The signing by Sports Minister John Ah Kit of a three-year deal between the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Football League (AFL) was witnessed today by the president of the Western Bulldogs Support Group, Ross McKenzie. The Bulldogs are a key to the deal, with a home game to be played in Darwin each year of the agreement.

"This places the Territory—in both Darwin and Alice Springs—as integral components of the national footy scene.

"It is a recognition of the enormous contribution our players have made over many years to supplying some of the most exciting players in the national competition, and of the faith displayed by the national league in the future of the sport here.

"A bonus in all this is that we have now signed up to AFLNT rep games and Aboriginal All Stars games right through to 2007—something that no other state or territory has achieved," said Mr Ah Kit.

The agreement signed today includes:

- An annual home competition match between the Western Bulldogs and another AFL side at Marrara Oval through to and including the 2006 season. The first of these will be a Bulldogs/Port Adelaide clash on 14 August 2004;

- An annual preseason—Wizard Cup—match at Marrara Oval and Traeger Park in Alice Springs through to and including the 2006 season, with Fremantle and Essendon playing the first game on 20 February in Darwin with a follow up match in Alice Springs the following fortnight;

- A biennial Aboriginal All Stars match at Marrara in 2005 and 2007—cementing the Territory’s hold on this premier event. AFLNT vs interstate sides will alternate, with the Bulldogs night time clash on 5 February 2004;

- Pre season and mid season camps in the Northern Territory which will feature community visits and clinics. So valuable to the future development of the game and our junior players in the Territory.

"Just two years ago, the deterioration of the ground at Marrara meant we faced oblivion in terms of interstate fixtures—the $2.5 million committed by our Government to improving Marrara, plus the money we have allocated to Traeger Park—has turned this around.

"We are now truly part of the national competition—with premiership points at stake," said Mr Ah Kit.

"The continued presence of the Bulldogs—supported by the AFL as well as the Government—demonstrates enormous commitment from Aussie Rules to the Territory."

Today’s signing was witnessed by Ross McKenzie, president of the local Western Bulldogs Supporters group.

As part of the agreement, $50,000 is to be used by the AFL in promoting the...
game in the NT, and a further $50,000 in establishing the Bulldogs’ profile in the Territory. Thus, 40 per cent of the annual $250,000 is to be spent in the Northern Territory. In addition the NT will recoup 25 per cent of gate receipts for the home matches in the Territory.