A 20-year population strategy being developed by the NT Government aims to address the slow growth in the Territory’s population.

Minister for Business, Industry and Resource Development Paul Henderson said the Territory’s growth rate had been slowing since the mid-1990s and the plan – a first for the Territory – would develop solutions to the problem.

While the population increased in 2001 by 0.7 per cent to 199,868 persons, the Government was concerned that the rate had dropped below the national figure for the last nine months of the year.

The Territory actually recorded a 0.2 per cent decline in its population growth rate in the December 2001 quarter. This was largely due to national and international circumstances outside the Territory’s control, and it is expected that the turnaround in the local economy will see the figures return into positive territory in 2002.

The ABS figures for the December 2001 quarter also showed that nationally the population increased 1.3 per cent to an estimated 19.6 million people over the year.

Mr Henderson said the Population Policy, which would be released for public comment later in the year, would look at ways of retaining and attracting more people to the Territory.

"In order to build the Territory economically, there is a need for the establishment of an integrated population plan covering the next 20 years.

"Such a policy would enable us to plan for future infrastructure needs and services necessary to meet the needs of the growing community, and help private businesses plan for future growth."