Chief Minister Paul Henderson today announced major reforms to the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory.

The NT Government today received and made public the report produced by the Board of Inquiry into the NT’s Child Protection System called by the Northern Territory Government.

As a result of the Government’s initial response to the Inquiry, major reform and restructuring will begin immediately in six key reform areas, backed by a $130 million additional funding injection over five years.

The reforms will be overseen by a cross-agency Child Protection Reform Steering Committee.

The Reform Committee will oversee the implementation process of the most urgent recommendations, and begin further assessment in detail of the report’s 147 recommendations.

The Department of Health and Families will be divided into two agencies, with a new department dedicated to child safety and wellbeing, reporting directly to the Minister through its own Chief Executive.

Ten interstate and overseas experienced child protection workers will begin immediately to tackle the current backlog of cases – a Blitz that is beginning as a matter or urgency.

An additional 42 professional child protection workers will also be recruited on top of the 76 frontline and support workers announced earlier this year in the NT Government’s $14.7 million child protection worker drive.

The Inquiry was announced by the Government on 11 November 2009 and conducted by three independent Board Members, Dr Howard Bath, Professor Muriel Bamblett and Dr Rob Roseby.

“The Government welcomes the Board’s findings and 147 recommendations, and acknowledges that significant changes are required to address the needs of children in the Territory’s child protection system,” Mr Henderson said.

“Children are the most vulnerable people in our society. All children are entitled to live safely and in circumstances that enable them to thrive - physically, intellectually and emotionally.
“This Government sought recommendations on ways to strengthen our system, and in the last year the Board of Inquiry has conducted a thorough investigation, receiving around 150 written submissions from organisations and individuals with an interest in the child protection system and the wellbeing of children.

“The report’s recommendations are a roadmap for the future of child protection in the Northern Territory.

“The matters brought to the Board’s attention highlight the need for a comprehensive rethinking of the way that Government, in partnership with NGOs, peak bodies and the broader community, addresses child protection.”

In addition to the immediate reforms, Mr Henderson announced the formation of a peak Indigenous non-Government body to support the delivery of culturally appropriate child safety and family support services, as well as the formation of two Indigenous childcare agencies as recommended by the Inquiry.

“Working in partnership with our Indigenous communities is absolutely paramount in making inroads into child protection. We will work with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to deliver the most appropriate services possible,” Mr Henderson said.

“We will also work with the non-government sector to establish a dual pathway for referral and assessments so that lower risk reports can be made to local non-Government service providers.

“This will refocus the system towards early intervention and greater support to the safety of children and families in need.

“This will be a challenging and far-reaching process, but the NT Government is absolutely committed to making real changes for the wellbeing of Territory children and families.

“I’d like to thank the three members of the Board for their commitment and time to the Inquiry.”

Contact: Maria Billias 0401 119 746
The Northern Territory Government will be allocating $130 million over 5 years to deliver the reform in the child protection services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>A dedicated child safety agency</td>
<td>The Northern Territory Government will establish a stand-alone agency focused upon child wellbeing and safety and supporting families in need. The new agency will have a CEO, dedicated budget and will house the interagency reform team that will implement the Government’s response to the recommendations of the Board of Inquiry.</td>
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<td>Immediate backlog reduction</td>
<td>The secondment of child protection workers from interstate and New Zealand dedicated towards ensuring each and every child protection notification is appropriately assessed and investigated in a timely way.</td>
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<td>42 additional child protection workers across the Northern Territory</td>
<td>Based on nationally benchmarked caseload and workload ratios the NTG will inject immediate funding to address chronic staff shortages and staff turnover that impacts upon continuity of care. The 42 FTE are in addition to the 76 frontline and support positions announced in the 2010/11 budget. The Government also commits to an extensive and ongoing regime of staff training and development will be provided in a systematic way in order to maximise outcomes.</td>
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<td>Engagement of Aboriginal Services</td>
<td>The Northern Territory will work with SNAICC and AMSANT to establish an Aboriginal Peak body to support the development of other Aboriginal agencies required to deliver culturally appropriate child safety and well being as well as family support services. The Northern Territory will also establish two Aboriginal Child Care Agency services based in Darwin and Alice Springs.</td>
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<td>NGO partnership - establish dual pathway referral and assessments</td>
<td>Working with the NGO sector, we will provide increased funding to expand family support services. We will also trial a non-Government based intake service based in the regions will allow diversion of notifications that require family support.</td>
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<td>Accountability to the Community</td>
<td>The Government will establish an external Steering Committee, which will monitor progress of the Government’s response.</td>
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