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Government to spend $100 Million on Convention Centre as part of Darwin City Waterfront Project

A world-class convention and exhibition centre will be the foundation project in the $600 million Darwin City Waterfront development announced today.

Chief Minister Clare Martin said the Government would contribute $100 million to build the centre and meet other infrastructure costs associated with the city waterfront development, with construction to begin within 18 months.

Ms Martin said the multi-purpose facility would be designed to attract further business tourism to the Top End.

She said the city waterfront was the preferred location for such a facility as recommended by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in its report to Government.

"The consultants recommended the city waterfront as having outstanding potential for the location of a convention centre," Ms Martin said.

"They believed other proposals such as the Darwin Entertainment Centre/Holiday Inn site had major shortcomings that would not meet the market requirements.

"In particular, PriceWaterhouseCoopers warned against a piecemeal approach, and recommended the city waterfront as the preferred location."

The proposed convention and exhibition centre will incorporate a 1500-seat convention centre, with 4000 square metres of exhibition space and parking. The total footprint of a convention and exhibition centre would be about 10,000 square metres.

Ms Martin said that at present, Darwin missed many large meetings, concerts, exhibitions and banquets because it did not have an indoor facility large enough to cater for them.

The maximum capacity of current CBD indoor venues is 1000, while Marrara Indoor Stadium can accommodate 2000 but is outside the CBD. Indoor banqueting is limited to 350 to 400 people, there is no dedicated exhibition space, and limited 'break out' space for conventions.

"Conferences and business tourism are high yield segments of the tourism industry," she said.

"The benefits of convention centres are that they attract large numbers of business tourists, with major multiplier effects for hotels, restaurants, and tourism generally.

"A Darwin convention centre, located so close to Asia, should also attract more international meetings to Darwin."

In addition, a convention and exhibition centre will create community infrastructure for local people - providing a community asset that could be used for the Northern Territory Expo and major functions.

It is estimated that a convention centre would lead to:

- an estimated $190 million increase in tourism expenditure over 20 years
- economic benefits, including multiplier effects
a stimulus to the CBD by bringing people into the city, with a link proposed to connect the precinct with Smith Street and the Esplanade and complementary development.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers assessed nine sites in the Darwin area and ranked them against criteria:

- size of the site
- capacity for car parking of 800 to 1000 spaces and space for semi-trailers to unload
- potential for 'theming'
- marketability, including attractiveness for events and interface with the waterfront
- 'walkability' to mall
- proximity to CBD
- 'walkability' to hotel precinct
- compatibility of land use and image
- catalyst for redevelopment
- minimal traffic impact
- complementary uses
- servicing of the site
- visitor amenity, including safety and noise

The nine sites assessed were:

- MGM Grand Hotel Casino
- Old Hospital site on Lambell Terrace
- Car park in Cavenagh Street
- Old Primary School in Woods Street
- Wharf precinct in Kitchener Drive
- Carlton Hotel/Holiday Inn site
- Parliament House in Herbert Street
- Chan Centre in Smith Street
- Admiralty on the Esplanade.

Three other sites were suggested during the consultation period by PriceWaterhouseCoopers but eliminated as unsuitable:

- Mitchell-Daly Street (too small at 0.6 hectares)
- Race Course (outside the CBD, considered a fundamental requirement)
- Golf Course

The waterfront area was given the highest ranking of all the sites.

Ms Martin said the Darwin Convention and Exhibition Centre (DCEC) would complement the Alice Springs facility and establish the Northern Territory as a quality destination for a wide range of events, both nationally and internationally.

She said the Darwin City Council preferred site at the Holiday Inn/Darwin Entertainment Centre was found by PriceWaterhouseCoopers to be unsuitable because:

- it is too small
- if an adjoining site were added, the facility would largely be underground
- cost
- totally unsuitable for traffic access
- inaccessible for exhibitions and associated heavy traffic

The Government will work with the Darwin City Council to guarantee the future of the Darwin Entertainment Centre and ensure the waterfront
redevelopment complements the remainder of the Darwin CBD.

For further information, contact Craig Rowston on 0401 119777