Territory jails are almost at maximum capacity, peaking last night at 93% full, and the average sentence length for property offenders has jumped 49% last year compared to the last year of the CLP government.

Minister for Justice Dr Peter Toyne said a comparison of average sentencing terms in the last year of the CLP government against the past year of the Martin government, has revealed a 13% increase in average sentence length for all sentences, and a huge 49% jump in average sentence length for property offenders.

In the 2000-01 year, (the last year of the CLP government) the average sentence length for all prisoners was 296 days, increasing to 333 days in 2001/02 (the first year of the Martin Government), a 13% jump.

In 2000-01 the average sentence length for property offences (excluding robbery and fraud) was 166 days, increasing to 247 days in 2001/02, a 49% jump.

"The increase in our jail population and increase in punishment should send a clear message that if you do the crime you’ll do the time – and a longer time."

Figures obtained from the Northern Territory Correctional Services Monthly Daily Average Report show the monthly daily average number of prisoners has increased by 4% over the past 12 months of the Martin Government, compared to the last 12 months of the CLP Government.

Dr Toyne said the monthly daily average of adult prisoners has jumped by 25 prisoners per day since the change of Government and the current prison population is at a five-year high.

"This increase in the number of prisoners in our jails is significant, particularly after the establishment of the Fines Recovery Unit which resulted in a near 100% reduction in fine defaulters going to jail, along with a reduction in the number of Indonesians held for fishing and people smuggling offences on behalf of the Commonwealth Government.

"What the increases in the jail population tell us is our new targeted strategies to attack crime are having an impact and serious criminals are going to jail."

"Targeted punishment will ensure that serious criminals serve time in gaol, and we will consider diversion strategies where appropriate for offenders convicted of minor offences, like we have done for fine defaulters," Dr Toyne said.

There are currently 747 adult prisoners in Territory jails with the capacity...
capped at 800 prisoners.

As at today Territory prisons are at 93% capacity Darwin prison at 96% capacity with 383 prisoners in a 400 number facility, and Alice Springs prison is at 91% capacity with 364 prisoners in a 400 number facility.

Dr Toyne said to manage the jail population, prison authorities are diligently applying the classification and security assessment process to grade prisoners in suitable classifications, and transferring prisoners between facilities to maintain operational balance.