29th April 2003
Police to have powers to fight terrorism

Parliament is expected to pass the Government’s counter-terrorism legislation in Alice Springs this afternoon, giving Northern Territory Police the powers needed to deal with a terrorism incident or threat.

Police Minister Paul Henderson said the new powers, while extraordinary, were necessary in the current world climate.

"The tragedy in Bali last October showed us terrorism can happen anywhere, and this Government wants to make sure as much as possible has been done to protect Territorians from this threat," said Mr Henderson.

"The Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Bill 2003 will enable police to act quickly and effectively to protect our community in the unlikely event of a terrorist act or threat occurring here."

Under the new legislation, if credible information of a terrorist threat or incident was uncovered, the Police Commissioner, with the endorsement of the Police Minister, could activate special search powers in relation to a ‘target vehicle’, ‘target person’ or ‘target area’

Officers could also use a premise for surveillance to protect people’s health or safety, can detain people for decontamination for up to 48 hours if a terrorist incident had occurred, and could demand the disclosure and proof of identity.

Mr Henderson said that in addition to the new legislation, the Government was also carrying out a range of other counter-terrorism activities, including

- Establishment of a Northern Territory Chemical, Biological and Radiological Working Group involving emergency response agencies
- Participation in regular security intelligence change meetings with the Australian Federal Police, ASIO, Australian Defence Force and Australian Customs Service
- Development of an interim Protective Security Manual for Government Agencies

"The Government will continue to review, develop and implement counter-terrorism measures to ensure that in the unlikely event of a terrorist incident threat occurring in the Territory, we are prepared," said Mr Henderson.