Ethnic Affairs Minister Kon Vatskalis last night extended a formal invitation to the Philippines Sports Commission for athletes to participate in Arafura Games 2005.

The invitation was presented at a function at "The Library", Makati City, Manila, which was also attended by the Australian Ambassador Ruth Pearce and Philippines Sports Commission Commissioner William I Ramirez.

“While the Arafura Games 2003 were sadly cancelled due to SARS related issues, the Northern Territory Government has remained committed to providing this fantastic celebration of sport and cultural exchange within our region,” Mr Vatskalis said.

“In fact Darwin has a large Filipino community who always look forward to welcoming and supporting teams from the Philippines during the Arafura Games.”

Athletes from the Philippines have attended every Arafura Games since their inception in 1991. Prior to the cancellation of Arafura Games 2003, over 300 entries from the Philippines had been received by Games organisers.

Arafura Games 2001 attracted over 5000 participants from 26 countries, who competed in 30 sports.

“Arafura Games 2005 has three new sports being Weightlifting, Taekwondo and Futsal,” Mr Vatskalis said.

“The Games are also expecting participation from new countries including South Korea, India and Italy.”

Mr Vatskalis said that the Philippines most successful campaign - which resulted in 74 medals – was in 1999.

“As a part of Arafura Games 2005 events for the differently abled will be included in Swimming, Athletics and Tennis,” he said.

“These events will include the prestigious 10km wheelchair race that is run through the streets of Darwin's Central Business District.”

For more information on the Arafura Games please visit www.arafuragames.nt.gov.au.