

AUSTRALIAN SOCCER

The Hon. F. PANGALLO (16:41): I move:

That this council—

1. Congratulates Australia's men's football team, also known as the Socceroos, on qualifying for the sixth time for FIFA's World Cup tournament to be staged in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December 2022;
2. Acknowledges the contributions made to the team and to the code in Australia by their coach, Graham Arnold; his assistants; and the sport governing body, the Football Federation of Australia;
3. Wishes Australia success in their group D matches against France, Denmark and Tunisia;
4. Extends its appreciation and congratulates the emirate of Qatar and the organising committee for FIFA Qatar 2022 in staging the iconic four-yearly global event, and held in a Middle Eastern country for the first time; and
5. Notes that the FIFA Women's World Cup will be jointly staged for the first time in Australian cities, including Adelaide; in regions; and in New Zealand from 20 July to 20 August 2023.

Who can ever forget that stunned look of joy on the face of bushy bearded Andrew Redmayne when he saved a decisive penalty against South Americans Peru that lifted all of Australia, sending the Socceroos to their fifth consecutive World Cup appearance—and their sixth overall—in Qatar? The sheer joy was reminiscent of that night in Sydney in November 2005 when Adelaide's John Aloisi slotted a penalty to deny Uruguay, sending Australia to its first World Cup, in Germany, since 1974.

I was fortunate to be there with my sons Mark and Alex and 85,000 other Aussie fanatics, and there was hardly a dry eye in the house, such was the elation and relief that was felt by ardent supporters of the beautiful game in Australia because there had been so much heartbreak in between when hopes had been so high.

As a reporter I was lucky again to make it to Germany in 2006 to see our team, known as the golden generation, in action against the world's best. They made it to their best ever finish, the round of 16, only to lose to a controversial penalty that was awarded late in the game to Italy, the eventual tournament champions. Australia was back again in 2010 in South Africa where it just missed out on making the second round on goal difference after its poor start against a rampant Germany in Durban. The Socceroos qualified again in 2014 in Brazil and Russia in 2018 but were eliminated in the first round.

The tournament in Qatar kicks off in just over 50 days, when the Socceroos face another massive challenge, the tournament favourites France, in their opening game on 23 November, then follows Tunisia and Denmark, equally tough opponents. But if there is one thing I have learned in following the game and our national team, they are not easily intimidated, and like so many of our sports men and women, they are renowned for their fighting spirit, right to the end.

There is no other sporting tournament like the World Cup of football. It is the biggest game on the planet. I have been to four, and I can say that the atmosphere generated beats any of the Olympics I have covered, except perhaps the Sydney 2000. There is no experience like being in a full stadium, with Australia's national anthem blaring out, and seeing every Aussie in the crowd sing their lungs out. It really does give you goosebumps.

I do not recollect hearing our national anthem sung with as much gusto anywhere else or at any other sporting fixture as when our Socceroos line up for a World Cup fixture in front of a global audience of millions. In Qatar I am sure our fans will try, ousting the French, who are just as passionate with their stirring national anthem, La Marseillaise. This occasion will have added significance for the Australian national team, which is celebrating its centenary year.

The difficult journey Australia has taken this time around cannot be underestimated. Many qualifying matches were played on foreign soil and during the worst of the COVID pandemic. Home ground advantage was lost. Players had to fly in from all corners of the globe to prepare for their games, played in mostly empty stadia, with hardly an Aussie supporter in attendance.

Australia won 11 consecutive qualifying matches in a single campaign, a FIFA World Cup record. What looked like being a cakewalk through to Qatar then took a bumpy detour, with Australia missing out on a top two finish in its group, then having to go through the play-offs and then finishing up with a nailbiting game against Peru, again played in Qatar with little fan support.

It was here that Australia's coach, Graham Arnold, showed his tactical genius. Aware that regular first-choice goalkeeper Matt Ryan was not confident against penalty kicks, he rolled the dice and replaced the skipper with big, burly and scary Redmayne, who successfully struck fear into the nervous hearts of the Peruvians with his trademark body movements. Following the game, an ecstatic Arnold told media that nobody back home expected Australia to qualify. Well, not quite everybody.

It is a testament to Arnold's unwavering dedication and fierce loyalty to his country that stretches all the way back to his playing days, first in the old national soccer league and then in professional leagues in the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. Not just a great club player, where he amassed more than 450 appearances and netted 161 goals, Arnie, as he is affectionately known, ranks in my book as one of our greatest Socceroos, always ready to pull on the green-and-gold strip and play his heart out. He made 54 team appearances, scoring 19 goals. He is also an Olympian, not just as a player but also as an assistant coach and a senior coach, taking in the games in Athens, Beijing and Tokyo.

He has also had great success as a coach, winning two A-League titles, with the Central Coast Mariners and then with a classy Sydney Football Club that swept all before them. It is a mark of Arnold's character that he engenders strong loyalty and support from his playing groups. Unlike the furore we are hearing about from AFL scandals, Arnold nurtures his players, especially the younger ones and those who have come from underprivileged backgrounds, like refugee Awer Mabil, who started his playing days with Adelaide United and is now a dynamic professional in Norway and will undoubtedly be a key player in Australia's World Cup attack.

Hopefully, we will see other South Australians selected in Arnold's final squad, including Riley McGree, who grew up in Gawler and played with the Gawler Eagles and is now with Middlesborough; Ryan Strain, who began with the Modbury Jets and is now in the Scottish premier league with St Mirren; Ryan McGowan, who is also in the Scottish premier league; and Adelaide United striker Craig Goodwin.

There is also another important South Australian connection with the World Cup. Tony Vidmar, an Adelaide City and Socceroo legend, is Arnie's assistant and has also taken over our Olympic team. Tony cruelly missed out on his lifelong dream of playing in a World Cup when a heart condition ruled him out of the squad that went to Germany in 2006 after he had played such a critical role in the 2005 qualifiers. He has now established himself as a skilled coach.

Arnold's achievement in making this World Cup, his first as senior manager, under the toughest challenges for his players, his assistants and also the governing body of the sport in this country, the Football Federation of Australia, is to be commended for the way that the governing body has managed the team's commitments, along with other national and international responsibilities during the pandemic era.

Next year, Australians will get a taste of what it is like to experience the excitement a World Cup tournament generates when we host the FIFA Women's World Cup with New Zealand. This will be huge and we will all wish our women's team, known as the Matildas, every success in being able to lift the trophy as one of the tournament favourites. Matches will be played in capital cities and regional centres, including Adelaide, where Coopers Stadium at Hindmarsh is currently undergoing a refit.

I would also like to extend the council's appreciation and congratulations to the emirate of Qatar on its preparations for this year's tournament. It was a shock when they were announced as hosts in 2010, because no country in the Middle East has hosted the tournament and it had very little in the way of the type of facilities required, particularly being such a small country. What is more, because of the climate challenges the traditional time frame of world cups from June to July had to be changed to late November to mid-December to accommodate for the heat. It meant that major leagues around the world would need to be disrupted for a period.

However, the Qataris have defied their critics by building the most amazing infrastructure. It has become a veritable football oasis in the desert. There will be eight magnificent stadiums that are airconditioned to 25° so that spectators and players can be comfortable. After the tournament, they will be dismantled and generously donated to other countries that need world-class facilities.

There will be another strong Adelaide business connection at the World Cup in Qatar. Peats Soils has won a contract to have its innovative BiobiNs at all the stadia that will process all the waste from the World Cup stadiums, and that compost will then be used in the surrounding deserts of Qatar in greening projects. It is a wonderful achievement for Peats. I think it is the only Australian company that has won a contract from FIFA at the World Cup.

I am very much looking forward to this tournament and the attention it will undoubtedly get globally and, of course, in this country. I commend the motion to the chamber.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. I.K. Hunter.