More than 25 tonnes of Territory produce will be flown direct to Asia this evening with the arrival today of the first of up to 16 trial Malaysia Airlines Darwin to Kuala Lumpur freight flights.

Asian Relations and Trade Minister Paul Henderson, at the handover of five airline pallets of mangoes to be loaded on to the first flight, said the trial air link opened up the world’s markets to the Territory.

“Instead of having to transport fresh produce down south before heading to Asia, under this trial arrangement Territory producers will now have direct access to the international air freight hub of Kuala Lumpur,” Mr Henderson said.

“This new trade link opens up significant new export opportunities for the Northern Territory, with exporters now able to quickly access markets in Asia, the growing markets of the Arab Emirates, and Europe.”

Twenty-four tonnes of mangoes, bound for Hong Kong, and 1.5 tonnes of groceries, heading to Kuala Lumpur, will be loaded on to the first MAS Kargo Boeing 747 flight when it touched down this evening around 7:00pm.

It’s expected about 50 tonnes will usually be available for Territory producers on the flights.

The Northern Territory Government, in partnership with NT Airports, has backed the trial by covering the landing and handling costs over the period.

“MAS Kargo will have to make a commercial decision on whether to continue the flights on a permanent basis, and it is encouraging to see Territory producers getting behind the service,” said Mr Henderson.

“With the mango season really getting underway, there is early support from growers in Darwin, Katherine and Kununurra for the next three flights, with about 60 tonnes booked for next week.

“Grape and rambutan growers are about to head into their season, so there is good potential for solid bookings over the next few months to get Territory produce into world markets.

“I strongly encourage growers and freight forwarders to get behind this trial service to help make it a permanent trade link for the Territory.”