The Territory Government has called on the Commonwealth to reconsider its approach to DNA laws, which is hindering the establishment of an effective national DNA database.

Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services Syd Stirling told Parliament today that recent events clearly highlighted that Australia did not have the cross-border DNA exchange arrangements it needed.

Mr Stirling said the Commonwealth’s insistence that all jurisdictions follow its ‘model’ legislation was inhibiting implementation of an effective national DNA database.

"The Commonwealth’s approach fails to realise the potential DNA has to solve crimes across Australia," he said.

"The Commonwealth will not allow the Territory to join a national DNA database unless we water down our DNA laws to comply with its ‘model’ legislation.

"If the Territory moved towards the Commonwealth’s model, it would seriously reduce the capacity of NT Police to use DNA as a crime fighting tool.

"If we were to follow their model, we would no longer be able to collect and analyse DNA samples from people suspected of crimes such as burglary and car theft.

"It would mean imposing complex procedures and time limits which delay investigations and invite legal challenge.

"Criminals do not respect borders. An efficient, effective system of cross-border DNA information exchange would play a pivotal role in fighting crime throughout Australia.

"Given the importance, accuracy and lack of intrusiveness of DNA as a means of identifying offenders or eliminating people from investigations, the NT questions what purpose is served by restricting its use."

Mr Stirling said that it was also the responsibility of the States and Territories to help bring about the establishment of an effective national database.

"I will be taking the Territory’s position to the Australasian Police Minister’s Conference being held in Darwin on 5 - 6 November and will be calling on all jurisdictions to make greater use of DNA as a modern crime fighting tool.

"I believe there is support from other jurisdictions for our position.

"The Territory recently entered into one-off exchange arrangements with New South Wales and South Australia.

"We are also having early but constructive discussions with Western
Australia, Tasmania and Queensland about entering into a general agreement for the exchange of DNA information.

"However a patchwork of agreements is no substitute for a strong, effective national scheme."