



Northern Territory Electoral Commission

EVERY vote counts!

Thursday, 22 August 2019

APATHY THE BIGGEST THREAT TO TERRITORY DEMOCRACY

With one year to go until the 2020 Territory election NT Electoral Commissioner Iain Loganathan said elector apathy poses the greatest threat to democracy in the Northern Territory.

In the 2016 Territory election there were 135,506 electors on the roll, but only 100,304 of those turned out and voted.

"More than 2000 of those who did vote didn't have their votes counted because they were informal," Mr Loganathan said.

Surveys of ballots after the 2016 Territory election also found that 80 per cent of the informal votes cast were done so intentionally.

"We find ballot papers with all sorts of messages and creative images scribbled over them." Subtract the informal votes from the turnout figure and that means only 72 per cent of enrolled voters had their say at the 2016 poll.

That rate looks far worse when considering the accuracy of the Territory electoral roll. According to ABS statistics it is estimated that there are a further 25,000 Territorians missing from the electoral roll. About 16,000 of those are Aboriginal.

Adding those 25,000 to the roll figure of 135,506 would mean that the actual voter turnout of 100,304 in 2016 was just 62 per cent of eligible voters.

Mr Loganathan said that the 25,000 people missing was the equivalent to nearly five NT electorates.

"The figures are both revealing and concerning," Mr Loganathan said.

"The electoral boundaries in the Territory may look very different if those missing electors were on the roll.

"The 2016 Territory election was the first time that we had a division that had an elector turnout of less than 50 per cent. That was in the bush electorate of Arnhem."

"And just recently, the two Territory electorates of Lingiari and Solomon produced the worst and second-worst turnouts in the country at the May Federal election."

Mr Loganathan said that gap between the bush and the urban areas in terms of roll accuracy was widening.

"The Australian Electoral Commission's automatic enrolment update system works well in urban areas but it doesn't operate in rural and remote areas."

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Mr Loganathan said that the roll wasn't the only issue confronting the NTEC in terms of voter participation.

"There is consistently low voter participation in remote communities.

"We have conducted surveys and the responses we have received are quite disheartening.

"When asked their views on voting, an overwhelming response we have received is 'Why bother? Nothing changes'."

"People need to get on the roll and when they do they need to participate in the process. Because if the people who live in the Territory don't care about the Territory, who will?"

The next Northern Territory general election will be held on 22 August, 2020.

Enrol to vote online at www.ntec.nt.gov.au