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TERRITORY RAILWAY DREAM NOW A REALITY FOR ALICE SPRINGS

A Federal Government commitment from the time of Federation, and a 100 year old dream for Territorians becomes a reality today with the first freight train from Alice Springs to Darwin, said Senator Scullion today.

Senator Nigel Scullion is in Alice Springs representing the Prime Minister of Australia, Hon John Howard MP, at the ceremony to celebrate the inaugural freight train which leave Alice Springs today.

“The Federal Government is very proud of this achievement and its unwavering support has made this dream a reality for Territorians. Without the significant financial contribution of \$191.4 million from the federal coalition government, along with the unfaltering drive from the previous CLP Territory government, today’s reality would still be the unfulfilled dream of the past 100 years.

“This dream has been shared by all Territorians and is the strongest indication and measure of the value of the CLP Government and its commitment to all Territorians. Special thanks and due acknowledgement should therefore be made to those pioneers of this project.

Senator Scullion said it was a major engineering feat that would generate benefits far exceeding its \$1.3 billion construction cost.

“It is predicted that the nett benefit to the Territory GDP is anticipated to be \$3 billion over the life of the railway, to be achieved on the back of exports and local value-adding of manufactured and fresh produce,” Senator Scullion said.

“Up to 350,000 tonnes of fuel and general products are carried by rail to Alice Springs already. Potential exists to increase rail freight haulage to more than 800,000 tonnes during the first few years of operation. This is a significant boost to Alice Springs which should provide wider benefits in this region.

All major economic forecasts predict a boom for the Northern Territory with the new rail now linking to the Northern Territory. The challenge for Territorians now will be to capitalise on the opportunities that this new link will open up to advance, develop and cement the future growth of our regions.

The first freight train is scheduled to leave Adelaide on 15 January 2004. This is a testimony to the unfailing foresight of many Territorians and shows a sensible track to follow to lay down the future of our Territory.

I am very proud to be part of this historical event and congratulate the previous CLP Government for their tireless efforts and dedication to this vision for all Territorians.