The Minister for Tourism, Dr Chris Burns, today accused the CLP Opposition of mischievously using largely irrelevant tourism statistics in order to talk down tourism results over the last year.

"There is no doubt that tourism has taken some big hits in the last two years, but to claim that tourism has decreased by 50% in the last year is just plain wrong and deliberately misleading," Dr Burns said.

"Trying to score political points through paid ads using unrepresentative figures is cynical, and of no help to those operators who have had a tough time."

Dr Burns said that the more reliable preliminary figures reported by the NT Travel Monitor show that there had been a decline in international holiday arrivals to the Territory overall of 6% in 2002/03 when compared with 2001/02.

"Other Travel Monitor figures show a 4% increase in holiday visitors to the Top End staying in commercial accommodation, and a 16% increase in holiday expenditure by those visitors. While there have been declines in the international market, domestic visitor numbers including the self-drive market were strong last year.

"It is a real shame that Dennis Burke and the CLP try to score cheap political shots in this way. They need to be much more careful that they don’t cause damage through their ill-advised claims, and their repeated attempts to talk the industry down.

"While sections of the industry are still facing challenges, particularly those that rely on the international market, these figures show that there has been growth in the last year, and we are projecting an increase in tourism growth of around 3% for the year 2003/04. This includes a projected growth of 19% in international visitors."

"Industry knows that the figures quoted by the CLP only show the number of people walking through the door of the Tourism Top End visitor information centre, and they know full well that these figures do not show total visitor numbers to Darwin or the Top End.

"Historical figures show that less than 30% of visitors to the Top End region actually visit the Tourism Top End Visitor Information Centre, as many get the information they require from other sources such as the web, hotel desks and other retail outlets.

The ABS figures quoted today by the Leader of the Opposition are so selective as to be a joke. Amongst other things, they do not relate at all to the number of international visitors that come to the Territory."
"Of course aviation capacity is one of the biggest barriers to tourism growth in the Territory. The Martin Government has worked hard to deliver increased domestic and international aviation capacity into Darwin and Alice Springs.

"In addition, the domestic marketing budget for the NT Tourist Commission this year was increased by $1.5M, providing the greatest allocation of funds for TV advertising since the "Never Never Know" campaign in the mid 1990’s.

"This Government will continue to do more. But we will respond to properly developed business plans and targeted campaigns, not to cheap shots."