Chief Minister Clare Martin today toured a number of significant railway construction sites around the Darwin area, including the Elizabeth River Bridge site and Crater Lake (100km south of Darwin, near Batchelor) where cutting and earthworks are underway.

"Despite the on-set of the wet, construction of the Alice to Darwin railway is reaching an exciting time with work now underway in and around Darwin.

"The railway is starting to take shape and Top End residents can see some of the action for themselves with land cleared in a number of areas."

Ms Martin said the benefits of the railway were already being felt across the Territory.

"Across the Territory, $325 million in contracts have been awarded locally, of this about $175 million of business has gone to Darwin companies.

"Contracts range from large items such as supply of fuel and heavy machinery through to consumables such as safety boots, hammers, telephones, and catering.

"Already approximately 112 Darwin people are already employed by the Asia Pacific Transport Company and Adrail, with many more employed by subcontractors.

"Levels of employment will increase as work again ramps up in the dry season."

Ms Martin also said the Katherine sleeper plant had now reached full capacity with 1600 sleepers produced a day (33,000 have now been produced out of 865,000 total). The Tennant Factory has produced 4000 sleepers with full capacity (2400 sleepers a day) expected to be reached next month.

Ms Martin said the first track will be laid in April 2002, with the entire project expected to be completed in early 2004.