The Minister for Family and Community Services Marion Scrymgour today slammed the Commonwealth Government for walking away from homeless people in the Northern Territory.

“The Commonwealth today effectively ripped up the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) agreement that has been in effect for 20 years” said Ms Scrymgour.

The SAAP program is a joint Commonwealth/States funding program that provides services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Community groups in the Northern Territory such as NTCOSS have argued that the SAAP program needs to be increased by at least 25% if it is to properly address homelessness in the Northern Territory.

The Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Kay Patterson, has today announced that the Commonwealth will not be increasing its funding but has asked the Northern Territory Government to increase its funding.

“What the Commonwealth has announced today is that they are cutting their funding share and has asked the Northern Territory Government to plug the hole they are leaving” said Ms Scrymgour.

“The Commonwealth has indicated that their reduced funding package is conditional on the Northern Territory covering for them”

The Northern Territory Government has been told that we must immediately increase its funding by nearly $1 million per year if the program is to continue.

Since coming to Government the Northern Territory has poured money into Family and Community Services. An extra $53 million is being spent this financial year compared with only three years ago.

“We are rebuilding vital Community Services in the Northern Territory but our task is becoming increasing difficult as the Commonwealth Government keeps reducing their share” said Ms Scrymgour.