Minister for Communications Peter Toyne, and his Commonwealth counterpart Richard Alston, will meet for the first time in Canberra on Thursday morning, 14 February.

"This is an opportunity to raise Territory issues with the Commonwealth Government, particularly the importance of improving telecommunications infrastructure and services to the remote indigenous communities of the Territory," he said.

"I plan to stress the potential to improve social and economic conditions by improving access to basic health, education, social and business services which are readily available to other Australians."

Dr Toyne said he would use the meeting to emphasise the Territory Government’s support for the Outback Digital Network (ODN) - an indigenous owned and managed company.

"Outback Digital Network is seeking Commonwealth funding (under the Networking the Nation program and the National Communications Fund) to increase telecommunications infrastructure and services in a number of remote communities.

"This important project would be carried out in partnership with Telstra and the Network Design Corporation (the infrastructure provider to Telstra)."

The NTG has been working closely with ODN to develop its bid for these funding programs.

Approximately $11m is available for NT projects under the Networking the Nation program and around $50m Australia wide under the National Communications Fund.

Applications for funding close early March 2002.