A package of reforms that introduces some of the toughest penalties in the country for sexual offences against children, and law reform addressing current inequity under the law for gay Territorians, will be debated in Parliament tomorrow.

Attorney General Dr Toyné said these reforms have been under discussion for the past 18 months and the Government’s proposals contain two fundamentally important aspects: ensuring all members of a community get a fair go and stronger protections for our children against sexual abuse.

"Homosexuality was legalised in the Territory 19 years ago, and in 1992 some laws were changed to give gay and lesbian Territorians legal equality when the previous government introduced anti-discrimination legislation.

The proposals to go before Parliament continues the process to cover new things such as superannuation, wills and other areas of life. The principle behind this change is to provide and impose on gay and lesbian people the same rights and responsibilities that as others in our community have.

The package contains a measure that makes the age of consent 16 years for all young people. Previously there was no age of consent for boys at all, except for homosexual sex.

Speaking as a former school principal and person committed to fighting adults who abuse the trust of children Dr Toyné said he was pleased that a key part the proposals boost the penalties for people who prey on our children.

"The current laws protecting our children from sexual offenders are weak and out of date. Over 20 years old, the current laws are too soft and inequitable with different penalties for sexually abusing girls to sexually abusing boys.

"This package of reforms sees tough new law to prosecute paedophiles and long jail sentences for these types of criminals, including a doubling of current jail sentences in some offences to give the most protection possible to Territory children," Dr Toyné said.

The new child sex offender laws are among the toughest in the country and include two new penalties:

1. **Aggravated sexual offence targeting predatory sexual offenders.** Including unlawful sexual offences committed against a child where the offender was in a position of authority, such as a teacher or carer or the victim was made vulnerable through the use of drugs or alcohol.

2. **A new offence to protect 16 and 17 year olds from predatory adults** - because they are not protected under current laws.

"The Government supports the package because it introduces the toughest
penalties in Australia for sex offences against children, including a new offence protecting 16 and 17 year olds, and addresses current inequity for gay Territorians.

"We understand there are a range of views in the community on the age of consent and respect those views, and understand that some CLP members also support the reform to the age of consent.

"However we believe the package offers more protection for young people from paedophiles and delivers equality under the law for all Territorians"

The Law Reform (Gender, Sexuality and De Facto Relationships) Bill will be debated in Parliament tomorrow.