



## **AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION AND PNGRU PRESS STATEMENT**

Monday 15 January  
Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

### **JOANNE BUTLER SIGNS WITH ACT BRUMBIES UNDER THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S PACIFICAUS SPORTS PARTNERSHIP WITH PNG RUGBY UNION, RUGBY AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA RUGBY.**

The PNG Rugby Union (PNGRU) proudly extends its heartfelt congratulations to Joanne Butler on securing a scholarship placement with the ACT Brumbies. The ACT Brumbies compete in Australia's Super W rugby competition and this placement marks a momentous milestone in Butler's rugby career and for PNGRU.

This achievement is a direct outcome of the *PacificAus Sports* program's support for rugby in the Pacific and PNG, a transformative partnership between the Australian Government, Rugby Australia, and Oceania Rugby.

Australia's *PacificAus Sports* program is designed to provide opportunities for athletes from the Pacific region to compete at the highest levels. *PacificAus Sports* has played a crucial role in bridging gaps and establishing pathways for aspiring rugby players across the Pacific and PNG. Joanne's inclusion in the ACT Brumbies is a living testament to the positive outcomes of this cooperative initiative.

The PNGRU extends deepest thanks to the Australian Government, Rugby Australia and Oceania Rugby for this powerful partnership which is transforming lives, and wishes Joanne the very best in her new endeavor with the ACT Brumbies.

#### **QUOTE BY DR JOANNE LOUNDES, ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PNG**

*"The Australian Government is thrilled that Joanne will have the opportunity to play with the ACT Brumbies for the 2024 season and join the other talented Pacific players that are now on Australian Super W scholarships through PacificAus Sports.*

*We're excited to see a locally grown Papua New Guinean in the Super W and we acknowledge Joanne's hard work and sacrifices to get to this elite level. We also recognize the contributions to Joanne's development from PNG Rugby Union, its coaches and the clubs.*

*The Australian Government is proud to be increasing pathways for aspiring female athletes in the Pacific who offer inspiration for women and girls across the region to pursue their dreams. We wish Joanne the best of luck for the season ahead."*



**QUOTE BY PAUL SIWI, PRESIDENT OF PNG RUGBY UNION INC.**

*“Joanne Butler’s journey to the ACT Brumbies stands as a shining testament to her exceptional talent and unwavering work ethic. Her accomplishments not only showcase her individual prowess but also underscore the success of the initiatives and strategies implemented by PNGRU to revitalize rugby in PNG and elevate it to new heights. This signing is a source of immense pride for PNGRU, highlighting the caliber of athletes emerging from our region and affirming the effectiveness of collaborative efforts in nurturing and developing talent.*”

*We thank the Australian Government, Rugby Australia, and Oceania Rugby for helping us to achieve this milestone sooner than envisioned. We also are grateful to the PNG Prime Minister Hon. James Marape, his government, our Patron, Hon Governor Powes Parkop and our family of sponsors, particularly, Kumul Petroleum Holdings Ltd, National Gaming Board and Air Niugini for their unwavering support which has seen the resurgence of the code after a number of years being dormant.*

*Collaboration is crucial for progress and this signing event is a sterling example of what can be achieved if there is a genuine desire to make a meaningful impact.”*

**QUOTE BY JOANNE BUTLER**

*“Glory to God Almighty for steering my life’s journey and opening this incredible door for me. The recent news and the past few days have felt surreal, yet I approach this opportunity with deep humility as I join the ACT Brumbies on a scholarship placement and begin the Super W journey.*”

*Thanks to PacificAus Sports, Rugby Australia and Oceania Rugby, women in the Pacific now have a solid platform to progress to elite rugby. Special gratitude to PNGRU for reviving women’s rugby and to the PNG Government for supporting the women’s program. I extend my thanks to everyone involved in my rugby journey, especially my father, whose passion for rugby inspired me to play.*

*My sincere hope is that this achievement inspires fellow Papua New Guineans and Pacific Islanders to fearlessly pursue their aspirations. I encourage more women and girls to embrace rugby union because life changing opportunities for women in the sport, are growing.”*

**QUOTE BY CYBELE WARI, FOUNDER OF WOMENS RUGBY IN PNG, CURRENT PNGRU BOARD MEMBER AND WOMEN’S RUGBY DIRECTOR**

*“The success of athletes like Joanne underscores the importance of establishing robust platforms for talent development. We (PNGRU) express our gratitude to the Australian Government, particularly through PacificAus Sports, for continuing to impact sports development in PNG and the Pacific. The inception of the*



*women's code in 2006 marked a crucial milestone, and 17 years later, we have finally reached a destination we have long envisioned.*

*Joanne's signing holds significant meaning, representing the culmination of sacrifices, dedication, and investments that have gone into women's rugby in PNG from our humble beginnings up to this point in time. We are confident that she will make a substantial impact with the ACT Brumbies, serving as an inspiration for young rugby enthusiasts in Papua New Guinea and across Oceania."*

***QUOTE BY SAILOSI DRUMA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PNGRU INC.***

*"It is an exhilarating moment to be part of the rugby community in PNG. This historic signing serves as the catalyst that will propel the growth of the game in PNG. It is a game-changer, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude, particularly to PacificAus Sports, Rugby Australia, Oceania Rugby, the PNG Government and all others who played a role in bringing us to this pivotal point."*

**About PacificAus Sports**

*PacificAus Sports is an Australian Government sports diplomacy initiative developing pathways for Pacific teams and athletes to compete in elite competitions and access high performance coaching in Australia and internationally. The program partners with Australian national sports organisations to support a range of Pacific sports, including rugby league, rugby union, netball, football, AFL, cricket and Olympic/Paralympic sports, with funding split evenly between women and men.*

*PacificAus Sports also partners with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) to promote Pacific sport through ABC Television's ' That Pacific Sports Show ' and ABC Radio's ' Fresh Off the Field '. The high performance outcomes of PacificAus Sports are complemented by the Australian Government's Team Up program, which focuses on sport for development in the Pacific. For more information about PacificAus Sports and its initiatives, visit [www.pacificaussports.gov.au](http://www.pacificaussports.gov.au) .*