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**Gary Humphries MLA**

Australian Capital Territory

2000-01 BUDGET

23 May 2000

## **CHANGES TO PUBLIC TRUSTEE TO IMPROVE SERVICE LEVELS**

\$269,000 will be provided in the 2000-2001 Budget for improvements in the business and service levels provided by the Office of the Public Trustee, Attorney-General, Gary Humphries, announced today.

Mr Humphries said the funding will allow for the development of new business initiatives that will ensure the Office is well placed to meet the increasing demands placed on its services.

"In particular, \$199,000 has been provided in recognition of the increasing need to provide assistance to people in the community who have a disability or lack capacity to make financial decisions on their own.

"Many people in our community do not have the comfort of family or friends to assist them in times where trustee services are needed.

"In these instances, the Public Trustee accepts appointment under an Enduring Power of Attorney or under an order of the Guardianship and Management of Property Tribunal to ensure that a person's financial needs are met and are not at risk or vulnerable to exploitation.

"Cases are being referred to the Public Trustee from the Tribunal in increasing numbers, reflecting a scarcity of suitable family and friends to fulfil the important management role, and the independence of the Public Trustee is seen by many as an advantage in maximising the development of the represented person.

"Additionally, the Public Trustee does not decline to accept estates or trusts on the basis of low value and is often required to intervene when family or friends are not able to be identified or contacted.

"A further \$70,000 has been provided to assist developing business initiatives to ensure the Public Trustee is well placed to meet community need through its will-making, executor and trustee services.

“This initiative is to promote awareness in the community as to the importance of making decisions which affect us while we are well and able to do so. This is particularly important as we recognise that we are a community which is ageing,” Mr Humphries said.

Other initiatives are:

- Improving the Public Trustee web page, making it user friendly and easily assessable to people using the Internet, and
- The introduction of Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) facilities to ensure clients and service providers receive funds in a more timely manner.

“The fee structure for services will change for the first time since 1990, to reflect a more commercially realistic cost of services, however the Public Trustee will have discretion to reduce or waive fees in the case of hardship.

“Marketing of services to higher-end estate markets will also ensure a continuing ability to provide services to the entire community at the lowest possible cost to taxpayers. The basic fee will be raised to \$700 for estates, and the basic hourly fee will rise to \$100 per hour. This still represents a 20% saving on the minimum fee in private industry.

Mr Humphries said the initiatives reflected the Government’s recognition of the important role of the Public Trustee in providing financial management services to people with impaired decision making ability and the importance of having information available to assist people in our community in making provision for their future, through wills and Enduring Powers of Attorney, while they have capacity to do so.

*Further information is available by contacting the Public Trustee, Diane Kargas, on 6207 9800.*

**Statement Ends**