The 2003-04 Budget will include an extra $1.3 million for new initiatives aimed at improving conditions for the 1700 public sector employees living and working in remote communities, including teachers and health staff, Employment, Education and Training Minister Syd Stirling announced today.

The initiatives include:

- around $1 million to improve remote area employees’ access to skills development opportunities;
- greater flexibility for employees in accessing airfares and travel from remote localities;
- expanding freight allowances to include all household items;
- increasing accommodation allowances by 20% to enable employees greater accommodation choices when travelling to urban centres for rest and recreation; and
- reviewing the current classification system for determining which areas are defined as remote localities.

"This is part of the Government’s commitment to improving the working and living conditions for staff and their families in remote and rural areas. By improving their conditions, not only are we further developing the NT Public Service as an attractive employer, it will also assist us to attract and retain quality staff in remote communities," Mr Stirling said.

The initiatives are the result of a comprehensive review of NT Public Sector Remote Locality Working Conditions. Forty-one separate workplaces throughout the NT were visited as part of the review.

Mr Stirling said an inter-agency working group had developed a draft NTPS Remote Workforce Development Strategy which looks at ways to enhance remote employees access to skills development.

"Government’s commitment of $1 million to this strategy will help to achieve equal access to development opportunities for all NTPS employees, remote and urban," he said.

"A regular newsletter has also been introduced for remote staff to keep them informed of progress in implementing the review and of new developments in employment arrangements.

"If we are to improve outcomes in remote areas, it is crucial that we strengthen the links between improved remote service delivery and
workforce development."