An environmental project aimed at reducing the amount of pollutants pumped into Darwin harbour by recycling treated effluent into irrigation was commissioned today.

Minister for Environment and Heritage Dr Chris Burns commended the agencies, prison officers and inmates involved in getting the project up and running.

"The new system will see 165,000 litres of waste produced daily at the prison recycled into a valuable irrigation resource for the tree farm, and at the same time improve the health of Darwin harbour.

"This new system has a further spin-off benefit through the training opportunities for inmates involved in the irrigation, landscaping and maintenance of the farm. Through this project they have learnt skills ranging from driving tractors, landscaping, irrigation techniques and farm maintenance, and will take these skills back to their communities.

"Inmates have contributed significantly to the construction of the system including installation of 4.5km of irrigation and planting of 2500 trees.

"Inmates will continue to maintain the tree farm with the timber to be harvested and replanted over time," Dr Burns said.

The $500,000 project was funded jointly by the Territory Government and Commonwealth Government under the federal Coasts and Clean Seas program, an initiative of the National Heritage Trust.

Corrections and the Department of Justice worked with the Office of Environment and Heritage on environmental requirements and construction of the system.

The project included the construction of a pumping station, a rising main, installation of irrigation and tree planting. Effluent discharge will now be pumped up-slope from the sewerage ponds and gravity fed through an elaborate underground irrigation system to a tree plantation, over an area of 3.5 hectares.

Prior to the new system, effluent was pumped into sewerage treatment ponds and then into the Hudson creek arm of Darwin harbour.

Dr Burns said this project demonstrates the Territory Government’s ongoing commitment to management and protection of Darwin harbour.