Minister for Employment, Education and Training Syd Stirling today introduced legislation into Parliament which represents the first part of a three-stage plan to reform the Territory's Workers Compensation scheme and foster safer workplaces.

"The reforms aim to improve Workers Compensation by reducing future long-term scheme costs, without reducing the protection provided to injured workers," Mr Stirling said.

"The changes are based on recommendations to the previous Government in April 2000 but not acted on.

"They are designed to improve the overall efficiency of the workers compensation scheme and will help to alleviate some of the problems encountered by workers, employers and insurers in recent years.

"Provisions include:

- removing discrepancies between benefits paid to junior workers and apprentices;
- tying benefits to a person’s capacity to work after two years;
- prohibiting interstate prisoners from claiming benefits from the NT;
- allowing claims to be settled more flexibly and quickly;
- increasing the focus on rehabilitation and return to work procedures;
- improving dispute resolution procedures; and
- increasing death benefits.

"The second stage of the Government’s reform process will involve the public release and discussion of the Lord Report, commissioned in 2001, into medical and rehabilitation issues relating to the Workers Compensation scheme.

"The Lord Report examined the role of medical practitioners in determining work-related injury; the extent to which medical and allied treatment practices provide a positive benefit for injury management; and costs, treatment, outcomes and interface between the medical practitioner, allied services and the scheme.

"The third stage will involve a review of the Occupational Health and Safety provisions of the Work Health Act, with a renewed emphasis on prevention and education strategies to reduce accidents and injuries in the workplace.

"The Government wants to ensure that the Workers Compensation scheme works for everyone and we believe that our three-stage approach will go a long way to ensure that it does."