

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Question Taken on Notice

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From: J Davis

To: Hon Lia Finocchiaro

Portfolio: Chief Minister

Agency: Northern Territory Electoral Commission

Subject: Costs of running a two week early voting period

QUESTION:

Can you please outline the costs of running a two-week as compared with a one week early voting period?

ANSWER:

The Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) has recently conducted two by-elections that provide a useful comparison of the costs associated with one-week and two-week early voting periods:

Election	Early voting period	Enrolled electors	Premise cost (excl. GST)	Staff costs (excl. GST)	Total early voting cost (excl. GST)
Nightcliff By-election (March 2026)	2 weeks (11 voting days)	5,940	Nightcliff Commercial Precinct \$29,672	7 staff \$28,660	\$58,332
Chan Ward By-election (May 2026)	1 week (6 voting days)	12,636	Rapid Creek Business Village \$9,084	7 staff \$18,014	\$27,098

These by-elections were conducted in comparable metropolitan areas and provide an indication of the principal costs associated with early voting.

The largest variation in total cost between the two elections was attributable to the cost of leasing the premises. In most cases, early voting venues are secured under short term commercial leases with a minimum lease period of one month. Consequently, reducing the early voting period does not necessarily result in a corresponding reduction in venue costs. Where a property owner is prepared to negotiate a shorter lease, some savings may be achieved, however this cannot be assumed for all venues.

Staffing costs are more directly affected by the length of early voting. In these 2 examples, staffing costs for the two- week early voting period were approximately 59.1% higher than for the one-week period.

The number of staff required at an early voting centre is determined by a range of operational considerations, including:

- expected number of electors
- location and accessibility of the venue
- capacity and layout of the premises
- size of the ballot paper
- the number of ballot papers issued to each elector
- the number of ballot boxes being managed in the voting centre.

For the Nightcliff By-election, staffing levels were higher than would ordinarily be expected because the early voting centre operated from a new venue with no historical attendance data, the location had high visibility and drive-by exposure, and the election attracted greater public interest as a Legislative Assembly by-election.

During the one-week early voting period for the Chan Ward by-election, the NTEC trialled extended voting hours on the Thursday night, with the early voting centre remaining open until 7:00pm instead of the standard 5:00pm closing time. The extended hours were well utilised and provided a convenient alternative for electors who were unable to attend during standard business hours. Considering the positive response, the NTEC intends to incorporate extended evening voting hours into future elections.

At general elections voters can vote at any early voting centre across the Northern Territory during the two week early voting period. Any reduction in voting services would require an impact analysis and if implemented a targeted public awareness campaign to ensure electors were aware of the changed arrangements. This would result in additional communication and advertising costs, although these would be difficult to quantify in advance.