A three-year PhD scholarship is to be funded by the Department of Community Development Sport and Cultural Development to explore ways in which regional development can be defined and evaluated, Regional Development Minister John Ah Kit announced today.

“As research at Thamarrurr has shown us, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of fundamental baseline data, and the ways in which different data sets are gathered and interpreted,” said Mr Ah Kit.

“This is no mere academic problem, but is critical to our understanding of where we are at in terms of the problems of regional development, and how we evaluate the effects of interventions and investments by government and private enterprise.

“As the Darwin Regional Development Board’s Chairman Duncan Beggs recently pointed out, accurate and comprehensive baseline data is a critical component of regional development planning.

“We really need far more comprehensive information on so many issues vital to moving the Territory ahead.

“The aim of the research we are funding in partnership with the Charles Darwin University (CDU) is to draw on international and Australian regional development material as part of an effort to draw various data sets together and to effectively make use of such information.”

The PhD student will be required to work on three interrelated elements:

- a description and analysis of how regionally oriented social and economic statistics are collected, shared across agencies, managed and maintained;
- The identification and analysis of those statistics which are presently considered to be meaningful and practically useful on-going indicators of regional development; and
- a description and analysis of the systems and processes by which such indicators can be most effectively incorporated into and used in regional policy deliberations and evaluation exercises.

The research would complement work being carried out by the Menzies School of Health Research and that of the Northern Territory Government’s Statistical Liaison Committee, and is supported by the departments of Treasury and Chief Minister.

“The scholarship, of $25,000 a year is likely to lead to an expansion of research and development in this vital area in the Territory, with ramifications for regional developmental work elsewhere in Australia,” said Mr Ah Kit.

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