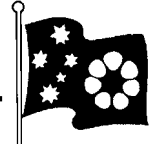




MEDIA RELEASE



**NORTHERN TERRITORY
CHIEF MINISTER
HON. DENIS BURKE MLA**

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Historic milestone for the Northern Territory and South Australia

Today's ceremonial turning of the first sod of soil for the \$1.3 billion Alice Springs to Darwin rail project is a major key opening the door to the Territory's future, Chief Minister Denis Burke said today.

"This is a nation-building project for Australia, and an historic milestone for the Northern Territory and South Australia," Chief Minister Burke said.

"Not only will this open up a new trade route linking the Northern Territory with Southern Australia, it paves the way for Darwin to achieve its potential as the gateway to Asia.

"Today Territorians and Australians witness an event that is rich in both history and symbolism.

"Historic, because this railway is built on a century of dashed hopes, energetic political lobbying and faith.

"Symbolic, because the railway represents both the Territory's pioneering past and its glowing future.

"Today I proudly represent all Territorians who have shared the Territory Government's vision that given the opportunity we can play a pivotal role in the future of this country.

["I have no doubt that the North Territory economy will become one of the nation's power houses of wealth generation.](#)

["Within 15 years, Australia's northern capital will be a linchpin in trade, communications and transport, linking Australia and importantly South Australia, with the dynamic markets of Asia."](#)

Chief Minister Burke said few, if any, major developments in Australia had been as complex to bring together as this rail project.

"It is a tribute to the strong partnerships between the Federal, Northern Territory and South Australian Governments and members of the private Consortium," Chief Minister Burke said.

"All share the vision and belief and the benefits to the nation that will flow from developing the central corridor across Australia. Together we have faced many hurdles and challenges. More will be faced and overcome before the first train rolls into Port Darwin."



Mr Burke paid special tribute to the strength of Prime Minister John Howard for remaining totally committed to the rail project.

“Only this Prime Minister has had the courage and will to deliver this project for Australia, Territorians and South Australia,” Mr Burke said.

“While the Labor Party walked away, Prime Minister Howard gave the AustralAsia rail link his absolute support. He deserves the highest praise for resisting Opposition calls for him to also walk away from the project.”

“For Territorians and South Australians the benefits will be great, but Australians will be major benefactors as well.

“When we celebrate again in three years this railway will end at a multimodal cargo terminal at Darwin's modern East Arm Port. There will be a new trade route from Asia to Adelaide. Regional areas in the Northern Territory and South Australia will gain a new lease of life. The railway will boost the growing sophistication and diversification of the Northern Territory's economy, along with the growth of mining, defence and natural gas.

“This is just the beginning, now together we will work to complete the dream.”

Contact: Gary Shipway (08) 8999 7859