Chief Minister Clare Martin today acted to bring legal certainty to 38 Territory Parks and Reserves by re-declaring them under the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act.

"In re-declaring these Parks and Reserves, we have acted to clear an anomaly brought to our attention in a recent High Court case," Ms Martin said.

"We want this to be a first step in establishing the best parks in Australia, attracting more international and domestic tourists, and offering them a more rewarding experience."

The Solicitor-General has advised the Government that as a result of the August 8 High Court decision in the Ward case, around 50 Territory parks and reserves declared by the previous Government between 1978 and 1998 were potentially invalid.

The legal advice says that some of these parks could be subject to claims under the land rights act, or open to native title compensation claims.

"My Government has decided to negotiate with the Aboriginal Land councils, rather than fighting the claims in the courts which could cost up to $100 million, and take years," Ms Martin said.

"This is the best way of developing joint management plans that really work for the Territory.

"The Government has deliberately sought a consensus approach to establish the certainty required to ensure all Territorians continue to have access to our parks.

"As a first step we had to re-declare some of the parks to confirm application of the by-laws and the ability to manage parks and reserves. They will now have the full protection of the Territory’s Parks legislation.

"This was done this morning when the Administrator, John Anichtomatis, signed new declarations.

"The next step will be negotiations with relevant stakeholders, within an agreed framework based on some core principles including:

- Resolution by negotiation rather than through the Courts.
- Territory parks and reserves will remain accessible to all Territorians and visitors on a no-fee no-permit basis.
- Business as usual in parks while negotiations are completed.
- Where title changes it is conditional on being leased back to the Government for use as parks, and subject to joint management arrangements.
- Current mining and exploration leases, and current tourism operator concessions are guaranteed.

"This Government is determined to take this opportunity to improve cultural and indigenous tourism, provide better park facilities, and generate greater employment opportunities for Territorians.

"We are also in discussion with the Federal Government over how better to integrate
management of parks between the various levels of Government.

"In this way we hope to turn a legal difficulty into an opportunity to build a national park system of international repute."