23 June 2003

Open and accountable budget

The Leader of Government Business Paul Henderson said the Northern Territory Budget would be subject to a record four days of scrutiny in the Territory’s history when the Estimates Committee process begins tomorrow.

"This Government is committed to being open and accountable to all Territorians, and has set aside 42.5 hours over a record four days for the Estimates Committee process," Mr Henderson said.

"Over the four days, Shadow Ministers will be able to ask Ministers about Budget initiatives and policy directions in their portfolios, and will have the chance to quiz senior Government officials on operational details."

Ministers and their agency officials will each spend 4.5 hours before the Committee, with Treasurer Syd Stirling MLA being allocated an extended seven-hour period.

"This will allow Mr Stirling and Treasury officials to answer whole-of-Budget questions, and allow his other portfolios to be covered," said Mr Henderson.

The Independent Speaker, Lorraine Braham, and the Legislative Assembly Clerk will be before the Committee for two hours on Tuesday morning to answer questions on expenditure in the Legislative Assembly.

"For the first time, Ministers and agency officials will not be served questions in advance. In the past this practice has seen hours taken up with Ministers reading prepared answers," said Mr Henderson. "It is up to the Committee and the Shadow Ministers to pick what they believe are priority issues in the time allocated."

For the first time, senior officials from PowerWater, a Government-owned Corporation will be subjected to questioning by the newly-formed Scrutiny of Government Owned Corporations Committee, which will operate for two hours on Friday.

"The previous Government did not allow full scrutiny of their Budgets, and Territorians were burnt by its under-estimates and hidden debt of more than $100 million," said Mr Henderson. "This Government believes Budget accountability is vital to ensure Territory taxpayers get value for their money."

Parliament will reconvene on Friday evening at 5pm for final debate and passage of the Budget.