps.

We are a £100m turnover business and that includes some public funding. We take our responsibility for spending public funds extremely seriously. We have a duty, and a responsibility, to be as good as we can be, and it's my job to make that happen.

Nigel Walker – WRU acting CEO

As an organisation, we've been in denial as to the extent of the problem. There have been cases in the past that have been dealt with and people have moved on. I think each individual case is an indication that there has been a wider problem, but people have not

joined the dots. When you see it presented over a 30-minute programme in the way that it was, unless you're going to bury your head in the sand for another six or 12 months, you have to take action.

None of us are proud of the position we're in. I've had meetings with sponsors, with representatives of the regions and other such meetings and I've been very clear as to the way that we're going to operate going forward. We're not going to turn it around overnight. I'm here as CEO in an 'acting' capacity, but I'm in a position now where we can change the relationship between us and the people we work with on a daily basis to one of equals - to change it from parent-child.

We have a problem and we're going to fix it. The important thing is that there is a commitment across the hierarchy of the WRU to fix it and the responsibility rests with us.

THE PROPOSALS TO CLUBS

The WRU Board will still comprise a dozen members, but the new proposals are designed to ensure a greater diversity of business skills, mindset, gender and cultural representation.

The proposals will double the number of independent representatives (INEDs) who are appointed rather than elected - three to six.

There will be a reduction in the number – from eight to four - of elected national or district members from the WRU Council on the Board.

All proposals have been unanimously pre-approved by the existing Board and meet Welsh Government expectations for governance change at the WRU.

The EGM is scheduled for 26 March 2023.

The WRU Board works alongside the Professional Rugby Board (PRB), whose INED chair also sits on the WRU Board, which runs the professional game.

The community game is run and governed by the Community Game Board (CGB), which benefits from a ring-fenced annual budget of over £10m.

Members of the WRU Council form the CGB and also provide (currently eight, to be reduced to four) directors to the WRU Board.

New proposals will also transform the WRU Council to ensure it is representative of the diverse rugby communities across Wales.

Membership of the Council will be broadened to drive diversity, inclusion and equality.

The full composition of the Board would be:

CEO and Independent Chair – at least one of these individuals is expected to be a woman

Four Independent Non-Exec Directors – at least two INEDS will be women

Chair of the PRB (independent on appointment) and Elected or appointed or selected representative for the women's game – at least one of whom will be a woman.

Four National and District council members including Chair of the CGB – at least one of whom will be a woman

DID YOU KNOW . . .

Concerns that these proposals could lead to the Clubs losing control are misplaced. The clubs will still 'own' Welsh rugby. If the clubs do not believe the new style of governance is effective then they will be in full control to change it.

What the WRU is looking for at Board level and beyond are independent people who, together, will offer the WRU a wide variety of skills that can be applied to help, and audit, the Executives.

Without a strong community game the future prosperity of Welsh rugby is threatened. A good INED will realise that the WRU is a fragile ecosystem and that every aspect of the system needs attention and care. In short, the community game is a key piece of the puzzle.

If the 75% threshold for change is not achieved at the EGM then there is a danger the current INEDS will resign, along with other members off the Board. Many executives and members of staff could follow their lead.

Sponsors could walk away, damaging both the reputation of the WRU and its finances.

The WRU may not be able to procure any further debt and might be obliged to repay current debt immediately.

Henry Engelhardt INED on WRU Board – In short, if these proposals do not pass then the WRU will fail.

FOR THE RECORD

2017 – Raelene Castle, the first woman to run one of Australia's major football codes, was appointed Rugby Australia chief executive.

November 2017 – World Rugby increased its Council from 15 to 32, with the 17 new members all being women, in line with its 'Women's Plan 2017-25', all aimed at accelerating the development of women in rugby on and off the field of play and further gender equality at all levels of the game.

2018-2020 – SRU announced Dee Bradbury as their 148th President, and the first female President in the Six Nations.

2021 – World Rugby announced female representation will be increasing from 30% to at least 40% on all of its committees in line with their new 'A global sport for all – true to its values' Strategic Plan.

September 2022 – a new structure was introduced by the Scottish Rugby Union (a company limited by guarantee) to take on the responsibility for the oversight of the organisation's main operating vehicle, Scottish Rugby.

February 2023 – Irish Rugby Union announced their committee had unanimously approved a proposal to achieve 40% female representation on the IRFU Committee by the end of this year.