With tomorrow’s release of the Bath Report, the Country Liberals have announced an updated child protection policy that will rectify glaring problems in the Government’s administration of the Territory’s child protection system.

Opposition Leader, Terry Mills, said the Country Liberals will match the requirement that professionals must report child abuse to NT Families and Children with the reciprocal obligation that child protection agencies will investigate those reports.

"NT Families and Children’s failure to listen to a series of warnings from health professionals concerning children at risk was the catalyst for the establishment of the Bath Inquiry," Mr Mills said.

"Response times to child protection notifications are another area of failure within the Territory’s child protection system.

"There is currently no requirement on NT Families and Children to investigate mandatory reports of child abuse made by professionals.

"This is an absurd inconsistency that makes a mockery of the Government’s tough talk on child protection and fails children about whom the reports are made and the professionals who make the reports.

"The Country Liberals will ensure all mandatory reports under the Care and Protection of Children Act will result in a formal investigation.

"We will ensure these investigations are conducted within the timelines assessed for each category – 24 hours for a Category 1 report; 72 hours for a Category 2 report; 5 days for a Category 3 report.

"In the 2008-09 financial year, only 83% of Category 1, 48% of Category 2 and 23% of Category 3 reports were responded to on time.

"It is my hope these unacceptable response times will be addressed by the Board of Inquiry into Child Protection when its report is released tomorrow."

Mr Mills said the Country Liberals also commit to establishing a stand-alone Department of Child Protection to ensure child protection is given the highest priority.

"As part of the Department of Health and Families, I don’t believe it is given the weight required of such an important responsibility of Government.

"The new Department will retain strong linkages with Health, but also work alongside the departments of Education, Housing and Local Government."

The Country Liberals will also move to ensure case plans for children in care are mandatory – and that the progress of each case plan is reviewed on a twice yearly basis.
The Opposition also remain committed to ensuring a much more effective exchange of information about children at risk amongst Government agencies.

The principles enshrined in the INFORMATION AMENDMENT (INTER-ORGANISATION DISCLOSURE) BILL we introduced earlier in the year remain a high priority for the Country Liberals.

The protection of children must come before the guarding of government information.

"I believe these measures will go some way to addressing the serious failures within the Territory’s child protection system," Mr Mills said.

"The Labor Party has known about failings within child protection since as early as 2003, but have run the system into the ground despite a number of high-profile reviews – including the 2007 Little Children are Sacred report.

"The Government must act on the recommendations reported in the Bath Inquiry with the utmost urgency."

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594