The Northern Territory Government has signed an agreement with the Australian Cricket Board that will see the Territory host a five-year program of international cricket from next year.

Chief Minister Clare Martin said that after months of negotiation, the Government has secured an agreement for Darwin's Marrara Oval to host a test match and a one-day international against Bangladesh in 2003 and matches involving other sides until 2007.

Ms Martin said the Government's $2.5m upgrade of Marrara Oval had sealed the agreement.

"This Government has already committed $1.2m to upgrade the surface of Marrara Oval and recently approved a further $1.25m to provide for improved player and media facilities, improved lights, a new scoreboard and the hire of a video replay screen," Ms Martin said.

"These upgrades were required for both AFL and international cricket matches and they will ensure the development of Marrara Oval into a top-class, multi-purpose facility that all people of the Territory can enjoy.

"I am delighted that international cricket will be played in the Territory.

"Territorians love their sport and they will flock to see their cricket heroes perform on the local stage.

"This Government has worked tirelessly to secure this exciting announcement. It is vital for us to encourage our young people in particular to reap the benefits of a healthy, sporting lifestyle and the chance to see international cricket will help inspire them to participate in organised sport.

"It is also a vital and ongoing opportunity to promote the unique appeal of the Northern Territory to the rest of Australia and the world.

"I congratulate and thank the ACB, my Sport and Recreation Minister John Ah Kit, local sports officials and everyone who helped make this a reality."

Ms Martin said economic, sporting and social benefits will flow from the announcement.

"It is estimated these games will bring millions of dollars to the Territory each year," Ms Martin said.

"The ACB advises that, based on a study of what happens at other Test matches, we can look forward to large numbers of international and interstate tourists for the matches.

"Additionally, with international and national TV coverage and the development opportunities for the local cricket and other sports, I am proud to say this agreement will have a huge impact on the Territory."

Click Here for a copy of the Australian Cricket Board Media Release