MINISTERS

Ministers are members of parliament chosen from the government to be responsible for an area or portfolio, and are usually in charge of that government department. Some example portfolios include Health, Education, Housing and Community Development, Tourism and Culture and Primary Industry and Resources.

How many ministers there will be is up to each government, and it is usually the Chief Minister who determines how responsibilities will be shared. Once decided, ministers are formally appointed by the Administrator.

Ministers are accountable to the parliament for the running of their areas of government. Parliament scrutinises ministers during Question Time as well as once a year during Estimates Meetings. In addition, the opposition appoints shadow ministers for each portfolio to ‘shadow’ or follow closely the activities of ministers. They also offer alternative policies from the opposition for that portfolio.

The Cabinet
The Chief Minister and ministers form the Cabinet which is the main decision making body of the government. It is responsible for deciding the government’s policy development and implementation.

Cabinet meets regularly and sometimes meets in different parts of the Territory. In cabinet meetings, ministers introduce proposals for new bills from their departments. Cabinet discussions are not made public, although records of cabinet meetings are made available after thirty years.

Honourable Titles
Ministers of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly may take the title ‘Honourable’. However, not all ministers choose to use this title.

The Backbench
Those members not having ministerial or shadow ministerial responsibilities are usually considered to be junior members and as such sit in the back rows of their respective sides in the Chamber. They are referred to as ‘backbenchers’ because of the benches sat on by members in the Chambers of older parliament buildings.