Territory to join witness protection scheme

The NT Government will introduce legislation in Parliament this week to enable the Territory to increase its participation in the fight against organised crime.

The Witness Protection Bill will see the NT join the National Witness Protection Scheme.

The scheme is designed to help combat organised crime and to solve major crimes.

It will enable law enforcement officers to seek and obtain identity documents for witnesses and their family members so they are protected before and after the giving of evidence.

Police, Fire and Emergency Services Minister Syd Stirling said the Territory’s legislation would complement the Commonwealth Witness Protection Act.

Mr Stirling said passage of the legislation in the Northern Territory would finalise the scheme nationally because all other jurisdictions already have witness protection legislation.

"The scheme is designed to encourage witnesses to come forward and give evidence with the knowledge they will have full protection from the criminals they have helped to convict," he said.

"This can only assist in the fight against serious crime in the NT and nationwide.

"Until now the process has been carried out through interstate agencies but the Commonwealth Act now means the Territory is obliged to carry its own weight in the national scheme.

"This legislation will be another ingredient in the battle against major crime which is often related to illicit drugs."

Under the system police will be able to apply to the Supreme Court for the necessary orders to allow a new identity to be created for a person.

Mr Stirling said that before this happened police, the witness and family members taking part in the scheme would be required to enter into a memorandum of understanding so each understood and agreed to the obligations.