BUILDING THE FUTURE OF THE KATHERINE REGION

Budget 2007 will boost jobs, growth and the lifestyle of Katherine region residents, Treasurer Syd Stirling announced today.

“This year the Martin Government’s Budget includes the most comprehensive housing package for Territorians ever,” said Mr Stirling.

“It creates thousands of jobs through a very high infrastructure spend and also provides a comprehensive jobs plan to skill Katherine region residents.

“Budget 2007 delivers on the Martin Government’s priorities of:

- growing and supporting business;
- improving educational outcomes;
- building a healthier Territory;
- providing a safer community; and
- enhancing our great lifestyle.”

The Treasurer said Budget 2007 delivered these goals within sound and sustainable fiscal parameters.

The Government is also providing record budgets for education, health and community safety.

HOUSING PACKAGE FOR FIRST HOME OWNERS

Katherine residents buying their first home won’t pay stamp duty on the median priced house or unit in the town.

“The Martin Government’s decision to lift the tax free threshold on stamp duty for first home owners by 55 per cent to $350 000 will see all median priced houses and units in Katherine stamp duty free to first home buyers,” Mr Stirling said.

The median priced house in Katherine is $225 000, while the median priced unit is $170 000.

The successful HomeNorth scheme will also be revamped to include more flexible caps on purchases and higher income limits for families with dependants.
“The scheme has successfully housed 60 people living in Katherine. Now it is time to fine tune it,” said Mr Stirling

“The Territory Government will retain the 2 per cent deposit and the $10 000 interest free loan component. The Government’s equity share will rise to $70 000, helping all borrowers.

“These are incentives that make a real impact on getting a deposit in place.”

Income limits will now reflect the number of people in the household:

- Singles will have an income limit of $50 000;
- couples without dependents $60 000; and
- single parents or families with dependents will have the limit lifted to $70 000.

Instead of a fixed cap for house prices in all parts of the Territory we will now place a cap at 85 per cent of the Real Estate Institute determined median priced house in each region.

“In Katherine, the cap will be $180 000. Generous asset limits are also in place,” said the Treasurer.

“These reforms target the scheme directly at families without driving up the average price of a home,” he said.

**TAXES REDUCED BY $156 MILLION SINCE 2002**

Katherine businesses will benefit from continuing tax reform by the Martin Government.

“Including this years' Budget, we have now reduced Territory taxes by $156 million since 2002,” said Mr Stirling.

“Furthermore, the Territory is the lowest taxing jurisdiction for small business and businesses with up to 100 staff.

“In Budget 2007 stamp duty on hiring is abolished – this is a real saving for business.”

**INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING REMAINS HIGH - MORE JOBS FOR LOCALS**

Mr Stirling said that $645 million would be spent on infrastructure projects across the Territory.

In the Katherine region, spending includes:

- $970 000 to complete the redevelopment of Katherine High School for middle years;
- $2.7 million for Kalkarindji to complete the new health centre;
- $1.46 million for Nitmiluk National Park to replace the ablution facility at the visitor centre and complete gorge crossovers; and
- $3.45 million to complete the new school at Wugularr.
INVESTING IN ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The Katherine region will receive a significant boost to the essential services with the announcement of a Territory wide, five year $814 million infrastructure program.

This includes:

- $10 million over five years to upgrade the Katherine wastewater treatment plant;
- $7 million for the Katherine Power Station augmentation;
- $1 million to connect Jilkminggan to the grid;
- $660 000 to relocate the Pigeon Hole Power Station;
- $510 000 to refurbish the Power and Water Corporation building near Katherine; and
- $470 000 for Darguragu to replace water tanks.

MAJOR ROADS BOOST INCLUDES MORE FUNDS FOR KATHERINE

"Spending on repairs and maintenance of Territory roads will be increased by $35 million over the next four years," said Mr Stirling.

“This year the total roads program is $180 million, which includes a repairs and maintenance Budget of $57 million,” said Mr Stirling.

“Roads support important Katherine region businesses like the cattle industry and the region’s horticulture,” he said.

“They also provide important links for people living in remote communities and pastoral properties.

“That’s why we are injecting $13.4 million into the repair and maintenance of roads in Katherine,” said the Treasurer.

“$45.9 million in ongoing funding has been set aside for the Victoria Highway.”

BUILDING A SAFER COMMUNITY

Budget 2007 delivers a record spend on Police, Fire and Emergency Services to build safer communities across the Katherine region and the Territory as a whole.

Katherine region residents will benefit from funding with:

- $16.8 million for Police, Fire and Emergency services, including nine police stations, one fire station and twelve volunteer groups;
- $1.2 million for Community Corrections in Katherine;
- $610 000 for courts to administer Justice to regional and remote communities including Beswick, Ngukurr, Timber Creek, Kalkaringi and Lajamanu; and
- $740 000 to deal with domestic violence and child protection issues
This budget boost comes on top of the recent delivery of a mobile police post for Katherine last month.

**LIFTING EDUCATION OUTCOMES AND SKILLS IN THE TERRITORY**

The Martin Government’s Jobs Plan 3 will see a boost in spending on employment and training programs in the Katherine region.

“Currently there are now over 3300 Territorians in training – an increase of 50 per cent since 2001. There are 310 Territorians in training in the Katherine region,” said Treasurer, Syd Stirling.

As part of a record Employment, Education and Training budget of $658 million, Katherine will receive:

- $15.3 million for primary and early childhood education at six urban schools;
- $8.6 million for secondary education at Katherine High School;
- $20.5 million for early childhood, primary and secondary education in 19 remote schools;
- $2.5 million for isolated children’s education through the Katherine School of the Air; and
- $2.6 million assistance for non-government schools in the region

**BUILDING A HEALTHIER TERRITORY FUTURE - KATHERINE HOSPITAL SPENDING UP 72 PER CENT SINCE 2001.**

Budget 2007 invests a record $838 million in Health and Community Services. This brings spending in this critical area up by 73 per cent since the Martin Government was elected to office in 2001.

“The Katherine Hospital will receive a total of $24.4 million this year - an increase of 72 per cent since 2001,” said Mr Stirling.

“This investment is critical in overcoming ill health and its causes.”

In total, the Katherine region will receive:

- $25.1 million for acute care services in the region;
- $20.4 million for non-acute health and community services; and
- $769 000 for renal dialysis services.

Katherine Hospital will also benefit from a $300 000 upgrade to Ward 3 and the Jack Roney Ward. There will be minor new works for the water pressure units and fire alarm system at the Hospital. $190 000 will be spent on upgrading the hospital laundry.
LIFESTYLE AND ENVIRONMENT

Budget 2007 plans for the future and secures the Territory lifestyle, said the Treasurer.

Spending on lifestyle and the environment includes:
• $248 000 for the establishment of an Environment Protection Agency in the Territory;
• $34.9 million for Territory parks across the Territory with $1.23 million for visitor programs in Katherine region parks;
• Continued backing for world class events; and
• $420 000 for regional library services at Katherine, Pine Creek, Lajamanu, Borroloola and Mataranka.

“The Government will also provide $1 million to re-develop Katherine’s main street, with $250 000 of that being spent this year,” said Mr Stirling.

“Budget 2007 is about Jobs, Growth and Lifestyle.

“It builds on the successful economic and social policies of the Martin Government over the last five years.

“It plans for our future and secures the Territorians lifestyle,” Mr Stirling said.

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** Please note this press release covers portfolios under the jurisdiction of other Ministers. Please direct inquiries as appropriate. Eg, for inquiries relating to essential services, contact the office of the Minister for Essential Services, Kon Vatskalis. **