The Northern Territory Government will build closer ties and develop economic opportunities with East Timor, following a meeting between Asian Relations and Trade Minister Paul Henderson and East Timorese Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri in Dili this morning.

"The Northern Territory has a special relationship with East Timor, and now is the time to build on these strong ties," said Mr Henderson.

"The economy in East Timor is struggling and the Northern Territory Government believes there are many ways in which we may be able to work with East Timor to help with development of this new nation."

Mr Henderson said key areas of interest for development projects already identified were tourism, fisheries, education and health, and the East Timorese Government is planning to visit Darwin in March or April to hold an investment seminar.

"Legislation is going through their Parliament at the moment to give legal certainty for foreign investment, lands tenure and labour relations," he said. "The East Timorese Government will promote this new regime to businesses when it comes to Darwin.

"This will provide an excellent opportunity in which to build on the discussions from today and take stock of the progress that has been made in joint projects."

Mr Henderson said he had also spoken with Prime Minister Alkatiri about the ratification of the Timor Sea Treaty.

"I congratulated the Prime Minister and the East Timorese Parliament on ratifying the Timor Sea Treaty on the East Timor side," he said. "After speaking with Prime Minister Alkatiri and the Commonwealth Government, I am confident that the discussions about the treaty are progressing, with detailed negotiations taking place at a bilateral level.

"I am hopeful the issue will be resolved soon."