The NT Government continues to drive growth in tourism with Chief Minister and Tourism Minister, Clare Martin, announcing that $15 million will be spent over the next three years to complete the sealing of the Litchfield Loop Road, with $4.5 million allocated in the 2004/05 budget for Stage 1.

“This $15 million project will encourage tourism related investment in the Top End, create jobs in road construction and see better and safer access to Litchfield Park,” she said.

“The funding will seal approximately 44 kilometres between Cox Peninsula road and Wangi Falls, creating better access and a more enjoyable experience for tourists and locals – it will be an important piece of tourism infrastructure and a job creating asset for years to come.”

Stage 1 will see approximately 15 kilometres sealed (9km from Cox Peninsula end including Parkinson's Pass and 6km from existing sealed section near Wangi Falls). Stage 1 will go to tender early 2005 with a contract expected to be in place by March and work completed by the end of 2005. Other sections will follow with the Finniss River Bridge stretch, the last section to be completed.

Ms Martin said many NT businesses and organisations, particularly in the Litchfield area such as the Wildlife Park, would benefit from increased traffic and the extended time spent in the area by tourists.

“This will be the realisation of tourist potential for the primary tourist/recreation destination in the Darwin region - especially for caravans, buses or hire cars not permitted on unsealed roads.

“It will support park development and environmentally sensitive tourist accommodation facilities by providing year round, integrated access to Litchfield Park (Wangi, Cascade and Florence Falls and Buley Rock Hole), Berry Springs and the Territory Wildlife Park.”

Possible private ventures that could be assisted by this sealing include a wilderness resort and the relocation/redevelopment of Wangi Falls Kiosk to include a gallery, increased outdoor seating area and interpretative centre.

In 2003, an average of 320 vehicles per day travelled to and from Litchfield Park on sealed roads through Batchelor, peaking in July with 590 vehicles per day. An average of 90 vehicles travelled through the unsealed section, peaking in July with 160 vehicles per day.

“Once the Litchfield Loop is fully sealed, more vehicles will travel through the park rather than make a return trip through Batchelor,” she said.

“Today's tourism budget announcement follows the $38 million to seal Meerenie Loop Road, $500,000 for headworks at the Katherine Cultural precinct and $500,000 for fishing infrastructure.”