Lands and Planning Minister Dr Chris Burns has introduced amendments in the Legislative Assembly that will modernise and simplify the Planning Act.

“The proposed amendments follow on from the release of a public discussion paper last year and more than 30 workshops throughout the Territory,” Dr Burns said.

“The current Act is creaking, complicated and frustrating for both developers and affected parties. This review fulfils another election commitment of the Martin Government.”

For the first time, the Act will include a statement of its objectives. It will also include a definition of “amenity” as it applies to planning issues.

“The overly complicated distinctions that exist in the current Planning Scheme between land use objectives, development provisions and incorporated documents will be removed,” Dr Burns said.

“The amended Act establishes a single default Planning Scheme for the Northern Territory. It will also provide capacity for the making of a separate, specific Planning Scheme for a part of the Territory where there are unique circumstances.”

Other amendments will enable lodgement of electronic documents, require the consideration of crime prevention principles in planning, strengthen provisions relating to land clearing and prosecution for illegal land clearing, and clarify the role of the Appeals Tribunal.

The Act will also be amended so that a breach of the Act or the Planning Scheme may be commenced within two years from the time the breach first came to notice, rather than the current six months. The current limited period has meant that some breaches have not been able to be prosecuted because of inadequate time to collect evidence and mount a case.

The amendments also introduce processes for limited third-party right of appeal in regard to development applications. Third-party appeals may be made only by a person who has lodged a written submission with the consent authority. Appeals will be allowed for residential developments above two storeys and non-residential uses in or next to a residential zone.

“The proposed amendments reflect the Government’s desire to balance growth with lifestyle,” Dr Burns said.

Dr Burns thanked the many Territorians who participated in consultative workshops and those who made written submissions to the review.