MEDIA RELEASE

NORTHERN TERRITORY
CHIEF MINISTER
HON. DENIS BURKE MLA

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Today's financial close on the $1.3 billion AustralAsia rail project is a major key opening the door to the Territory's future.

Chief Minister Denis Burke said this in Sydney today after signing the final documentation to complete financial close on the rail project. "This is a nation-building project for Australia, and an historic milestone for the Northern Territory and South Australia."

"Not only will this open up a new trade route linking the Northern Territory with Southern Australia, it paves the way for Darwin to achieve its potential as the gateway to Asia."

Chief Minister Burke said few, if any, major developments in Australia had been as complex to bring together as this rail project.

"It is a tribute to the strong partnerships between the Federal, Northern Territory and South Australian Governments and members of the private Consortium," Chief Minister Burke said.

"All share the vision and belief and the benefits to the nation that will flow from developing the central corridor across Australia. Together we have faced many hurdles and challenges. More will be faced and overcome before the first train rolls into Port Darwin."

Mr Burke paid special tribute to the strength of Prime Minister John Howard for remaining totally committed to the rail project.
"Only this Prime Minister has had the courage and will to deliver this project for Australia, Territorians and South Australia," Mr Burke said.

"While the Labor Party walked away, Prime Minister Howard gave the AustralAsia rail link his absolute support. He deserves the highest praise for resisting Opposition calls for him to also walk away from the project."

"For Territorians and South Australians the benefits will be great, but Australians will be major benefactors as well."

Mr Burke said work on the railway would commence on time in May at the official start of the Dry Season. He said hundreds of millions of dollars worth of contracts would be awarded over the next couple of months to Territory and South Australian suppliers and contractors.

"A large proportion of goods and services will be supplied by Northern Territory and South Australian industry, in line with the Consortium’s commitment to sourcing 75% of the value of the project from the NT and SA," Chief Minister Burke said.

The Consortium has provided an initial list of $250 million worth of orders and contracts to Territory and South Australian suppliers and contracts for major supply items during the first three months of construction.

"A Territory business and employment group set up by the NT Government will focus on maximising business and job opportunities for Territorians."

"This is just the beginning, now together we will work to complete the dream."

Contact: Gary Shipway (08) 8999 7859