MEDIA RELEASE

PNGRFL COMMENDS PNG ORCHIDS AND KUMULS EFFORTS FOLLOWING RLWC26 CAMPAIGNS

Port Moresby, 4 November 2026: The Papua New Guinea Rugby Football League (PNGRFL) extends its gratitude to the Santos PNG Orchids and PNG LNG Kumuls following the conclusion of their Rugby League World Cup 2026 campaigns.

PNGRFL Chairman Sandis Tsaka acknowledges the commitment, courage and pride shown by both teams in representing Papua New Guinea on the world stage. He also recognises that, while the results were not what the country had hoped for, they provided an important indication of the state of rugby league in comparison to the world's leading teams.

SANTOS PNG ORCHIDS

The Orchids delivered memorable moments throughout their campaign, including a strong opening victory over France in Port Moresby, highlighted by Naomi Kelly's four-try performance.

"You prepared not only to compete at the Rugby League World Cup, but also to inspire a nation," said Chairman Tsaka. "Your courage, sportsmanship and pride in wearing the PNG jersey have helped create opportunities and paved the way for the next generation of girls across our country."

While the team showed its potential, the campaign also exposed areas that need attention as the Orchids continue to develop and compete at the highest level.

PNGRFL also acknowledges the retirement of Santos PNG Orchids representative Therese Aiton from international rugby league, recognising her contribution to the national team and thanking her for her service to Papua New Guinea.

PNG LNG KUMULS

The Kumuls carried the expectations of millions of Papua New Guineans throughout the tournament, opening their campaign with a victory over Lebanon before facing strong opposition from Samoa and England.

Chairman Tsaka acknowledged the team's effort and commitment while emphasising the importance of learning from the campaign.

"Our challenges are not failures. They are lessons that must guide our next steps. We must be honest about our shortfalls and recognise our current level on the international stage if we are to improve," he said.

A special tribute was also paid to retiring captain and Kumul No. 262, Rhyse Martin, in recognition of his 12 years of service, leadership and contribution to the PNG LNG Kumuls and the nation.

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LOOKING AHEAD

Chairman Tsaka said the next step for PNGRFL, the coaching staff and both playing groups would be to review the campaigns together, identify key areas requiring improvement and develop clear strategies to address them ahead of the next Rugby League World Cup.

“We must take an honest look at every game, understand where we fell short and work together to address those gaps. These results show us where our game currently stands globally, but they also give us a clear starting point for the work ahead,” he said.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

PNGRFL also extends its sincere appreciation to the thousands of supporters in Papua New Guinea and abroad who turned out in numbers to cheer on the Orchids and Kumuls throughout the tournament. Their passion, encouragement and unwavering support demonstrated the special place rugby league holds in the hearts of Papua New Guineans.

We also extend a special acknowledgement to our National Team’s naming rights sponsors, PNG LNG, and Santos PNG, for their continued support, alongside valued partners Kumul Petroleum, Digicel PNG, VISA, Boroko Motors and PacificAus Partnership. Their support remains important to the growth, development, and sustainability of rugby league in Papua New Guinea.

“On behalf of the PNGRFL Board and the entire rugby league family, I thank both teams for their commitment and for representing their families, communities, and country. We also thank our supporters and partners for standing with us throughout this campaign. We recognise the efforts of everyone involved, and we must now turn the lessons from this World Cup into action,” Chairman Tsaka said.

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