NEW FREIGHT DEAL FAST TRACKS RAILWAY SUCCESS

Chief Minister, Clare Martin, today welcomed the signing of a major contract between Bootu Creek Resources, owners of Bootu Creek mine, and AustralAsia rail operator, FreightLink, saying that her Government’s planned upgrades to the Darwin’s East Arm Port helped secure the deal.

The five-year contract is to carry 600,000 tonnes of manganese annually from the mine, 160 kilometres north of Tennant Creek, to Darwin.

Ms Martin said the Bootu Creek deal highlights the capabilities of Darwin’s East Arm Port, saying that more than $11 million will be spent by Government on bulk handling facilities to off-load minerals.

“This is a landmark deal and justify’s the Territory’s faith in the railway and port - it will create jobs, drive economic growth and keep the Territory moving ahead,” she said.

“The railway has now secured contracts for over a million tonnes of Freight each year - a remarkable result considering the train has been operating for barely 15 months.”

Ms Martin said the AustralAsia Railway is playing a critical role in regional development and now that this transport route has linked Central Australia from Adelaide to Darwin, other mines will follow suit.

“This manganese will be transported to China and we are confident new importers and exporters will see the benefits of our train and port facilities,” she said.

“The February Growing Our Trade strategy, identified the establishment of bulk material handling facilities as a key opportunity to make Darwin a “Port of Choice” for new bulk mineral exports to Asia.

“This new freight deal is tangible proof of that opportunity being realised and improves the chances of the port capturing other exports destined for markets throughout Asia.”

Ms Martin said that the Australasias Railway was instrumental in the mine starting up this year. It makes the development economically viable by providing a competitive transport solution.

Both the mine and bulk handling facilities are expected to be operating around August 2005. The mine is expected to generate $70 million a year in export earnings for the Territory and generate more than 80 jobs at the mine and on the haulage of bulk ore by rail to Darwin Port.

Approximately 40 Territorians are currently employed in the construction of the 50km haul road from the mine to the rail siding (now 80% complete) and provision of other services (eg. power lines). Many local companies have benefited from this work and the construction of a 100 person accommodation camp.

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