The new fitness to plead legislation introduced by Minister for Justice and Attorney General Peter Toyne in May this year, will be a point of discussion at a psychiatry, psychology and law congress at the Carlton Hotel tomorrow.

"I welcome discussion on this legislation which is now enacted, as balancing the rights of an individual before the courts with the safety of the community is an important facet of our judicial system and should continuously be debated," said Minister Toyne.

The recent reforms were long overdue for the Territory and have rectified the previous inadequacies that saw serious offenders released into the community because of their inability to stand trial.

The operations of the new Insanity and Fitness to plead provisions of the Territory’s Criminal Code will be discussed along with other aspects of mental competence and forensic considerations particular to the Northern Territory.

Leading Territory legal and psychiatry professionals will be presenting to the conference including Sue Oliver, a senior lawyer with the Department of Justice; Peter Mals, Manager of the Mental Health Forensic Team at the Top End Mental Health Service, Department of Health and Community Services; and Jane Vadiveloo, Manager Social Services at Tangentyere Council, Alice Springs.

The Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, Psychology and Law Congress runs over four days, finishing on Sunday 14 July, with the theme this year - Changing Climates: Future Priorities in Psychiatry, Psychology and Law.

The keynote Speaker, Dr Sheilagh Hodgins PhD, is Professor of the Department of Psychology at the University of Montreal, Canada. Professor Hodgins is an internationally regarded researcher and speaker with broad interests in the links between major mental disorders, criminality and violent behaviour.