The vibrant centre of Katherine is set to reap significant benefits in the 2002-2003 Budget with commitments to the region totalling over $95 million.

"Already the region is benefiting from the building of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway with more to come as the project moves towards completion in 2003/04," the Minister for Community Development and Member for Arnhem, John Ah Kit, said today.

" Discussions will begin shortly with the Katherine Council and local stakeholders as part of the Territory-wide process to develop passenger platforms at three key centres along the railway route."

"The Government expects work on the platforms to begin next Dry Season."

Mr Ah Kit said the Katherine region had enormous potential in tourism, mining and agriculture, and the Budget targeted expansion in each of these sectors.

"$2.5 million alone will be spent on research to expand and enhance agricultural opportunities in the region," he said.

"The Government’s commitment to education and health is also reflected in significant funding to primary and secondary education and well as primary health care and the Katherine Hospital."

Budget highlights include:

- Over $32 million to provide early childhood, primary, post primary and secondary education in the region. This includes $2.24 million to the Katherine School of the Air and $340,000 to extend library, classrooms and storage at the Minyerri School. Government schools in the region will also benefit from the 21 per cent increase in grants to school councils for supplies such as stationery and textbooks as part of a Territory-wide boost of $862,000.
- Over $22 million to provide primary health care, family, aged and disability services in the region. This includes $1.3 million to the Northern Territory Aerial Medical Service, which has a base at Katherine.
- Over $15 million for acute medical and surgical services at Katherine District Hospital. Initiatives include $300,000 towards the Katherine Transitional Care Unit and $350,000 for a new mortuary.
- Over $12 million for the operation of police and fire stations and an emergency services unit in the region. There will be an expenditure
of $290,000 for a new tanker to improve fire-fighting capacity as well as $500,000 in capital and upgrades at Katherine, Pine Creek, Mataranka and Ngukurr police, fire and emergency facilities.

- $7.2 million in operational grants to local governing bodies and organisations delivering local government-related services.
- $2.5 million for research activities that aim to expand and enhance agricultural opportunities in the region.
- $2.5 million for new capital works on the region's roads and highways.
- $1.23 million to continue flood mitigation works at Lake Hickey.
- $1 million to regrade the existing gravel airstrip and seal the landing strip at Kalkarindji, and complete seal widening of the road to Daguragu.
- $350,000 to construct stairways, walkways and tour launch landings in Nitmiluk National Park.