




Speech by

Paul Hoolihan

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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CENTRAL QUEENSLAND NRL BID TEAM

 **Mr HOOLIHAN** (Keppel—ALP) (12.16 pm): As we gear up for the first 2011 State of Origin contest tonight, I ask the people in the gallery and honourable members to consider that Central Queensland is contributing just under 25 per cent of the 18-man squad, with Matt Scott from Ilfracombe, David Taylor from Blackwater, Jharal Yow Yeh from Emu Park and Dane Nielsen, one of Mackay's native sons. Why do our talented rugby league players have to move away to play NRL football? Because we have no team in Central Queensland. However, the Central Queensland NRL bid team is working to correct that.

The Central Queensland NRL bid team, with chairman Geoff Murphy and CEO Dennis Keeffe at the helm, has a talented board with members from Mackay in the north, Bundaberg in the south and Emerald and Longreach in the west. A region of over 600,000 square kilometres is covered by the bid and encompasses four coastal shires and 12 western shires, extending to the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales borders. The population of the region is approximately 600,000 with 450,000 living within a 3½-hour drive of Rockhampton.

To create infrastructure and support the regions, at a community cabinet meeting in Rockhampton Premier Anna Bligh confirmed that the Labor government is committed to building a stadium in Rockhampton if the bid is successful. If modelled on the Skilled Park complex, it would hold approximately 20,000 people and represent an estimated \$180 million to \$200 million in funding. Newman had to be embarrassed into even considering the idea.

The bid team has calculated that a team in Rockhampton would contribute approximately \$75 million to \$80 million to the economy of Central Queensland, based on the Cowboys' Dairy Farmers Stadium contribution of approximately \$75 million to the North Queensland bottom line. The bid team has attracted a major sponsor in QR National, which draws major income from the region and also provides employment to many of the families who would love to keep their sporting children in Central Queensland while providing an opportunity to learn near to home and to keep close contact with family. There are also many other committed sponsors behind the bid.

As part of the proposal, the bid company has a strategy to establish a regional educational, vocational and sport academy to be based in Rockhampton and to operate through the Central Queensland bid region. That strategy provides an opportunity to give back to the community and it will use sport as the conduit to link education and training to an employment pathway. It will also pay particular attention to the needs of our remotely located young people and Indigenous youth primarily across Central Queensland by providing access to place based programs that outreach across the vast region. It will also allow an opportunity to help disadvantaged and remote youth to gain valuable social skills and employment.

The bid team has also announced the formation of a youth team at under-13 level to compete in local and regional competitions and to put them onto a pathway that could lead them to playing for a Central Queensland NRL team. The government investment in a stadium will reap dividends and returns in social and financial terms for Central Queensland, and the playing of NRL games in Rockhampton will allow television to showcase the bid region.

The Central Queensland NRL bid has a great capacity and valuable knowledge within its team to ensure that the projected benefits come to our area. The people of Central Queensland who know the value of a national sporting team can sign the petition to grant a licence or can go to www.cqnrlbid.com.au to find out how to support the bid. Remember that an NRL team in the Central Queensland region years ago may have offered players of the calibre of Wendell Sailor and Rhys Wesser, just to name a few recent losses, and even the four players I mentioned at the outset the chance to play in a local team. I thank the Labor government for its support and I will continue to work with Geoff, Dennis and their team to achieve success for their far-sighted and sensible proposal.

One of the things that a Central Queensland NRL bid team hopes to achieve is that this area, which as I indicated covers 16 shires, becomes the best part of Queensland in which to support young people and regional people. It will mean that people who want to achieve success in elite sport do not have to move away and do not have to go to Sydney or Brisbane. The Cowboys in North Queensland proved that. The Central Queensland NRL bid, resulting in the granting of that licence, will prove that Central Queensland will remain the powerhouse for rugby league, particularly in Australia. It has provided so many top players with world-class capacity.