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**TERRITORY BUSINESSES LEAD THE NATION**

The *Sensis Business Index* results released today show Northern Territory small and medium businesses are setting the pace for the rest of the country with a six and half year high in business confidence, Business Minister Paul Henderson said.

“Northern Territory small businesses are really raising the bar for businesses around the country at the moment, returning the highest readings in all economic indicators except prices,” he said.

“The Territory’s construction industry is flat out, tourists are continuing to roll in, new projects in the mining, defence and gas sectors are opening up new opportunities.

“Territory business confidence in future prospects is up seven points to 73 per cent – a six and half year high and well above the national average of 55 per cent.

“Small businesses increased sales by 22 points to 50 per cent, outstripping the expected net balance of 44 per cent.

“Capital expenditure also increased, up 12 points to 20 per cent.

“Employment was up one point to 9 per cent, well above the national average of 1 per cent and reflecting the fall in the Territory’s unemployment rate recorded by the ABS.

“The Martin Government will continue to deliver initiatives to drive economic growth in the Territory, such as the record tax cuts that have made the Territory the lowest taxing jurisdiction for small business in the country.

“We know the skills shortage continues to be the main issue for Territory business, and building the Territory’s skills base is a priority.

“The Government will continue to support Territorians to get in to traineeships and offer employers incentives and support to take trainees on, and will continue to target interstate and overseas skilled workers to live, work and invest in the Territory.

“There is always more to be done and the Martin Government will continue to back small business to keep the Territory moving ahead.”

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