

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**WRITTEN QUESTION**

Mr Higgins to the Chief Minister:

**Annual Report – NT Electoral Commission**

1. How could the Commission have improved voter enrolment and participation in remote areas in NT elections conducted and what are the future plans?
  2. The average turnout in the seven remote divisions in the 2016 election was 59.2% representing a 2.8% decrease from 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 rollWhat measures will the Commission be putting in place to better support people of voting age in remote areas of the Territory to both enrol and vote?
  3. Please provide the details of the remote voter engagement program being developed with the AEC.
  4. The election report was tabled in May 2017 and there were 24 recommendations listed in the report. Please advise the status of each of the recommendations.
  5. What feedback was received from stakeholders post- election and what new performance measures have been put in place as a result? Please advise the specific KPIs.
  6. Will those voters who are enrolled but did not vote be fined? Please explain the reasons for your answer.
  7. In relation to the conduct of the 2017 Local Government elections please advise on the success or otherwise of the following:
    - Early voting centres established in major centres
    - Website developed and enhancements made to the virtual tally room
    - A call centre operating from the Darwin office
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## ANSWER

1. The most effective way to improve enrolment participation in remote areas is through the delivery of face-to-face enrolment services. At the 2016 Territory election we worked with regional councils and field staff of the Department of Housing and Community Development to deliver enrolment services. In addition, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) contracted Department of Human Services to enrol and confirm enrolment of remote electors during their field visits. Whilst these initiatives generated some enrolment transactions a stand-alone field program would likely have produced better results.

A proposal is being prepared to establish a remote education and engagement program from 2018/19 to improve roll accuracy in remote divisions prior to the commencement of the redistribution in February 2019.

2. As stated in response to question 1, a proposal to establish an ongoing remote education and engagement program to increase enrolment and voter participation in remote divisions.
3. Subsequent to the tabling of the 2016 Territory election report, the 2017/18 Budget announced that the AEC was reducing the number of NT staff from 15 to 3. All NT enrolment functions are now managed from Queensland. The AEC have not provided details, but advised that they're currently exploring a number of options to better engage with remote communities in the NT, with a view to commencing activity in the first quarter of 2018. Rather than administer a remote program from Queensland, it is proposed that both organisations jointly fund a remote education and engagement program managed by the NTEC. See response to question one.
4. A Northern Territory Government discussion paper on electoral reform that references the recommendations in the election report (excluding political donations) was released in November 2017 with public comments closing on 19 January 2018.

Recommendations relating to political donations are being considered by the current *Inquiry into Options for the Reform of Political Funding and Donations* in the Northern Territory. The discussion paper was released in October 2017 with public comment closing on 15 December 2017.

It is expected that the government will formally respond to the recommendations in the report in the first half of 2018.

5. Feedback was received from political parties, candidates, media and election staff. There have been no new KPIs put in place; however, the feedback will be used to revise electoral practices and develop the election charter (that will include KPIs) for the 2020 Territory election.
6. Electors with a deliverable mail address were issued a non-voter fine. Approximately \$40 000 was collected from payment of fines.

7. Following a trend from the 2016 Territory election a significant number of electors opted to vote before election day for the 2017 NT Council elections: Alice Springs 5084; Casuarina 6554; Darwin 5434; Katherine 2236; Litchfield 3476; and Tennant Creek 995.

There were significant enhancements to the website, election management system and virtual tally room to incorporate the requirements of a local government general election. The 2017 NT Council elections website was launched in early June and provided comprehensive information for candidates and voters. It also hosted dedicated election results pages, included details on vote counting, and showed all remote, early and election day voting centre information.

The call centre operated from 2 August to 28 August. The call centre received 3254 phone calls; 1379 emails; 615 non-voter excuses; 694 enrolment queries; and 462 postal voting enquiries.