



MEDIA RELEASE



**CHIEF MINISTER
HON. DENIS BURKE MLA**

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Alice focus of historic sod turning

Prime Minister John Howard will use an historic shovel and wheelbarrow to turn the 'first sod' of the Adelaide to Darwin railway in Alice Springs next week.

The nickel-plated shovel was first used by Governor Sir William Jervois in January 1878 when the proposed transcontinental line began in Port Augusta.

It was used again in 1927, when the line was extended from Oodnadatta to Alice Springs, and in 1975 by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to symbolise the start of the new standard gauge line from Tarcoola to Alice Springs.

"This will be the final time the shovel is used on this line," Chief Minister Denis Burke said today.

"When this railway is completed in 2004 – 126 years after it began - we will realise a long-held vision of what a transcontinental railway can achieve in reducing the isolation of the Territory and creating a new trade route to Asia."

The shovel and wooden wheelbarrow to be used in next week's ceremony are on loan from the new National Museum of Australia in Canberra. They are highlights of the exhibition, *Nation – Symbols of Australia*, where they are displayed in a section, *Conquering Distance*, which examines the contribution of transport to the making of the nation.

"The National Museum is very much a living museum, so we are delighted that the old shovel is coming out again for this last historic dig," says Dawn Casey, Director of the National Museum of Australia.

"With nearly 400,000 visitors in our first four months, many people have seen the story of this shovel, and the dream of this link between Adelaide and Alice Springs – it is just one of the many we tell about Australia and Australians."

Mr Burke said next week's ceremony also will be attended by the South Australian Premier, Mr John Olsen, the Chief Executive Officer and President of Kellogg Brown and Root, Mr Randy Harl (who is travelling from America), Mparntwe traditional owners, and a large group of interstate and overseas visitors.

The Premier and a large South Australian contingent will arrive in Alice Springs Tuesday morning on The Legendary Ghan. The Ghan will be servicing Darwin upon the opening of the Adelaide to Darwin rail-link.

A special train will then be reconfigured and Australia Southern Railroad, which will operate freight trains on the new Alice Springs to Darwin line, will pull the reconfigured train the extra three kilometres to the line's end, with two locomotives: the *Alice* and the *Darwin*, followed by a double stacked freight wagon.



Alice Springs residents can watch the event in an area set aside for the public at the end of Smith Street, however people are advised to arrive early due to limited space.

Alice Springs Town Council has provided considerable assistance with seating, barricades and staff.

The ceremony will start at 11 am, so people are advised to be at the site in plenty of time.

Remote area viewers with satellite receivers currently accessing the Aurora service on the Optus B3 satellite can see the ceremony free-to-air and live from 11.15 CST. Call Homesat on 1800 064 343 for assistance with tuning your satellite receiver. Instructions will also be posted on the Internet. Visit the media room of the railway site at <http://www.nt.gov.au/railway>

For information and images of the shovel from the National Museum please contact Media Manager Martin Portus on 0409 916 481 or email m.portus@nma.gov.au

For details of media arrangements for next week, please contact Peter Greer of the Government Communications Office on 8999 1356 or 0401 119 744.