Chief Minister Clare Martin today announced the Northern Territory Government had received advice from the Solicitor General Tom Pauling QC that a recent High Court decision has the effect of 50 of the Northern Territory parks being invalidly declared.

Mr Pauling QC has advised the Government that as a result of the recent High Court decision in the Ward case, Territory parks and reserves declared by the previous Government between 1978 and 1998 are now in legal limbo.

The legal advice says that some of these parks are now subject to claim under the land rights act, or native title compensation claims.

Ms Martin said the Federal Government, the Northern and Central Land Councils, the Opposition and other relevant stakeholders had been briefed on the legal advice.

At the briefing the Government outlined its preferred approach is to work these issues through by negotiation rather than through the Courts and apply the following principles:

- Resolution by negotiation rather than through the Courts.
- Territory parks and reserves will remain accessible to all Territorians and visitors on a no-fee no-permit basis.
- Business as usual in parks while negotiations are completed.
- Where title changes it is conditional on being leased back to the Government for use as parks, and subject to joint management arrangements.
- Current mining and exploration leases, and current tourism operator concessions are guaranteed.

"We can ensure certainty of tenure in the parks either by negotiation or by litigation, but the best course is the first path because we don't want to spend decades in the courts, and between $50 and $100 million in hard earned Territory revenue. "This money could be better spent on more nurses, teachers, or police resources," said Ms Martin.

The Chief Minister said 39 of the existing parks and reserves will be declared under section 12 of the amended Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, to ensure management plans and by-laws have full statutory effect.

"We are confident we can achieve a lasting solution which benefits all who have interest in the Territory's parks and reserves," said Ms Martin.