The Northern Territory will this week play a leading role in a major national simulation of a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Outbreak, Minister for Primary Industries Paul Henderson announced today.

"An outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Australia would have a devastating effect on trade and the national economy – with the Territory cattle industry alone worth around $190 million," Mr Henderson said.

"Research has shown that a major outbreak of FMD could cost Australia over $9 billion in lost export earnings, and between $30 million and $450 million to clean up and control."

Mr Henderson said the operation, called Exercise Minotaur, is one of the largest and most complex of its kind ever taken in Australia.

"The exercise will test the response of officers from my Department should such an outbreak occur in Australia.

"Although Australia has been free of FMD since 1872, Exercise Minotaur is an opportunity to identify where our preparedness can be improved, and will be an important training tool for staff who may have to deal with the real thing.

"It will also test the capacity of Government to work with industry to manage and contain a major disease outbreak, such as the FMD outbreak experienced in the United Kingdom in 2001."

During the exercise, three States or Territories in Australia will have a hypothetical outbreak and will need to respond at a decision-making level, including activating Local Disease Control centres and State Disease Control Headquarters.

Exercise Minotaur will be held until Friday this week, and will be a desktop activity. There will not be actual field operations. The exercise is named after the beast in Greek mythology which inhabited the labyrinth.