The Minister for Essential Services, Dr Chris Burns, said that the desert was set to bloom, after announcing today that the first stage of the $6.3million project to re-use treated water in horticulture in Alice Springs has been put out for tender.

During this stage, a pipeline estimated to cost $1.4million will be built to transfer treated water from the Alice Springs sewage treatment plant to the Arid Zone Research Institute for use in commercial horticulture.

The pipeline is part of the Water Re-use in the Alice scheme, which will see more than $6 million dollars in works to treat the effluent, infrastructure to transfer the water and developing horticultural ventures.

Dr Burns said the project will not only provide opportunities to the local construction industry, there will also be significant environmental and economic benefits.

"The Water Re-use in the Alice project will help develop the horticulture industry south of Alice Springs, quite literally helping to make the desert bloom," Dr Burns said.

"On the environmental front, the project will also assist in rehabilitating the Ilparpa Swamp and improve the amenity for people living in the rural area."

The pipeline itself will be about six kilometres long and it is anticipated the construction will be completed in April 2004.

Further works in the project include infrastructure to improve treated effluent quality, which are expected to be out to tender mid-next year.

"Already Ilparpa residents will have noticed that water is no longer pooling for long periods on the road when the swamp overflows in heavy rain," Dr Burns said.

"As part of the Water Re-use Project a drain into St Mary’s Creek is carrying the overflow and making the road a safer and more pleasant drive.

"The hard work of the Ilparpa Swamp Rehabilitation Committee is also paying off in terms of reducing overflows and helping to control mosquitoes – which is good news for everyone!"