COUNTDOWN ON – 12 MONTHS UNTIL NEXT ARAFURA GAMES

Today marks 12 months until the next Arafura Games and work is already underway to ensure it is one of the best Games ever.

Sport and Recreation Minister, Delia Lawrie, said the next year will be an important time leading up to the Arafura Games on the 12 May 2007, particularly for the dedicated sports coordinators who will ensure the delivery of the 23 sports.

“Sport is an important part of our great Territory lifestyle, and the Arafura Games is one of our premier events,” said Ms Lawrie.

Marking the 12 month milestone, the Minister announced the Northern Territory Government has formed a $250,000 partnership with the Australian Paralympic Committee and the Oceania Paralympic Committee, which will see the Arafura Games incorporate the Oceania Paralympic Championships for the first time.

“This partnership is of international significance and is a unique opportunity to develop Athletes with Disabilities (AWD) sports in Australia and the South East Asia region,” said Ms Lawrie.

“The new partnership will allow the 2007 Games to showcase Athlete with Disability Events (AWD) in 7 sports - Athletics, road cycling, powerlifting, swimming, table tennis, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis.

“The Territory has several well known AWD athletes who have achieved greatness in their sport - Judith O’Hearn (swimming), Melanie Hall and Nadia Romeo (wheelchair basketball) and Dennis Wormald (blind lawn bowls) to name a few.”

Ms Lawrie said there is an extremely large amount of goodwill surrounding this partnership with the Australian Paralympic Committee and the Oceania Paralympic Committee using today’s event to present a $100,000 cheque to the Arafura Games.

“We see ourselves having a long term partnership with the NT Government. Darwin and the Northern Territory can play a key role in the preparation of athletes and teams from our entire region as we head towards the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Paralympic Games,” said Mr Greg Hartung, President of the Australian Paralympic Committee.

“This event will showcase the best of disability sport in our part of the world. It will become a wonderful promotion of the Paralympic movement.”

Contact: Maria Billias 0401119746