Chief Minister Clare Martin and the Northern Territory Minister for Tourism, Dr Chris Burns, have today welcomed into Alice Springs the inaugural Virgin Blue flight from Sydney.

Greeting the flight on its arrival, Ms Martin said that she was delighted that Virgin Blue had decided to increase its services into the Northern Territory with the introduction of the daily service from Sydney into Central Australia.

"The tourism industry in Central Australia will benefit from an increase in visitors using this new route, and more visitors means more jobs for Territorians," she said.

The Minister for Tourism, Dr Chris Burns, who was one of the passengers on the first flight, said that he was impressed by the level of service offered by Virgin and was confident that the new route would prove to be commercially sustainable.

"I commend Virgin on its decision – I believe it will be beneficial for the company itself, as well as visitors and business travellers," he said.

"I also congratulate NT Airports, the Aviation Development Director Mr Peter Roberts, the NT Tourist Commission and the local Alice Springs community for their hard work in developing the business case that has brought this new service.

Ms Martin and Dr Burns said that the expanded capacity into Alice Springs, together with increased capacity into the Territory offered by Qantas and a new Virgin Blue service from Sydney to Darwin starting later in June, is a clear vote of confidence in the Territory’s travel market.

"Our tourism industry is facing a number of challenges at the moment, but these new flights will help to create new opportunities to attract tourists from throughout Australia," Dr Burns said.