



# PRIME MINISTER

## INAUGURAL JOURNEY OF THE ALICE SPRINGS TO DARWIN RAILWAY

I am delighted to be in the Northern Territory today to welcome the first train to travel directly from Adelaide to Darwin.

The Australian Government is proud of its contribution to the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway.

The completion of the project is the realisation of a dream that many have shared since Federation. I am pleased that my Government, in cooperation with the Northern Territory and South Australian governments and the Asia Pacific Transport consortium, has been able to deliver on that dream.

Recognising the benefits that will flow to the economy as a whole from this important land transport initiative, the Australian Government has made available up to \$191.4 million for the Railway.

The development of a rail line from Adelaide to Darwin has had a long history. The Adelaide to Alice Springs leg was completed some time ago. Following a commitment made as part of the Northern Territory Acceptance Act 1910, various federal governments have promised backing for the project. Since its election in 1996, the Coalition Government has consistently delivered strong and unwavering support for the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway. This commitment, coming for the first time from the national government, has been crucial in securing completion of the project.

I am sure that in the long term the Railway will be judged to be one of the nation's most significant infrastructure projects, standing alongside the Snowy River Scheme as a monument to the dedication, expertise and inspiration of the Australian people.

The Railway will create considerable opportunities for the Northern Territory, South Australia and the nation as a whole. It will promote Australia's trade position. The Railway will streamline land transport links between the south east of Australia and the fast-growing economies of Asia, and improve efficiency and reduce transit times for freight movement. It will also encourage the development of new businesses and industries in the region.

Thousands of tourists are also expected to visit South Australia and the Northern Territory on the Ghan, which is scheduled to make its first trip on the newly completed line in February. Australian and foreign tourists alike will have the opportunity to view the spectacular scenery along the way. Residents of towns such as Katherine and Tennant Creek will also benefit from the activity these visitors will generate for local businesses and industries.

The South Australian and Northern Territory governments and the Asia Pacific Transport consortium have also provided significant funding for the project. The Railway highlights the success that can be achieved when the public and private sectors work together in partnership.

I would like to thank all of those people who have been involved in the project for their dedication, commitment and hard work. Australians should be proud of the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway.

17 January 2004