MEDIA RELEASE

CHIEF MINISTER
HON. MARSHALL PERRON MLA

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NT Chief Minister Marshall Perron has hailed a $100 million commitment from the South Australian Opposition to the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link as the likely catalyst to get the project off the ground.

The South Australian Liberal Leader, Dean Brown, formally announced the $100 million commitment by his party should it win Government at a press conference in Adelaide today.

The NT Government has already committed $100 million towards the project. The announcement of the $100 million contribution from SA marks the first time any of the major political parties in that State have committed funds to the rail link, either in Government or Opposition.

In a letter to Mr Brown, the Chief Minister said that despite the commitment by both the Territory and the SA, the Federal Government must be persuaded to pick up its prime responsibility for the railway to Asia.

Mr Brown's Liberal team has a comfortable lead in the polls for the State elections to be held on Saturday. Today's announcement from South Australia follows discussions between Mr Brown and Chief Minister Perron on the latest feasibility study on the rail link by Dr Don Williams, Chairman of Australian National (Railways).

The study is a cost-benefit analysis of completing the rail link to Darwin, integrating a new port facility in Darwin Harbour to facilitate two-way trade with Asia. The Williams study will be submitted to the influential Wran Committee, which has been appointed by the Federal Government to foster Darwin as the nations gateway to Asia.

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"As you know, successive Federal Governments have promised to honour their legislative and financial responsibilities to the vital project, usually during election campaigns, but have reneged on these commitments soon after polling day," Mr Perron's letter said.

"Although the Northern Territory has never lost faith in the enormous commercial benefit of the line for our two regions and Australia as a whole, this is the first time that a potential or actual Government of South Australia has committed funds to the project.

"Following detailed talks between NT Treasury officials and the Chairman of Australian National, I am convinced that private enterprise will see the benefits of investing $300 million in an integrated transport company which will, among other things, build and operate the missing railway link in the economic corridor between Adelaide and Asia, I.e. from Alice Springs to Darwin. This will give our two Governments and the private sector 50% equity participation in the project.

"The job ahead of us is then to convince the Federal Government to honour its prime responsibility to this national project, and lead the way by sponsoring the most important rail/port/sealane link between southern Australian manufacturers and the Asian marketplace. We must convince Canberra to start by picking up at least 50% of the investment in this national project.

"It may have taken 82 years, but your $100 million commitment could well be the catalyst for this visionary project."

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