Environment Minister Karl Hampton will tomorrow introduce urgent legislation into Territory Parliament to close a legislative loophole recently discovered in the Water Act.

“I have made no secret of the fact that I have not been happy with either the discharge licences issued to sewage treatment plants or the overall regulatory processes for high risk activities around the harbour, and ordered a review earlier this year,” Mr Hampton said.

“In the course of reviewing the licensing regime my office has received legal advice from the Solicitor General indicating that the provisions of section 74 of the Water act do not operate as has been thought for more than 17 years.

“Since 1992, successive Governments have implemented section 74 on the understanding it allowed for waste discharge licences to be issued generally where waste is discharged to a natural water body.

“This could occur from activities such as sewage treatment discharges, waste water from mining tenements and dredging.

“Legal advice recently received suggests that in fact the section should be read much more narrowly than the historical interpretation, effectively making existing and past licences invalid, whilst curtailing the ability of government to issue more licences.

“Tomorrow legislation will be introduced into parliament on urgency, to restore the legal operation of the Water Act to the manner in which it was thought to operate.

“I have offered the opposition and both Independents a full briefing on this important legislative action which is crucial to provide legal certainty to industry that rely on existing discharge licences and to ensure that that the environment continues to be protected.

“Licensing is very important to ensure waste discharges stay within safe limits and without a legally valid licensing regime our freshwater and marine environment could be put at significant risk.

“I am not prepared to take that risk and I am taking strong and decisive action at the earliest opportunity since receiving the legal advice.

“With the legal certainty to the operation of waste discharge licensing under the Water Act quickly secured, I will continue to drive improvements to the licensing regime to ensure it meets best practice.

“This urgent legislation is a small part of our comprehensive review of regulatory issues around discharges into the harbour.

“Our commitment to a greener territory is clear: we want to ensure our environmental legislation works and if it doesn’t, fix it.”