

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Chief Minister:

Appropriation Bill – Northern Territory Electoral Commission

Please provide copies of:

- All questions, which have been received from the public in relation to the Estimates process and consideration of the Appropriation Bill for the 2017/18 financial year; and
- The answers to those questions that were presented to the Estimates Committee.

Please provide the information requested below for Agencies and Government authorities for which you have responsibility, as at 31 March 2017.

NORTHERN TERRITORY ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Please accept apologies if questions are not under the correct Output. Where this is the case, it would be appreciated if you could indicate the appropriate Output in your response. Thank You.

OUTPUT GROUP: ELECTORAL SERVICES

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Estimates – Electoral Commission

1. Please advise the total cost of the Territory election?

\$3,460,741.

2. What amount was not covered by appropriation and covered by Treasurer's Advance?

\$2 million was covered through appropriations, with the balance covered through a Treasurer's advance.

3. Did this represent the total difference between advance funding and final actual expenditure? If not why not?

Yes.

4. Please advise the cost of the electronic certified lists for the Territory election?

\$438 000 which includes a \$125 000 contribution towards the 'joint pool' of 685 netbooks with Elections ACT.

5. What interpretation services were provided for Indigenous people in the NT election?

A 'how to vote' digital training tool was developed and displayed on tablets at voting centres. The one minute video explained how to mark a ballot paper and could be viewed in 13 Indigenous languages.

There were 44 Indigenous staff engaged as local assistants during mobile polling. Part of their duties was to repeat instructions to voters in language.

6. Please advise the participation rate for voters in remote areas of the Territory and whether there has been an increase or decrease since the 2012 Territory election. If so what is this attributed to? Please advise the cost.

The average turnout in the seven remote divisions was 59.2% representing a 2.8% decrease from the 2012 Territory election. The decrease was in line with an overall decrease of 2.9% compared to the 2012 Territory election.

Reasons for the decrease in turnout include:

- voter fatigue or confusion due to the federal election taking place eight weeks prior to the Territory election
- elector apathy or disengagement
- a decline in the quality of the electoral roll

7. How is the success of this investment measured?

The outcomes of the election were measured through key performance indicators contained in the 2016 Territory election charter. The 2016 Territory Election report details performance against these key performance indicators.

8. Were any complaints lodged in relation to the NT election and if so what were they and have they been investigated?

There were numerous minor complaints lodged during the election period that were addressed through liaison with parties, candidates and campaign workers.

Two formal written complaints were investigated. One was received during the election period alleging electioneering in an electorate office located within 100m of an early voting centre. The other written complaint was received post-election alleging breaches of the 100m prohibition boundary at remote polling locations in the Division of Namatjira.

9. What was the outcome of these investigations?

The complaint regarding the electorate office was investigated by the Department of Legislative Assembly as electioneering within electorate offices is prohibited under Remuneration Tribunal No 1 of 2015. Their investigation found no evidence of electioneering occurring within the electorate office.

The NTEC investigated the complaint regarding breaches of the 100m prohibition and sought further information from relevant parties and candidates as well as mobile polling staff and NT police. As there was insufficient verifiable evidence, no further action was taken. The 2016 election report states that that it was impractical to administer the 100m boundary in remote divisions and recommends changes to the prohibition boundary.

10. What was the cost of mobile polling for the NT election and did any issues arise as has been the case in previous elections?

The cost of mobile polling was \$504,327.

The partnership with the Department of Human Services to deliver remote polling services and the development of a digital training tool (translated into 13 Indigenous languages), significantly decreased issues and complaints regarding mobile polling compared to previous elections. There was one local assistant dismissed, shortly after voting commenced, after it was alleged that their interpretation service was not entirely impartial.

11. What percentage of those eligible to vote did not and what action has been taken in relation to these people?

Of eligible voters, 26% did not vote. Valid excuses were provided by 1739 electors, 2324 made an attempt to postal vote and there were 2356 rejected declaration votes.

There were 15,074 non-voter first notices sent on 18 November 2016 and a further 8,526 second notices sent on 13 February 2017.

Non-voters (who have provided an email address on the enrolment form) were emailed requesting that they be correctly enrolled for the August 2017 NT Local Government elections.

12. Please outline matters raised by the Electoral Commissioner post Territory election, the nature of these matters and action taken and proposed.

The election report was tabled in May 2017 and there are 24 recommendations listed in the report. These recommendations and matters raised in the report are currently being considered in consultation with the Electoral Commission.

13. Please advise the local government by-elections that were held in the period to 31 March this year.

There were no local government by-elections conducted.

14. What was the cost of these elections and was 100% cost recovery achieved? If not, why not?

There were no local government by-elections conducted.

15. Please advise if any issues arose during the conduct of these elections and what action has resulted.

There were no local government by-elections conducted.

16. Please advise what provision has been made for the conduct of the 2017 Local Government elections.

Service level agreements were negotiated with each council for election services to be provided for the Local Government elections.

Regional Councils have been working with the Electoral Commission to review the electoral roll in remote communities.

17. Please advise the infrastructure that is planned for the conduct of the 2017 Local Government elections?

Where possible, infrastructure procured and developed for the 2016 Legislative Assembly election will be reused at the 2017 Local Government election. This includes electronic certified lists, advertising products, website, virtual tally room and enhancement to the election management system.

By negotiating service level agreements with regional councils, they have committed to provide specific resources (i.e. premises, vehicles, staff) to assist in conducting mobile voting. Vehicles and charter flights will be procured through the whole-of-government contract.

Early voting centres will be established in major centres.

A website has been developed for the Local Government election and enhancements made to the virtual tally room.

A call centre will operate from the Darwin office.

18. Please advise the education programs that are planned in the lead up to the Local Government elections.

In co-operation with LGANT and councils, candidate information presentations have been conducted. The presentation is also available in video format on the NTEC website and YouTube page.

Since March, the NTEC has worked with regional councils to review the electoral roll in remote communities.

Election newsletters containing relevant information about the election, are being emailed to incumbent members and anyone who has registered an interest in contesting the election. The newsletters are also available on the NTEC website.

A 'how to vote' digital training tool has been developed and will be displayed on electronic tablets at voting centres. The one minute video explains how to mark a ballot paper and is available in 13 Indigenous languages.

The digital enrolment campaign commenced in June 2017, with the television, newspaper, radio and social media campaigns commencing in July 2017.

The formality advertising campaign will commence in August 2017. Emails and SMS will be sent to electors who have made their contact details available, to inform them about voting services.

19. What will this cost and what is specifically proposed for non-urban communities?

The budget for the Public Awareness campaign for the 2017 Local Government election is \$350 000. This includes all advertising, website, social media, call centre and other communication products/services.

A digital training tool translated into 13 Indigenous languages and SMS messages, will specifically target non-urban communities.

20. Please identify the differences in arrangements for the 2017 Local Government elections and outline the reasons why and the costs involved.

The 2017 Local Government election is conducted as a separate election for each council. Election services for each council are negotiated through service level agreements. While electoral services will be similar to the 2016 Legislative Assembly election, they are tailored to meet the requirements of each council.

The elections are conducted on a fee-for-service marginal cost recovery basis. Electoral services procured and developed for the 2016 Legislative Assembly election will be reused, wherever possible. While electoral services will be similar to the Legislative Assembly election their scale will be reduced to lower election costs. The estimated cost of the 2017 Local Government election is \$1.72 million.

OUTPUT GROUP: CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

OUTPUT: CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

Staffing

1. Please advise the number of Full Time Equivalents currently employed within this Agency, broken down by Output and Business Unit.

There are 13 FTE - 11 classified under the output electoral services and the remaining two in corporate and governance.

Six staff are employed in the operations section, three in public awareness, two in corporate and two in executive.

2. How many Full Time Equivalents have resigned, retired, taken a redundancy package or have been made redundant, or terminated? Please break down these numbers by Output and Business Unit.

None.

3. What has happened to these positions? Has the work been reallocated to existing staff?

Not applicable.

4. Are there any plans to fill these positions in the near future?

Not applicable.
