MEDIA RELEASE

MINISTER FOR THE RAILWAY
HON BARRY COULTER, MLA

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Northern Territory Railway Minister Barry Coulter today described a $10 billion proposal to build a railway between Melbourne and Darwin via Queensland as an old idea with little modern work behind it.

He said the basis of this proposal first came to light in 1932 via A.J. Cotton, a pastoralist with extensive holdings in Queensland and the Northern Territory. Later the plan was advanced by Sir Harold Clapp in a report to the Curtin Government in 1945.

More recently, Emeritus Professor Lance Endersbee in 1994 proposed a high-speed link between Melbourne and Darwin via south-east Queensland.

Mr Coulter said the latest plan being promoted by Everald Compton was for a $1.34 billion project initially linking Melbourne and Brisbane, with an extension costing several billion dollars between Brisbane and Darwin at some vague time in the future.

"Let’s face it," he said. "This proposal has an extremely long way to go before it can be regarded as being on the table for examination.

"There are no cost estimates, no feasibility studies, no timetables for construction and completion, no route surveys and no finance plans."

On the other hand, Mr Coulter said, the Adelaide to Darwin rail project was now ready to go to the market place with all possible surveys, studies and financial plans completed.

"We are talking about a $1 billion project with a four-year construction timetable. The Territory and South Australian governments have pledged $100 million each and the market place is ready to show its hand in financing the remainder.

"A detailed project brief is ready to be placed in the hands of pre-qualified tenderers to build, own and operate the railway."

Mr Coulter said claims by Mr Compton that an Adelaide to Darwin rail link would not pass through significant mining and agricultural regions were incorrect.

He pointed to gold mining operations in the Tanami Desert in central Australia, copper and gold mines in Tennant Creek, the large Lake Phillipson coal deposit in the north of
South Australia, the Meekatharra iron ore deposits in South Australia, Western Mining’s Olympic Dam project and new gold ventures in the Gawler Craton region.

As well, live cattle exports from the Northern Territory were recording record growth figures.

Mr Coulter said the Northern Territory and South Australian governments had forged close ties in working together to bring the Adelaide to Darwin railway to reality.

"A decade of hard work has gone into this rail project," he said. "Now is not the time to be distracted by alternative schemes yet to be put to any sort of real economic or financial test."

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