10 March 2004
Government committed to better NT Parks with continued good public access

Parks and Wildlife Minister, Chris Burns, today assured Territorians that negotiations over NT Parks and Reserves are based around the core principle that they will remain accessible to all visitors on a no entry fee, no entry permit basis.

“We want the NT parks estate to be expanded with more parks made accessible to the general public and facilities improved in Territory Parks,” he said.

“The Parks and Reserves legislation will help us move towards establishing a world class system of parks and reserves while resolving outstanding land and native title claims over national parks.

“It is business as usual in our parks during negotiations and the Opposition Leader's latest attempt to spread incorrect information, sadly, is further proof of an inability to understand the issues.

“The situation where a Kakadu Swimming spot was closed occurred in a Commonwealth Park and it's mischievous to try and use this to confuse sensitive negotiations over the Territory's parks.”

Mr Burns said that the 2002 High Court decision in Ward presented the possibility of great uncertainty for the future of the Territory's parks estate and that the new legislation turns that uncertainty into opportunity.

“The purpose of the Bill is for the Territory to end up with a larger, better managed parks estate that utilises our natural and cultural heritages,” he said.

“Rather than spend millions in court battles we want to effectively work through land and native title claims on NT national parks through joint management with Aboriginal traditional owners.

“It is also important for the economic future of Indigenous Territorians, who are among the most disadvantaged people in our society.”

The core principles of the Bill, laid down by government and agreed by the Land Councils, include:

- development of a parks master plan to expand and more effectively manage the parks estate;
- current mining and exploration leases and applications and tourism operator concessions are guaranteed;
- all NT Parks and Reserves will remain accessible to all visitors on a no-fee no-permit basis;
● business as usual in parks until negotiations are completed; and

● where title changes occur they will be conditional on the land being leased back to the NT subject to joint management under NT legislation.