Information sessions will be held around the Territory over the next fortnight to help incorporated associations to find out how the new Associations Act will help them.

The new Associations Act which will come into force next month will modernise the current out-dated laws and provide increased protection and accountability mechanisms for incorporated associations.

Dr Toyne said the reform was well overdue, highlighted by the number of associations that have folded or sought assistance in recent times due to financial difficulties.

“The reforms are significant and will be supported by a comprehensive education campaign across the Territory to assist associations to understand and operate under the new updated system.

“The aim of the reform has been to modernise and provide a proper legal and reporting framework that would support the operation of associations as much as possible.

“An education and support program will be rolled-out across the Territory, including to remote areas to support the number of associations operating in remote and Aboriginal communities.

“The focus of education sessions will be on responsible management and committee member obligations under the reformed system.

“The Government has recognised the need to modernise current law in this area that has proven to be outdated, something highlighted as far back as 1997 but not acted upon by the CLP,” he said.

Dr Toyne said the apparent current lack of governance and accountability of some associations, which has concerned Government, will be addressed in these reforms.

“The changes being introduced aim to protect club members and the community by toughening rules and penalties for larger associations with high turnover and, at the same time, easing the reporting burden on smaller, community organisations.”

“It is an important and welcome reform for the 1700 incorporated associations operating around the Territory, some of those with assets and annual turnover measured in the millions of dollars,” Dr Toyne said.

The amendments will:

- strengthen accounting and auditing provisions
• give strong investigation and enforcement powers to the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs

• implement modern insolvency provisions

The changes include checks and balances and tiered structures to recognise the different scale of associations so smaller bodies will not be overburdened by regulation.

For example, in the area of auditing financial records, smaller associations with low turnover can be audited by a person who is not a member of the association, whereas there will be more stringent requirements for larger associations with significant turnovers.

Further, the amendments will permit the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs to appoint a statutory manager to conduct the affairs of an association if:

• the number of members falls below five

• if the incorporation was obtained by fraud

• if the association exists for an illegal purpose

• if the association has wilfully contravened the Act or their own constitution, or

• if following an investigation it is deemed necessary in the interests of creditors or the public.

Extensive consultation was undertaken around the Territory with a number of submissions made to Government on the proposed amendments.

Information Sessions:

• Katherine 15 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Knotts Crossing Resort

• Tennant Creek 16 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Bluestone Motor Inn

• Alice Springs 17 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Mercure Inn Diplomat (Noonies Room)

• Yulara 18 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Ayers Rock Resort (Breakout Room)

• Nhulunbuy 22 March 2004 4.30-5.30 Arnhem Club

• Darwin 23 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Novotel Atrium (Brolga Room)

• Darwin 24 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Casuarina Club

• Palmerston 25 March 2004 5.30-6.30 Palmerston Sports Club (The Gunn Room)