The Government will seek tougher penalties for illegal fishing and poaching, Fisheries Minister Dr Chris Burns said today.

"I’m pleased to announce that we are seeking to increase penalties, with serious fishery offenders to face fines of up to $20,000. Adequate deterrents are needed to ensure that the penalties match the seriousness of illegal fishing and the detrimental impact it has on our well managed fisheries".

The proposed penalties will apply to commercial and recreational fishers convicted of an offence under the Fisheries Act.

"Professional operators had raised concerns with me about the actions of a minority who deliberately choose to operate outside the law, place the livelihood of responsible commercial fishers at risk and generally portray the commercial industry in bad light. Repeat offenders face a ban from the fishing industry for up to 5 years," Dr Burns said.

"Our fisheries are in great shape and the envy of Australia. Adequate penalties will ensure that unscrupulous fishers are not tempted to operate outside our well developed fisheries rules and regulations" Dr Burns said.

Independent assessments of the way in which the Northern Territory manages its fisheries have been undertaken, with the Commonwealth Government recently accrediting the sustainability of a range of export fisheries.

The proposed changes will allow Fisheries Officers to serve fishery infringement notices, much the same as on-the-spot fines, for minor offences. Fishery infringement notices will be issued for minor offences rather than overloading the court system. Offenders will have the choice of paying the fine or contesting the matter through the Courts.

I have also asked for a wider review of the penalties for all fisheries offences to be undertaken within the next 12 months with a view to moving to penalty units, so that fines are not eroded over time" Dr Burns said.