Territory Treasurer Syd Stirling said today that the Federal Treasurer had given a firm commitment to jointly review Australian Bureau of Statistics processes that have lead to a $25 million loss to the Territory in 2003-04.

"While the path was not clear for Mr Costello to give back the $25 million the Territory has lost due to population revisions, he said he would raise the Territory’s concerns with the ABS and would ask them to look into it as a priority," Mr Stirling said.

"Unfortunately the Territory Government still faces a tight Budget in 2003-04."

Speaking after the Treasurers’ Ministerial Conference in Canberra, Mr Stirling said he had raised concerns with Federal Treasurer Peter Costello about the way ABS estimates consistently underestimated Territory population figures.

"I pointed out to Mr Costello that the NT’s Indigenous population, particularly in remote areas, was regularly undercounted by the ABS – a problem widely acknowledged by academics and experts," Mr Stirling said.

"I asked Mr Costello to make it clear to the ABS that accurate recording of Indigenous Australians was essential and that appropriate resources be directed to this task as a matter of urgency.

"Although the Commonwealth will not reinstate the $25 million, Mr Costello’s commitment to seek action from the ABS over this issue shows that he is listening."

Mr Stirling said it was confirmed at today’s conference that the Territory would receive around $1,591.2 million in GST Revenue Grants in 2003-04.

"This is $13 million more than was estimated at the time of the Mid-Year Report – not the close to $40 million increase we were hoping for," he said.

"Unfortunately, this small increase goes nowhere near covering the high and ever-increasing costs of delivering services in the Territory."

"While the Government will not be cutting essential services such as health and education in the upcoming Budget, this disappointing result means that there will be little scope for the development of any new initiatives."