As part of its plan to tackle rising public liability costs in the Territory, Chief Minister and Treasurer, Clare Martin, today detailed a package of Government measures.

Heading the list is law reform with Government negotiating with Trowbridge Consulting (the national public liability consultants) to assist in developing appropriate NT laws and legal practice reform, including:

- Tort Law Reforms – legislating to cap thresholds for general damages and placing caps on loss of future earning capacity (caps will not apply to medical expense).
- Discount rate for loss of earnings damages to be set at 5%.
- Prohibit claims arising from criminal activity and taking into account recreational drug use (including alcohol) in compensation payouts.
- Place limits on circumstances, and amount, of damages allocated to family careers.
- Introduction of compulsory conferencing or mediation prior to the commencement of court proceedings.

"The Government is aware that public liability has impacted on many organisations and we are taking this action in order to develop real solutions to this problem," Ms Martin said.

"The legislative changes are expected to be introduced in the October sittings."

A raft of other changes committed to by Government include:

- Legislation to exempt volunteers from any threat of public liability action.
- Legislation to implement national solutions for structured settlements.
- Limits on legal advertising.

The Chief Minister also announced that the Northern Territory would join the Queensland Grouping Scheme from 1 September 2002, to provide assistance for not-for-profit and community groups.

"While final negotiations continue, applications to the scheme are expected to be taken from late this month.

"This scheme will give both jurisdictions (QLD/NT) collective power, delivering with it economies of scale and more effective risk assessment and claims management.

"The main advantage for the Territory is that some not-for-profit
organisations - currently unable to get insurance at all - are likely to be covered (eg. equestrian clubs).

"For those that do have cover, the scheme may offer lower premiums."

"This is a long-term and viable option that I’m sure will be warmly welcomed by the community."

Ms Martin said Government had also pledged support for a range of national measures including: ACCC monitoring of insurance market and premiums, examination of law of negligence, changes to the *Trade Practices Act* to allow for self assumption of risk, greater collection and reporting of data from insurance companies and benchmarking claims against world standards by December 2002.

"Public Liability is a national problem and therefore requires a national solution.

"With less than 1% of the public liability insurance market we cannot influence premiums the way larger jurisdictions can - that makes it crucial to support these national measures."

Today’s announcements follow measures already undertaken by the Territory Government such as establishing a public liability hotline and web site, risk management seminars and changes to Government procurement contracts.