New child protection legislation to be introduced to Parliament

The Northern Territory’s 24 year-old Community Welfare Act will be completely overhauled when the NT Government introduces the Care and Protection of Children Act into Parliament next week.

A centerpiece of the legislation will be the appointment of a Children’s Commissioner.

“The creation of a Commissioner for Children as a statutory appointment will allow independent oversight of child protection in the Territory.

“Child abuse and neglect is a serious issue across the Territory and the NT Government is working with the Federal Government and Aboriginal communities to achieve change.

“The NT Government has quadrupled funding into Child Protection services since coming to government six years ago, bringing the total budget to $35.7 million per year.

Ms Scrymgour said one of the recommendations from the Anderson Wild Report, which the NT Government commissioned last year, was an overhaul of the Community Welfare Act, would be now be put in place.

“This new Bill has had three phases of extensive consultation, and meets one of the recommendations from the Anderson Wild Report,’ Ms Scrymgour said.

Key characteristics of this new legislation compared to the current Act:

• A comprehensive approach to prevent harm and exploitation to children;
• Strengthening of provisions to support families to care for their children;
• Continuing the support for young people leaving the care;
• Provision to move a child to a safe place
• Introduction of a screening system for child-related employment
• Provision for establishment of Review Teams to examine the operations of the child protection and care system.
• The appointment of a Commissioner for Children.
"As well as these new measures the Act maintains universal mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect by a parent, but extends responsibility to service providers to ensure staff are trained and know about their reporting responsibilities," Ms Scrymgour said.