Chief Minister, Clare Martin, announced today that the Territory’s new Electoral Commissioner, Kerry Heisner, has been granted leave of absence for three months to assist the United Nations with the task of preparing for the Iraq elections in January 2005.

He was due to take up his appointment as Northern Territory Electoral Commissioner on 3 August 2004.

“I recently received a letter from the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs on behalf of Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, requesting the services of Mr Heisner to undertake an urgent electoral mission to Iraq,” she said.

“The UN is currently in the process of putting together a small team of electoral experts to help organise the Iraqi elections early next year.

“Kerry has worked with the UN on a number of electoral missions, most recently in Afghanistan, and also has experience working in countries such as Sierra Leone, Kosovo, East Timor and Tajikistan.

“The UN, in requesting that he be made available for this project, said that his contribution to the preparation of the operation plan would be crucial to the success of their involvement in the electoral process of Iraq.

“While we are anxious for Kerry to commence work as the NT’s Electoral Commissioner, clearly the elections in Iraq are an international priority.”

Ms Martin said that the Territory is pleased to be able to assist by releasing him to work with the UN on this occasion.

“A request such as this certainly highlights the calibre of our new Electoral Commissioner, and we are proud that a person of such international renown will be at the helm of the Northern Territory Electoral Commission,” she said.

“Kerry will work with the UN in Iraq from the beginning of August until 30 October 2004 and will be on leave without pay from his position of NT Electoral Commissioner during this time.”

Mr Barrie Hamilton, the current Electoral Commissioner, will continue in this role until Mr Heisner’s return at the end of October.