The Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries Peter Toyne today announced $250,000 government funding to ensure the Territory’s fisheries meet new national guidelines for export by December 2003.

Dr Toyne said the new guidelines, introduced under the Commonwealth Government’s Oceans Policy, were designed to ensure the ecological sustainability of the nation’s fish resources.

"Fisheries that are not deemed by the commonwealth to be ecologically sustainable will not be able to export," he said.

"Prior to 2000, when these guidelines were released, most commercial fish species were exempt from export certification because they were subject to sustainability assessment through state or commonwealth fisheries processes.

"The new guidelines increase the standard and breadth of research and management information and actions required for each fishery to export its product."

Dr Toyne said NT fisheries and aquaculture businesses affected by the new guidelines included:

- the Demersal trawl fishery;
- the mud crab fishery;
- the barramundi aquaculture industry;
- the shark fishery;
- the Timor Reef fishery;
- the Spanish Mackerel fishery;
- the Aquarium Fish fishery;
- the Coastal Line fishery;
- the Jellyfish fishery; and,
- the Trepang fishery.

"These businesses currently export around $20 million gross value product, so it is crucial that the government help protect that income for business," he said.

"The Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries sought additional funding for 2001/02 to 2004/5 to enable a team of three, reducing to two staff in 2003/04, to undertake the tasks required to meet the new guidelines.

"At the same time, the NT fishing industry agreed to raise its licence fees by 50 per cent, in anticipation that the NT Government would meet the balance of costs, at least for the initial assessments."

Dr Toyne said the CLP Government had initially allocated $250,000 to the Department for 2001/02, with no allocation for future years.

"However, we now know that subsequent to the allocation being made, the under-treasurer, at the request of the former treasurer, directed that the allocation not be used," he said.

"No reason was given for the decision and the department has been unable to proceed with the work, jeopardising future Territory fish exports."
"The Martin Government has therefore directed that the funding be allocated immediately and we will continue negotiations with the NT Seafood Council to reduce the cost of export certification to government beyond the initial assessments."

Dr Toyne commended the work of DPIF officers who had been redirecting available resources in an attempt to meet the guidelines.

"Without this additional budget, the work would not however have proceeded at a rate to meet the December 2003 deadline," he said.

"This government will continue to examine these important issues and take the necessary actions to protect Territory interests."