Three new petroleum exploration permits valued at $3 million have been granted in the Northern Territory adjacent waters of the Timor Sea, Minister for Resource Development Paul Henderson said today.

Mr Henderson said these permits have been awarded to Melbourne-based joint venture National Oil and Gas Pty Ltd, Australian Natural Gas Pty Ltd and Nations Natural Gas Pty Ltd.

"Six petroleum exploration areas in Commonwealth waters adjacent to the NT were released for competitive tender last year, and these permits have been granted as a result of that initial process," Mr Henderson said.

"This exploration expenditure forms part of the work program bidding system administered in Offshore Australia whereby the permit holders commit to a guaranteed fixed first three year term commitments

"The first three years form part of a minimum guaranteed work program and will include 1500km of new seismic acquisition and will have a total exploration expenditure of more than $3 million."

Mr Henderson the Northern Territory could expect spin-offs during exploration and development from some of these potentially hydrocarbon rich areas.

"By world standards Timor Sea enjoys a very high success rate in terms of hydrocarbon discoveries.

"When the operations move to drilling phase will mean additional supply and service opportunities for Darwin businesses."