MEDIA RELEASE

MINISTER’S ALL AT SEA

December 14th, 2011

The Mandorah Ferry contract fiasco has gone from bad to worse.

Member for Port Darwin, John Elferink, said there is a real risk the ferry service could stop operating – disadvantaging countless patrons and business operators on both sides of Darwin Harbor – because of the mess the Henderson Government has made of the tender process.

The latest development has seen the Department of Lands and Planning notifying the operators of the companies bidding for the tender that they have been ruled out of the tender process.

This notification was followed soon after by a phone call to the operator of SeaCat Ferries proposing a two-year extension of the current contract but with additional services, an expanded fare structure and free rides for pensioners.

“Unless the Government has an alternative operator waiting in the wings, it’s possible the Cullen Bay-Mandorah ferry service will stop operating on New Year’s Eve,” Mr Elferink said.

“This would be the worst possible outcome for the many people who rely on the ferry to get between Darwin and the Cox Peninsular.”

Mr Elferink said he telephoned Lands and Planning Minister Gerry McCarthy this morning and was concerned he didn’t even know about this latest development.

“This shows that resolving the ferry contract crisis is extremely low on the Minister’s radar,” Mr Elferink said.

“As the Minister who announced the tender process earlier this year, it’s remarkable Gerry McCarthy could be so blind-sided and befuddled that he didn’t know the Department had cancelled the tender process.

“Gerry McCarthy’s all at sea over the ferry contract – and Top End residents are shaping as the losers.

“The Minister’s priority now must be to ensure an operator is found to pick up the service if SeaCat pulls out on December 31st.”
How the Ferry Fiasco Unfolded:

- Local Member conducts a survey on the future of the Mandorah ferry contract
- Only about 20% of people surveyed respond
- Minister Gerry McCarthy appoints Labor Party colleague Rob Knight, to chair a ferry reference group
- The reference group fails to meet with SeaCat, the ferry operator
- Sydney company Fast Ferries is named as preferred tenderer to operate the service
- Department of Lands and Planning officials travel to Sydney to meet Fast Ferries representatives
- Fast Ferries dumped as preferred tenderer in favor of SeaCat
- SeaCat and Fast ferries dumped from the tender process leaving the future of ferry services in doubt

Further comment: John Elfe rink 0418 406 400