



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

**20 February 2008
ADJOURNMENT DEBATE**

NEWCASTLE JETS & ENERGYAUSTRALIA STADIUM

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (7.35 p.m.) - Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the speakership. I did have a previous opportunity but at the time, in question time, you were being so stern and there was such a profound silence in response that I did not like to spoil the moment. As much as I miss sharing a bench in this chamber with you, and I miss your wise counsel, sharp wit and great humour, I am so proud that it is being shared with the Australian public. The question time tragedies in my electorate are telling me that they very much appreciate the new style of the new Speaker.

It is grand final time in the A-league and I am proud to inform the House that on Sunday evening the Newcastle Jets will play the Central Coast Mariners in the grand final. I notice that the member for Robertson, a rival in this, is here and I am sure she is supporting her team. While we have made the finals in each of the three years of the A-league competition, this is our very first grand final. Last year the member for Hindmarsh's team knocked us out; I enjoyed very much watching that game with him in Adelaide. So in Newcastle we are abuzz with excitement. That we have reached this point is a tribute to the owner, Con Constantine; the club's executive and staff; its coach, Gary van Egmond; and all of its wonderfully talented players, not to mention the dedicated fans. On the weekend, former Socceroo Craig Foster wrote that the Jets, along with Queensland Roar, were the best teams to watch this season - a fine tribute to our young squad, from a great of the Australian game.

The city of Newcastle has got right behind our Jets in the three years of its existence, and it is great that we now have two teams - the Jets and the Knights - competing at the highest level, in two national football codes and receiving such wonderful support. Like thousands of Novocastrians, I am looking forward to travelling to Sydney on Sunday to cheer them home. But also like many thousands of Novocastrians, I will miss the home-ground atmosphere. Like them, I was also very disappointed that, had we qualified first for the grand final, we would not have had the opportunity to host the grand final at our home ground - EnergyAustralia Stadium - because our stadium's capacity, currently around 24,000, is just not sufficient for a grand final crowd. It is also not big enough to host Asian Cup or World Cup matches, which require 40,000 seats - competitions which Australia has indicated it may bid for in the near future. It would be a tragedy for our region if we were to miss out on those opportunities because our stadium still is not up to international standard.

I was first elected into this place in 2001, and I continually lobbied the former government for federal assistance to help upgrade our stadium. Ten thousand signatures on a petition were lodged, but not one cent was forthcoming for Newcastle. I am pleased to report to the House that the Rudd government is following through with its commitment at the last election to contribute \$10 million to help create several thousand more seats at EAS.

We expect this funding to become available in April or May this year and I would be very surprised if it is not spent already. Adding to the state government's recent funding, we are now moving forward after 10 years of neglect by the Howard government. I hear the member opposite saying 'pork-barrelling'. I remember the former Treasurer's team, the former Prime Minister's team and the team of the former member for Lindsay, Jackie Kelly - and I remember quite a few announcements of stadium funding, but none for Newcastle. I will keep working with my colleagues in government, with the Hunter International Sports Centre Trust and with the community to make sure more funding becomes available to build the new western grandstand we would all so dearly love to see. In the past we have missed out on hosting Rugby World Cup matches. An economic study done by the local university shows that we have missed out on \$130 million in economic activity that it is estimated a redeveloped stadium would bring in.

The city of Newcastle now boasts two codes and two top-ranking teams - the Jets and the Knights - using the stadium year round. I congratulate the Knights on their victory in the opening trial game for the 2008 season, and our Jets have qualified for the Asian Champions League in 2009. We really do want to be part of the Asian and World Cup bids in 2015 and 2018. I will be cheering the Jets home in Sydney on Sunday, and hoping the member for Robertson is not quite as happy as I am on the day, and I will keep working towards the day when we can cheer them home in a grand final at EnergyAustralia Stadium - and when we can cheer on the Socceroos in international matches held at EnergyAustralia Stadium.

The SPEAKER - I simply say to the honourable member for Newcastle that while the chair is supposed to be benevolent in most matters, within the A-league there is only one victory—a Melbourne victory.