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Australia secures complete national DNA sharing

After eight years of great effort to resolve legislative and policy complexities affecting the Commonwealth, states and territories, Australia now has a complete national framework for cross-jurisdictional DNA matching to allow a coordinated approach to crime-solving.

The national DNA database is maintained by CrimTrac - the agency responsible for developing information sharing solutions for law enforcement - and allows police and forensic scientists from all nine police jurisdictions to compare DNA profiles across borders and exchange information held in every state and territory.

CrimTrac CEO, Ben McDevitt said all nine jurisdictions could now match with one another, making it even more difficult for criminals to hide.

“The last of the 36 combinations has just been switched on, allowing New South Wales to match with the Northern Territory. This means that all jurisdictions can now carry out complete inter-jurisdictional matching,” Mr McDevitt said.

The national database contains DNA profiles collected from crime scenes, serious offenders, suspects, objects belonging to missing persons and unknown deceased persons. It has the ability to identify possible links to a suspect or crime and where jurisdictional legislation allows, can also compare DNA profiles from suspects with profiles from unsolved crime scenes.

“The benefits of a national database are twofold: the technology provides police with the ability to match DNA profiles with all jurisdictions, greatly assisting investigations, as well as foster faster outcomes in the resolution of unsolved crime,” Mr McDevitt said.

“While most states and territories already have their own DNA databases, a national system allows law enforcement agencies to work together to establish links between cases.”

“For example, if someone was to commit a serious crime in one jurisdiction, leaving his or her own DNA at the crime scene, and then move to another jurisdiction, where the person carried out another crime which led to their arrest and their DNA being taken, there would be two law enforcement agencies with that person’s DNA profile and a link between the two cases would inevitably occur.”

“As well as tracking criminal transience, the national DNA database has an important role to play in protecting the innocent and identifying unknown deceased.”

“Full usage of the national DNA database will result in police matching more unknown DNA profiles left at crime scenes with people throughout Australia and assist in solving serious cases where there may be few other leads.”

CrimTrac’s role is to provide a reliable technological platform to enable national sharing of DNA database information and encourage harmonisation of the various states and territories’ legislation to permit the exchange of DNA information.