Minister for Sport and Recreation Matt Conlan has today announced an historic agreement with the Parramatta Eels that will see National Rugby League premiership matches played in the Northern Territory until 2018.

Mr Conlan was joined by Parramatta’s club officials, Coach Ricky Stuart and Captain Tim Mannah in Sydney today to launch the new four-year partnership, which begins in 2014.

“This is a great day for the sport of rugby league and the Territory,” Mr Conlan said.

“Today’s announcement is the first time the Northern Territory has partnered with an NRL club to deliver a long-term future of premiership NRL games in the NT.

“The agreement will see the Eels play a regular season home game in Darwin each year until 2018 as well as a pre-season Trial Match in Alice Springs in each year of the agreement.

“It means Territorians will be able to see the big games and the big stars of the NRL in action in both in Darwin and Alice Springs, and have a team to call their own.

“While these games are important to the Territory, this agreement goes much further than just NRL games and will also deliver significant benefits to our community over the next four seasons, all year long.”

The Northern Territory Government’s agreement with Parramatta is valued at $4 million over four years and is based on four major pillars:

1. NRL Trial Match each year
2. NRL Premiership match each year
4. Community Engagement Programs

“This is not a fly-in fly-out agreement, it’s a partnership that will see the Eels have a strong, ongoing presence in the Territory,” Mr Conlan said.

“The Eels will be involved in promoting participation in Rugby League and Touch Football throughout each year of the agreement to help grow both these sports. The Club will also conduct training camps and coaching clinics during extended visits to the Territory working with the Northern Territory Institute of Sport to oversee the development of our juniors and coaches from all sports to improve their pathways to the elite level.

“The Club will also be involved in community programs right throughout the Territory, including remote communities, promoting healthy lifestyles, the importance of numeracy and literacy and going to school.
“As part of the agreement, the Territory Government will also work with the Eels on a new initiative, **Strong Men-Strong Leadership.**

“The aim being to provide Territory men with strong role models using Parramatta players like 24 year old Territory-born Luke Kelly, who played for the Katherine Bushrangers as a junior, to inspire better life choices and to combat issues such as alcoholism and domestic violence.

“As well as the sporting and social benefits, Western Sydney is also the third largest economy in Australia so as we look to grow the NT economy this agreement with Parramatta will prove to be a valuable link for the Northern Territory as we move forward into our new future.”

Parramatta Eels Interim CEO Matt Phelan said the new partnership would display the impact Rugby League can have not just as a major sporting spectacle but also as a vehicle for positive community outcomes.

“This is the start of a long relationship between the Eels and the NT, which will be based on genuine engagement with the Northern Territory community,” Mr Phelan said.

“We are committed to providing both resources and knowledge to grow the game in the Northern Territory.”

Rugby League has a strong history in the Northern Territory dating back to 1938 and continues to grow in popularity with more than 2200 players registered in the NT in 2013 and 8,000 fans attending this year’s clash between the Gold Coast Titans and Penrith in Darwin.

This fixture for the new Darwin games will be announced in coming months however it’s anticipated the Eels 2014 Trial Match will be held in Alice Springs in February and the NRL game in Darwin in August.

There have only been three NRL premiership games played in the Territory’s history, in 1995, 2012 and 2013.

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