

# “More pressing needs”: UPNG students on the \$600m NRL team

by Anna Kapil and Stephen Howes

2 February 2026



The PNG rugby league team beat Fiji in the Pacific Bowl competition in Port Moresby, November 2025

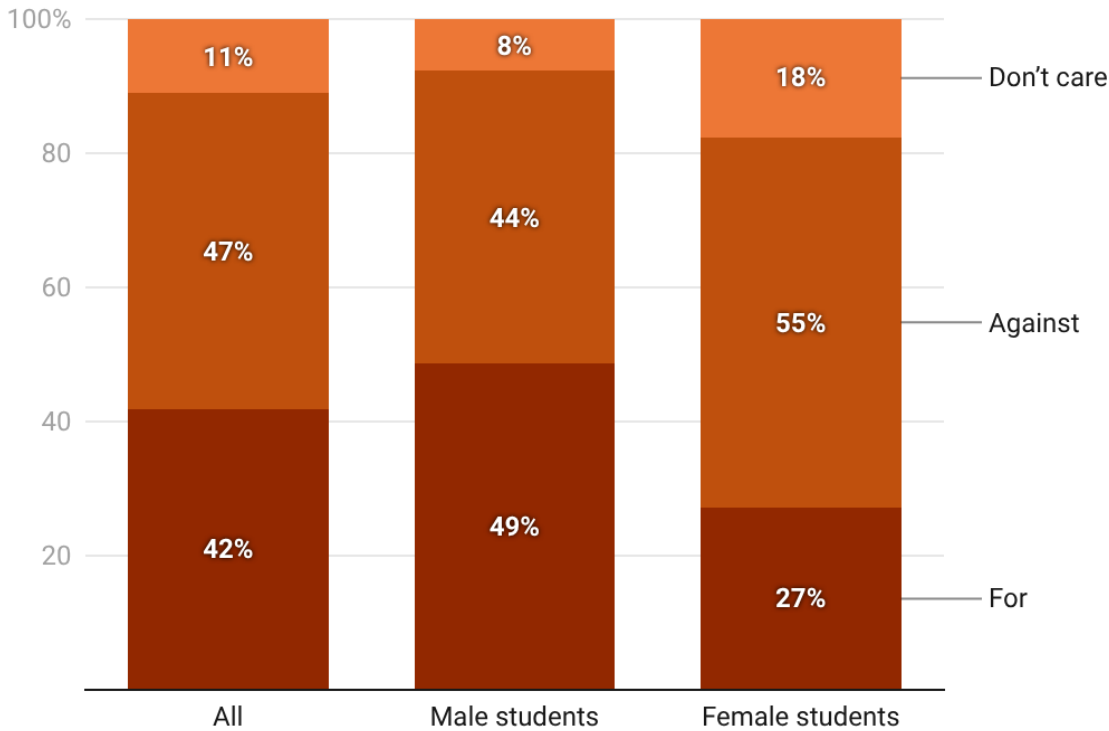
*Photo Credit: Facebook/PNGChiefsOfficial*

“Chiefs”: the official name for the Papua New Guinea National Rugby League team, announced by Prime Minister James Marape at the PM’s XIII fixture on 12 October 2025. Rugby league is not only the national sport of PNG but a sport that unites one of the world’s most diverse nations. PNG and Australia share the same passion for rugby league, with the NRL craze on display during the recent visit to PNG of the [Brisbane Broncos NRL and NRL Women’s teams](#).

PNG’s bid to have a team in the NRL, and Australia’s support for that bid, have been debated both [in PNG](#) and [in Australia](#). But what do Papua New Guineans think? Absent public opinion surveys, it is difficult to gauge the national mood on key questions such as this one. We thought we would make a start by finding out what University of Papua New Guinea students think. So, we included questions about the NRL bid and Australia’s support for it in the [2025 UPNG student survey](#), our second annual survey.

Views were divided. Of the almost 400 UPNG School of Business and Public Policy students we surveyed, 29% said they were very supportive of the bid, 13% said they were supportive, 22% said that they were not very supportive and 25% not supportive at all. 11% said they didn’t care. Overall, it was 42% for (supportive or very supportive) versus 47% against (not very supportive or not supportive at all).

**Figure 1: For or against a PNG NRL team**

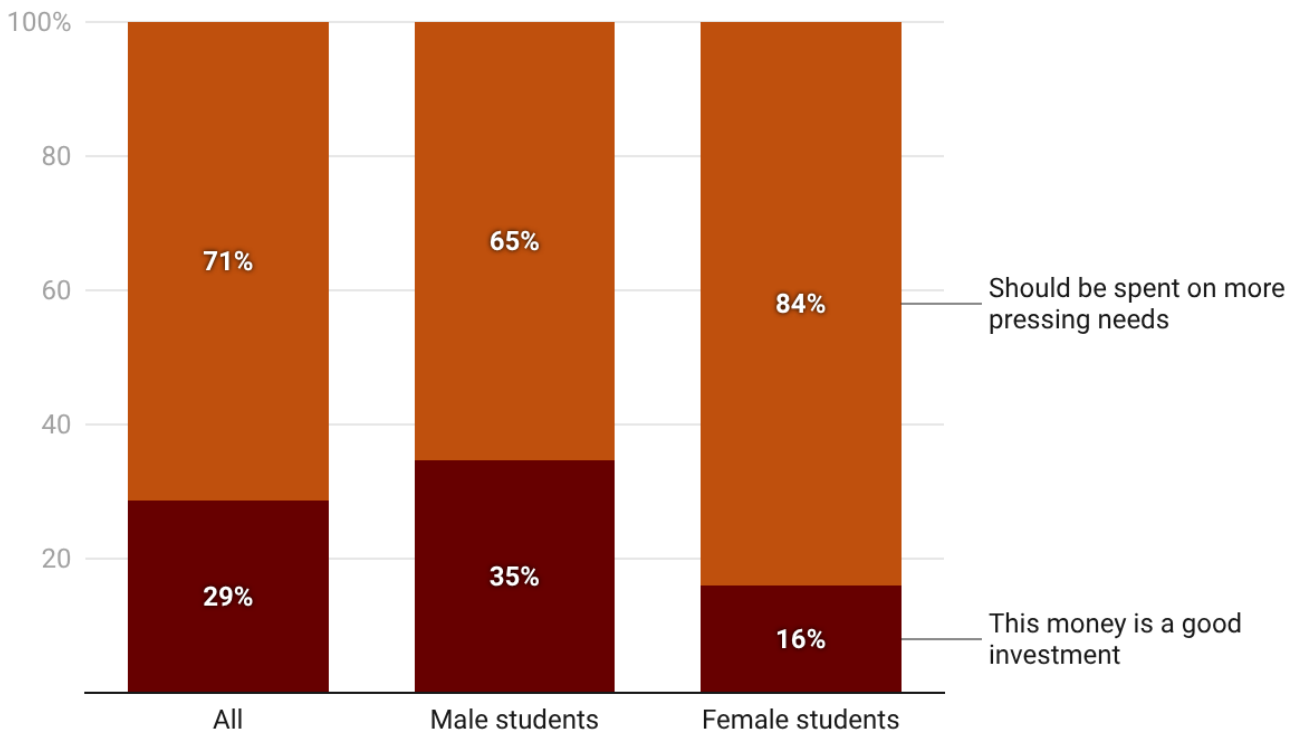


Source: 2025 UPNG Student Attitudes Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Rugby league is a male-dominated sport, but is loved and watched by almost the entire nation. However, the two genders showed quite different levels of support for the NRL bid, with male students (the majority) much more supportive than female students. Overall, whereas 49% of male students were supportive and 44% against, only 27% of female students were supportive while 55% were against, a large and statistically significant difference across genders.

Students were also asked about what they thought of the A\$600 million that the Australian government has put on offer to make the NRL bid happen. They were given two choices: was this money a good investment or were there more pressing needs that this money could be spent on? The great majority (71%) thought the Australian money could be better spent on more pressing needs. Only 29% said it was a good investment. Even among male students, only one-third thought it was a good investment. Among female students this share was just 16%: again, a very large and statistically significant difference.

**Figure 2: Views on the \$600 million from Australia in support of the NRL bid**



Source: 2025 UPNG Student Attitudes Survey • Created with Datawrapper

The students were also given an opportunity to share their views on the idea of a PNG NRL team against the background of the A\$600 million investment. Common positive comments were that this could be an income-earning opportunity and would give tourism a boost. On the negative side, many said it was an unnecessary expenditure and waste of resources, that PNG was not yet ready for an NRL team, and that the money should be spent in areas of greater need.

No doubt, once the PNG NRL team takes to the field, UPNG students will be out there to support their team, or at least enjoy the games. At the same time, ordinary people in PNG still face a lot of struggles in their daily lives and lack basic services, and the students’ answers reflect this reality.

*For other findings from the 2025 survey, see the [article series](#) and the [2025 PNG Update presentation](#). The results of the first survey, conducted in 2024, are reported [here](#). Statistical significance is judged using the Chi-square test.*

**Disclosures:**

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*This research was undertaken with the support of the ANU-UPNG Partnership, an initiative of the PNG-Australia Partnership, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views are those of the authors only.*

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Link:

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