The touchdown of Australian Airlines inaugural Singapore to Darwin flight at Darwin Airport today heralds a major step forward in rebuilding international tourism to the Northern Territory Chief Minister and Tourism Minister, Clare Martin, said today.

Australian Airlines, a new leisure travel airline connecting holidaymakers between Asia and Australia, will operate twice weekly B767-300 services between Singapore / Darwin / Cairns.

Ms Martin said that, combined with the existing Qantas schedule, this brings this crucial air link up to five services per week.

“The new twice weekly service - which carries 271 people per flight - will conservatively bring an additional 12,000 tourists to the Territory over the next year, contributing $9 million in direct visitor expenditure,” she said.

“The flights are extremely important to the local tourism industry and today's inaugural flight is a significant boost for local businesses.

“The Territory's largest international tourism markets are the United Kingdom and Europe, and those tourists transit through Singapore en route to Australia.

“Now they will have direct flights into Darwin five days per week - making their trip to the Territory less expensive and more convenient.

“My Government - through its tourism arm the NT Tourist Commission - has committed $400,000 towards a cooperative marketing campaign with Australian Airlines and the Australian Tourist Commission in the UK, Europe and Japan.

“I am confident that this new twice weekly service will deliver more tourists, more money and create new opportunities in the Territory over the years to come.”

Ms Martin said that while the NT would lose some of these tourists to Cairns this figure would be quite low as there are already many direct flights from Singapore to Cairns adding that Australian Airlines believes that there is the potential to pick-up Japanese tourists.

The Territory Government has also recently appointed a part-time marketing representative in Singapore to ensure that these flights are promoted in Singapore and Malaysia.