THE $250 million Westin luxury hotel to be located at the Darwin Waterfront has been welcomed by tourism operators.

The hotel still has to go through the full planning process. Chinese company Landbridge, lessee of the Darwin Port, emerged as the successful bidder following an 18-month process.

Longtime Darwin tourism identity Penny Tastula told ABC radio she had been arguing for such a development for 25 years.

“If this comes off this is exactly what Darwin needs,” she said. “No high-rise. A low-rise concept along the waterfront to attract and keep tourists. We really don’t have anywhere that will attract families. They want a destination to go to and not be packing up and moving on in a few days.”

“Looking at some of Westin’s ocean resorts in Hawaii and my oh my if we got anything like that then it will start a whole new generation of tourism into Darwin.”

Darwin Harbour Cruises’ Rachel Beaumont-Smith agreed the development was crucial to tourism.

“The high-end leisure market has been looking for resort-style accommodation of a higher standard in Darwin for a long time,” she said. “When the accommodation itself is a draw card we will see an increase in visitor nights in Darwin benefiting the entire industry.”

“We are confident that this exciting new hotel development will not only increase the demand on our harbour cruises but will also create greater interest from the Asian market where recent results have been softer than expected.”

Mr Beaumont-Smith said air access to Darwin and the Northern Territory was essential for the success of the tourism industry and consistent lobbying of the Australian government was required.

Landbridge managing director Mike Hughes said Westin had been chosen due to its strong brand here in Australia but also its presence in Asian markets.

“We will use Westin to train people and in a network like theirs there is a genuine career path for people.”

The project will mark Starwood Hotels & Resorts’ debut in Darwin through the introduction of its Westin brand to the Northern Territory.

Mr Hughes said Westin had been chosen due to its strong brand here in Australia but also its presence in Asian markets.

“We will want to attract the domestic business traveller as well as the tourist and the Asian traveller who knows the Westin brand,” he said.

Construction is expected to begin next year for completion by 2019. In addition to offering 2.9 hectares of the former Toga land for the development, the Government has agreed to provide up to $10 million towards connecting services to the site.

Landbridge has also been offered an 18-month call option over an additional 1.5 hectares of the former Toga land on commercial terms. The Government will not provide any support towards the hotel’s ongoing operations.

The hotel is expected to employ up to 150 people once built.