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MEDIA RELEASE

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LIBS WELCOME NEW VICTORIAN NBL TEAM

The launch of the South Dragons basketball team that will compete in the National Basketball League (NBL) next year is great news for Victorian sport with the formation of a second Victorian NBL team being long overdue.

Labor's Sports Minister Justin Madden has failed to take action to progress the development of basketball in this state and is instead concentrating his efforts in appearing in photo opportunity after photo opportunity for the Commonwealth Games.

I urged Justin Madden to set up a working party to establish a second NBL team in Victoria in Parliament in November 2004. He did nothing.

Justin Madden ignored the issue despite the importance of the NBL competition to grassroots basketball and the impact of declining attendances and sponsorship for the Melbourne Tigers, the only state team in the league after the collapse of the Giants franchise.

While the NBL operates as a commercial organisation, the State Government should have shown more interest in the league's problems in Victoria, which included issues associated with state-owned venues.

Justin Madden certainly has no reservations about becoming involved in issues and activities in other commercial sports bodies such as the Australian Football League.

It beggars belief that Justin Madden has shown no interest in basketball, despite Victoria dominating for more than four decades and recording the highest participation rates in the country, particularly at junior levels.

While Justin Madden avoided yet another sports issue, it is encouraging to see Victorian businessmen, Mark Cowan and Raphael Geminder, establishing the new South Dragons franchise.

It is fantastic news for Victorian basketball that Cowan and Geminder are pursuing a recruitment policy that will target talented young home grown Victorian basketballers for the player roster.

New young talent at the South Dragons will regenerate crowds and sponsorship and provide a renewed interest and encourage everyone involved in basketball at the grassroots level, particularly juniors who will see an opportunity to advance their careers in their home state.

With its recruitment policies, the South Dragons franchise will also potentially have a positive impact on our national teams playing in the Olympics, Commonwealth Games and other international championships.

The Liberal Party congratulates Mr Cowan, Mr Geminder and everyone involved in the launch of this new franchise. This is one photo opportunity that Justin Madden will not be a part of.

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