

# Northern Territory Electoral Commission



**ELECTIONS  
2008  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Report  
on the  
Northern Territory Municipal Elections  
held  
Saturday 29 March 2008**



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## PART 1

### 1.1 Background

The Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) provides independent electoral services to the people of the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, local government councils and other organisations.

Three of its key functional responsibilities are:

- maintaining the Northern Territory electoral roll
- managing parliamentary and non-parliamentary elections including local government and fee for service elections
- delivering public electoral awareness programs.

### 1.2 Legislation

Legislation prescribing procedures for the conduct of local government elections is contained in the *Local Government Act* and the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations*. The Department of Local Government has carriage of both of those pieces of legislation.

Electoral provisions in the *Local Government Act* and *Electoral Regulations* often mirror the NT *Electoral Act* (NTEA), which governs Legislative Assembly elections. The NTEA was substantially amended in 2004 but changes were not introduced into local government electoral legislation.

Proposals were released in 2007 to provide a new local governance structure for the NT that provided for four municipalities (i.e. Darwin City Council, the City of Palmerston and the Town Councils of Katherine and Alice Springs) with the remaining areas to be divided into shires. Whilst some amendments have been made to the original proposal, elections for the four municipalities were held on the last Saturday in March (29<sup>th</sup>) 2008, with shire elections tentatively scheduled for October 2008.

The 2008 municipal elections were held under the provisions of the *Local Government Act* and the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations* in force at 1 January 2008, using many procedures that are no longer in step with current Legislative Assembly elections. As at the end of May 2008, new statutory provisions for local government have been passed in the parliament with revised regulations to be established in the near future.

### 1.3 Tendering process

The four municipalities made separate approaches to the NTEC requesting cost or fee proposals for electoral services for the March 2008 elections. The first approach was made in late July and the last in mid-September 2007. Times provided for preparing the proposals varied from two months to two weeks.

The engagement process was not very satisfactory from the NTEC's perspective. The provision of separate estimates for individual councils at a periodic election is problematical as economies of scale and the most effective logistical arrangements are difficult to estimate in the absence of an assurance that all councils will engage the one provider.

Further, the NTEC was not confirmed as the preferred provider for the four councils until November 2007. This left only three months to finalise a program prior to roll close on 22 February 2008. As the three month period included the Christmas/New Year holiday break, it could not be fully utilised to advance preparations with permanent/polling staff on leave and many schools and business either closed down or operating on skeleton staff.

Despite the challenges involved, however, the NTEC did prepare and forward detailed estimates of charges to councils within the required timeframes during September and October. They were based on the delivery of best practice electoral services and included some program options for the councils to consider. With no guarantees that it would be the nominated service provider, the NTEC then commenced tentative bookings for banner space in public areas as these must be secured in some areas several months in advance.

In this context, it should also be remembered that the NTEC absorbs many costs at local government elections and only passes on its marginal costs to councils. Under these circumstances, it is clear no other provider can compete with the NTEC on price.

During the consultation process with councils, two expressed concerns regarding the optimum number of static polling places which would be open on polling day, and one council later asked for an extension to the mobile polling program to take account of electors drawn into the municipality due to boundary changes. Although the selection of polling places is at the discretion of the returning officer, the matters raised by council were taken on board by the NTEC and a satisfactory conclusion for all concerned was reached.

#### 1.4 Key dates

The election timetable is attached at Appendix A. Key dates of the election included:

Close of rolls	6pm Friday 22 February 2008
Close of nominations	12 noon Friday 7 March 2008
Commencement of pre-poll voting/postal mail-out	from 2pm Friday 7 March 2008
Mobile polling commenced	9am Tuesday 25 March 2008
Polling day	Saturday 29 March 2008

#### 1.5 Planning and project approach

A list of key project areas was compiled for the allocation of resources. Projects identified included:

- corporate badging, stakeholder liaison, statutory instruments, evaluation
- public awareness – enrolment stimulation, education and information
- staff resourcing and training
- roll management
- materials despatch/return and transport arrangements
- operational issues
- results
- ICT infrastructure
- financial management.


## PART 2

### 2.1 Corporate Platform

The NTEC incorporated in its materials a ballot box graphic



the agency acronym and a slogan promoting participation

and, where appropriate, the logo devised for the elections by LGANT 

Liaison was maintained with councils, candidates, Australia Post (householder notice and despatch/return of postal vote envelopes), the Government Printer (roll products and ballot paper printing), the website provider and Fujitsu and DCIS for system support. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) provided support for roll management and the use of their experienced personnel to supplement the small staff resources of the NTEC was much appreciated.

Effect was also given to the formal appointment of officials, observing statutory requirements and establishing post poll evaluation from stakeholders and staff.

### 2.2 Public Awareness

The public awareness campaign commenced with an enrolment drive in the major shopping centres. This was supported by TV, radio/print advertising, banners and signage. The cost of the enrolment drive was not charged to councils. Both the NT and Australian Electoral Commissions agreed to promote enrolment through their own resourcing during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the calendar year.

Enrolment stalls were located at prominent supermarkets on each Saturday in the month leading up to, and on, the day the rolls closed on Friday 22 February. Stalls were rotated at less prominent locations in other shopping areas to capture the smaller number of enrolments likely to be obtained in those areas. The results of these are seen below:

Locations	Enrolment Forms		No. of Queries
	Distributed	Collected	
Parap Markets	16	8	11
Smith St Mall	11	7	13
Katherine Oasis	36	18	105
Casuarina Square	26	51	16
Nightcliff	18	7	19
Palmerston	49	49	24
Karama	15	13	21
A/S PO	22	31	65
A/S Todd Mall	4	1	14
A/S Flynn Dr Northside	11	11	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>302</b>

Enrolment stalls were equipped with brochures containing information on the municipal elections. AO sized posters were printed to notify passing traffic of the upcoming elections. The NTEC would recommend using corflute signage for future elections.

Three radio and TV advertisements went to air with two different messages at appropriate periods in the election timetable. The first advertised the close of rolls whilst the second advertised pre-poll voting and polling day. Hot 100, Mix FM, 8HA and SCTV7 offered the optimal footprint to the target audiences. In the case of Darwin City Council (DCC), the TV advertisements were forwarded to DCC as requested to facilitate additional advertising with their preferred/contracted broadcaster (Channel 9). The NTEC liaised with DCC to synchronise timetabling for maximum impact.

Banners were placed at previously booked locations but were removed at two locations in Darwin. One of these banners was stolen and a new banner had to be procured at short notice.

The Commission undertook to inform electors at locations where no polling facility would be offered of alternative places to vote. Corflute signage was arranged and, with permission from schools and businesses, erected on the relevant premises from the beginning of the election week. The advance warning raised public awareness of voting facilities amongst staff and parents of school children.

Householder notices were mailed to all municipal households. Business and PO Box address were excluded as there was no way of determining the residential address of the recipient. The notice advised eligible electors of the elections and of a choice of polling place locations appropriate to their enrolled address.

The regional newspaper advertising campaign was designed to meet both the returning officer's statutory and discretionary public awareness obligations. The NTEC website provided up-to-date information throughout the election period. In addition, home-pages such as the NTG inter/intranet were used to help promote the key dates.

Media releases were also forwarded in a timely manner to all relevant bodies, including candidates after the close of nominations. Candidates and CEOs were kept informed electronically by the regular release of election bulletins. Any candidates who did not provide an email address received a bulletin via Australia Post.

The voting campaign also sought to target school newsletters, supermarkets and culturally diverse groups with moderate success. For the defence forces, the NTEC was able to utilise signal text for internal defence communications for the first time.

### **2.3 Staff resourcing and training**

Before Christmas 2007, the NTEC contacted by letter 898 staff recorded on its election management system to see if they were interested in working in 2008 at either the municipal or shire elections. One hundred and one (11.2%) had moved interstate or were returned to sender (RTS). Of the remaining 797 persons, 510 did not reply.

The 287 (36.0%) who replied created a preliminary pool on which to draw whilst many staff who did not respond initially were eventually recruited. Predictably, the NTEC



experienced many staff withdrawals as polling day approached and at times struggled to replenish the staff ranks. Clearly, there is an increasing reluctance to commit to a long day as a polling official, especially taking on the responsibility of running a polling place.

Charles Darwin University (CDU) was approached to advertise data entry opportunities on its intranet but no applications were forthcoming from that source. A local private sector agency provided a small number of staff for post polling day arrangements.

Staff manuals, home workbooks, powerpoint presentations, forms and returns were reviewed before the election. It is noted that these will once again require detailed examination when new local government regulations are released to ensure they reflect a number of new processes and references.

Whilst polling official training documentation adequately meets current needs, the documentation of some of the other post poll operational processes could be improved. The NTEC intends to devote some attention to documenting those processes in the future.

## 2.4 Close of Rolls

Roll changes were made by the AEC to incorporate 169 electors into the Katherine Town Council area following an expansion of its boundaries, Gazetted 4 January 2008. Roll close for the municipal elections was 6pm Friday 22 February 2008.

Comparative enrolment figures are as follows:

Council/Ward		2004	2008	+ % change 2004-2008
Darwin	Chan	9767	10088	3.3
	Lyons	10712	13127	22.5
	Richardson	10142	10475	3.3
	Waters	9181	9476	3.2
Darwin Total		39802	43166	8.5
Palmerston		12173	14059	15.5
Katherine		4561	4815	5.6
Alice Springs		13943	14564	4.5
TOTAL		70479	76604	8.7

Age and gender breakdowns are as follows:

Council/Ward	No. by age range						Total	No. by gender		
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+		Female	Male	
Darwin	Chan	1059	2082	2131	2062	1647	1107	10088	5090	4998
	Lyons	1567	3202	2772	2471	1978	1137	13127	6229	6898
	Richardson	1180	1916	2157	2345	1846	1031	10475	5315	5160
	Waters	1071	1970	2053	2170	1504	708	9476	4843	4633
Darwin Total		4877	9170	9113	9048	6975	3983	43166	21477	21689
Palmerston		1695	3873	3744	2563	1379	805	14059	7175	6884
Katherine		509	1127	1198	936	684	361	4815	2408	2407
Alice Springs		1516	2918	3381	3400	2167	1182	14564	7574	6990
TOTAL		8597	17088	17436	15947	11205	6331	76604	38634	37970
%		11.2	22.3	22.8	20.8	14.6	8.3	100.0	50.4	49.6

Following roll close, certified lists and reference rolls for the election were printed. The returning officer established a charge of \$5 per election roll for any candidate wanting a reference roll for campaign purposes, as allowed under the legislation.

The roll was provided if a candidate signed a written undertaking to restrict his/her use of the roll to the election period, to campaign purposes, to dispose of it carefully (or hand to an electoral or council office for secure disposal) and not to use or divulge the information contained on the roll for commercial purposes or gain. The NTEC retained the original signed undertaking and stapled a copy of the signed undertaking to the inside cover of any reference roll purchased by a candidate.

## **2.5 Materials despatch, return and transport arrangements**

In order to minimise freight costs, the distribution of materials throughout the NT needed to be highly coordinated. The vehicle for officers travelling to Katherine on different occasions for candidate briefings, nominations close, mobile polling and the scrutiny and count was loaded with cardboard and /or count materials. Officers travelling to Alice Springs loaded electoral materials with their baggage. Other election materials required on an overnight basis were despatched by courier.

## **2.6 Election operations**

### **Nominations**

Nominations opened after roll close on 22 February 2008. The first page of the nomination form was publicly displayed at the principal office of each of the respective councils as they were accepted. This page, together with the candidate contact details (where the candidate had agreed to release) was also displayed on the NTEC website ([www.ntec.nt.gov.au](http://www.ntec.nt.gov.au)).

Nominations for the municipal elections closed at 12 noon Friday 7 March. A public declaration of the names and addresses of all candidates who nominated took place at:

#### **Darwin and Palmerston**

Northern Territory Electoral Commission  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, AANT Building  
79 – 81 Smith Street, Darwin

#### **Katherine**

Katherine Town Council Office  
Stuart Highway  
Katherine

#### **Alice Springs**

Northern Territory Electoral Services Centre  
Suite 4 Leichhardt Building  
16 Leichhardt Terrace, Alice Springs.

The declarations took place after allowing time for last minute processing and consolidation of nomination data. A summary of the nominations follows:

No. vacant positions		36
No. nominations	Mayoral	27
	Aldermanic	63
Total no. nominations		90
No. candidates standing for both mayoral and aldermanic positions		13
No. candidates standing for mayoral position only		14
No. candidates standing for aldermanic position only		50
Total no. candidates standing		77

No. candidates standing for mayor AND alderman*		
Darwin	3	Fox, Gould, Lesley
Palmerston	2	Cabry, Carter
Katherine	2	Coutts, Thompson
Alice Springs	6	Clark, McIvor, Ociones, Ryan, Stewart, van Haaren
Total	13	

\*Note: Counts for Lyons and Waters Wards (Darwin City Council) and Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs aldermanic elections could only be finalised once the outcome for candidates also standing in the mayoral election was known.

Council/Ward		Nominations received				No. candidates ± % change
		2004		2008		
		No. vacancies	No. candidates	No. vacancies	No. candidates	
<b>Darwin</b>	Lord Mayor	1	7	1	11	+57
	Chan	3	8	3	9	+13
	Lyons	3	9	3	6	-33
	Richardson	3	6	3	4	-33
	Waters	3	7	3	4	-43
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>-8</b>
<b>Palmerston</b>	Mayor	1	3	1	3	-
	Alderman	6	12	6	9	-25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>-20</b>
<b>Katherine</b>	Mayor	1	7	1	5	-29
	Alderman	6	14	6	13	-7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>-14</b>
<b>Alice Springs</b>	Mayor	1	4	1	8	+100
	Alderman	10	17	8	18	+5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>+24</b>
<b>4 Councils - MUNICIPAL TOTAL</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>Ratio nominations to positions</b>		<b>2.5:1</b>		<b>2.5:1</b>		

Age and gender breakdowns of nominees were as follows:

Council/Ward	Nominations by age range						Not given	Total	Nom. by gender	
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+			Female	Male
<b>Darwin</b> Lord Mayor			5	1	3	2		11	4	7
Chan		1	1	3	4			9	5	4
Lyons			2	2	2			6	2	4
Richardson			2	2				4	1	3
Waters					3	1		4	2	2
<b>Darwin Total</b>		1	10	8	12	3		34	14	20
<b>Palmerston</b> Mayor				1	1		1	3	0	3
Alderman			2	1	4		2	9	4	5
<b>Total</b>			2	2	5		3	12	4	8
<b>Katherine</b> Mayor				2		2	1	5	2	3
Alderman		1	3	4	2	1	2	13	5	8
<b>Total</b>		1	3	6	2	3	3	18	7	11
<b>Alice Springs</b> Mayor				6	2			8	3	5
Alderman		3		11	2	2		18	8	10
<b>Total</b>		3		17	4	2		26	11	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	5	15	33	23	8	6	90	36	54
%		6.0	18.0	39.0	27.0	10.0			40.0	60.0

Age data was supplied on a voluntary basis and was not provided for 6 nominations. The statistics will assist in analysis and profiling of candidates willing to stand for office on council.

Ballot papers were proofed at the Government Printer that day and printing of all papers was finalised Monday 10 March 2008.

The NTEC notes that it received a number of calls relating to a lack of candidate information eg candidate profiles on websites. Documentation and briefing sessions for candidates could reiterate the need to consider mechanisms for promoting their profile within the community.

## 2.7 Voting outcomes and results - based on mayoral figures

Postal voting and pre-poll voting services were well advertised before polling day and the NTEC experienced an increase in take-up.

The increase in postal and pre-poll voting correlates with a decrease in the number of electors voting 'ordinarily' at a polling place within their own ward/council. This trend for an increasing number of electors to 'vote early' rather than on polling day is being reported in all jurisdictions.

Seven mobile teams were deployed to visit 23 locations in the NT in 2008:

- 8 aged care/nursing home/disabled locations
- 4 hospitals
- 4 renal units
- 2 correctional centres
- 5 communities.

*Mobile polling ballot papers – aged care, medical and corrective locations*

Council	2004	2008	% variation
Darwin	31	33	+6.5
Palmerston	-	15	(NA)
Katherine	19	107	+ > 5 times
Alice Springs	61	46	-24.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>+81.1</b>

*Postal voting ballot papers (returned and accepted into scrutiny)*

Council	2004	2008	% variation
Darwin	432	482	+11.6
Palmerston	74	163	+120.3
Katherine	39	45	+15.4
Alice Springs	84	126	+50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>+29.7</b>

*NB Not all postal ballot papers issued are returned.*

Pre-polling facilities (5) were located in Darwin, Palmerston, Casuarina (one week only), Katherine and Alice Springs.

*Pre-poll voting ballot papers*

Council	2004	2008	% variation
Darwin	1754	2653	+51.3
Palmerston	547	944	+72.6
Katherine	372	641	+72.3
Alice Springs	540	1281	+137.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3213</b>	<b>5519</b>	<b>+71.8</b>

*Ordinary voting*

Council	2004		2008		% variation
	No.	%	No.	%	
Darwin	25928	86.1	24925	81.5	-4.6
Palmerston	8195	89.3	8462	85.5	-3.8
Katherine	2753	84.5	2402	73.0	-11.5
Alice Springs	9280	91.2	8803	85.4	-5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>46156</b>		<b>44592</b>		<b>-3.4</b>

*Reg 46(1), (2) ballot papers - electors who appeared to be unenrolled or crossed off the roll as having voted – roll resolutions*

Council	2004	2008	% variation
Darwin	236	32	-86.5
Palmerston	90	32	-64.5
Katherine	11	10	-9.1
Alice Springs	113	4	-96.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>-82.7</b>

*NB. These envelopes undergo roll and other checks; small numbers only are admitted to the count*

*Reg 46(3) ballot papers – ballot papers from ‘absent’ voters, voting in polling places away from their own council/ward*

Council	2004	2008	% variation
Darwin	1726	2475	+43.4
Palmerston	272	277	+1.8
Katherine	63	86	+36.5
Alice Springs	94	52	-44.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2155</b>	<b>2890</b>	<b>+34.1</b>

*NB. Not all envelopes from absent voters are admitted to the count following compliance checks on each envelope.*

Voting outcomes by vote type

Vote type	2004		2008		% variation
	No.	%	No.	%	
Ordinary at polling place	46156	87.6	44592	82.4	-3.4
Mobile	111	0.2	201	0.4	+81.1
Postal	629	1.2	816	1.5	+29.7
Pre-poll	3213	6.1	5519	10.2	+71.8
Reg 46(1)(2) – roll check	450	0.8	78	0.1	-82.7
Reg 46(3) - absent	2155	4.1	2890	5.3	+34.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>52714</b>		<b>54096</b>		

*Informal voting*

Council/Ward	2004		2008		% change	
	%		%		2004-2008	
	Mayoral	Aldermanic	Mayoral	Aldermanic	Mayoral	Aldermanic
Darwin		8.6 (8)		10.5 (9)		+1.9 (+1)
	Chan			9.4 (6)		+0.6 (-3)
	Lyons	6.0 (7)	7.7 (6)	6.7 (4)	+3.5 (4)	-1.0 (-2)
	Richardson		8.5 (7)	7.2 (4)		-1.3 (-3)
Waters						
Palmerston	6.1 (3)	12.6 (12)	8.3 (3)	11.6 (9)	2.2 (=)	-1.0 (-3)
Katherine	3.6 (7)	7.9 (14)	4.1 (5)	8.4 (13)	+0.5 (-2)	+0.5 (-1)
Alice Springs	4.8 (4)	10.4 (17)	4.6 (8)	10.7 (18)	-0.2 (+4)	+0.3 (+1)

*( ) number of candidates*

See Appendix B for an analysis of categories of informal voting in the four mayoral elections. Approximately two thirds of informal ballot papers appeared to be intentionally informal rather than mistakes being made in marking the ballot paper.

The NTEC was unable to allocate resources to examining informality in aldermanic elections, particularly any failure to sequentially number the voting squares eg in Alice Springs where 18 candidates were nominated.

## Deposits forfeited

A summary of deposits refunded and forfeited is as follows:

Election type	Candidates	
	Refunded \$100 deposit	Forfeiting \$100 deposit to council
<b>Mayoral (27 nominations)</b>		
Elected	4	-
Unsuccessful but polling > one fifth of the primary vote of the successful candidate	11	
Unsuccessful and polling < one fifth of the primary vote of the successful candidate	-	12
<b>Aldermanic (63 nominations)</b>		
Elected	32	-
Unsuccessful but polling > one fifth of the primary vote of the 1 <sup>st</sup> elected candidate	19	
Unsuccessful and polling < one fifth of the primary vote of the 1 <sup>st</sup> elected candidate	-	12
<b>Total (90 nominations)</b>	<b>66 (73%)</b>	<b>24 (27%)</b>

## Turnout

Turnout figures for the four council mayoral elections were as follows:

Council	2004		2008		% variation
	Electors on roll	% voting	Electors on roll	% voting	
Darwin	39802	75.6	<b>43166</b>	<b>70.9</b>	-4.7
Palmerston	12173	75.4	<b>14059</b>	<b>70.4</b>	-5.0
Katherine	4561	71.4	<b>4815</b>	<b>68.2</b>	-3.2
Alice Springs	13943	73.0	<b>14564</b>	<b>70.8</b>	-2.2

The 2008 elections were held at the end of March (as opposed to the end of May in 2004) and just four months after a federal election. The 2008 poll also was conducted at the end of the wet season and included the Easter long weekend and two short working weeks within the election period. These factors may have contributed to reduced voter turn-out.

## 2.8 ICT infrastructure

The fixed dates allowed the NTEC to specify with certainty when it needed extra telephones, hardware and organise their timely installation. It also arranged to have immediate support throughout the election period in the event of system failures.

The NTEC acquired an additional two personal computers linked to the roll management system for the election period to provide telephone enquiry support and computer counting support post poll. A further four personal computers were provided for data entry purposes for the aldermanic elections in the Top End. One lap-top was allocated to the Katherine elections.

The town councils of Katherine and Alice Springs made computer and other facilities available locally for administrative and count purposes.

The NTEC organised the loan of 40 palm-held PDAs for roll checks, from the Victorian Electoral Commission and loaded them with the whole NT roll in i-format

through the courtesy of the New South Wales Electoral Commission. The PDAs were well received by pre-poll staff and declaration voting officers in selected polling places and helped to provide on the spot checks of an elector's enrolled address anywhere in the Territory.

Feedback has been received that all officers attached to an electoral service count centre should have internet log-on facilities and capacity to access the NTEC server. This has been noted and taken up with service providers.

The exhaustive preferential count software owned and used by the NTEC is a DOS based system and more difficult to set up and operate in a windows based environment, particularly with printer access. Whilst the current system is functional, it does not feature the enhancements, user friendliness and reporting capacity of more widely accepted count systems. Once the vote counting system under the new electoral regulations is finalised, the NTEC will explore options to lease or purchase new software compatible with a window-faced operating environment.

## **2.9 Financial management**

GST exclusive cost proposals were put to all councils. They also excluded a number of costs, including:

- normal hours costs for NTEC staff (including all work undertaken prior to engagement)
- use of NTEC assets, equipment and infrastructure
- NTEC's usual fee for service management fees.

An immediate advance was requested from councils in late November 2007 with a final account scheduled to be forwarded in June 2008.



## **PART 3**

### **3.1 Initiatives**

The NTEC put in place the following initiatives for the municipal elections:

- more detailed and formalised cost estimates for councils
- appointment of a senior NTEC officer to liaise with each council
- review of forms, manuals, powerpoint packages, results display on the website, public advertising for clarity of language and updated formatting
- preparation of a structured information package in the election processes for council officers likely to have direct contact with the public during the election period
- email contact with councils and candidates to pass on pertinent election information simultaneously and expeditiously (13 bulletins issued)
- the NTEC relayed advice from the Power and Water Corporation and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to candidates on signage
- candidate contact information (if approval was given) was posted on the NTEC website
- candidates were advised of the protocol for registering complaints
- the use of a LGANT 2008 logo to enhance information materials
- tri-fold A4 brochure as election hand-out, election posters prepared for dissemination through councils
- a roll close reminder for councils to email to all employees
- an election reminder on NTG website
- deployment of palm held i-roll devices (PDAs) for pre-poll roll checks and declaration voting on polling day in selected councils
- legal advice enabled a review of the ballot paper to simplify wording and formatting in the absence of new regulatory provisions.

### **3.2 Issues for the NTEC**

#### *Late engagement*

The NTEC was disadvantaged by the late advice of the appointment of the Electoral Commissioner as returning officer for the elections. The benefits of set term elections are to provide more certainty in reserving facilities, ordering supplies and making arrangements with stakeholders. These benefits are negated if the electoral service provider is unable to implement considered program planning and co-ordination or is unable to provide economies of scale in the tendering process.

If the NTEC is not to be the prescribed service provider for local government general elections under the new regulations, it recommends the appointment of a returning officer be made at least nine (9) months prior to future elections. This will eliminate uncertainty in workload allocations, staff resourcing, recruitment and program planning. It will also allow a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness to be attained in the process.

#### *Polling place discussions*

Discussions on polling place locations took place with two councils. Elector growth in the Top End, the use of common polling locations for all parliamentary and local government elections to ease elector confusion are all issues to be considered by the returning officer.

The NTEC would recommend that the overriding concern for the service provider should be to best cater for an increasing number of electors, minimise elector confusion and offer optimal polling facilities on a cost effective basis.

*Advisory matters*

The NTEC responded to a number of queries regarding adherence to signage regulations which were resolved as quickly as possible with the cooperation of the candidates concerned.

The issue of eligibility arose with respect to a candidate in arrears with rates and a legal opinion was sought. Generally the returning officer has a limited role in assessing eligibility at the point of nomination and accepts the candidate's own declaration of eligibility on the nomination form.

*Cooperation with councils*

The NTEC nominated liaison officers for each council as follows:

<b>Council</b>	<b>Contact Officer/s</b>
Darwin	Bill Shephard, Electoral Commissioner/Returning Officer (NTEC)
Palmerston	Greg Davis, Sr Project Officer (NTEC)
Katherine	Wendy Stow, Electoral Officer (NTEC)
	Steve Telford, Sr Operations Manager (Victorian Electoral Commission)
Alice Springs	Greg Hibble, Regional Coordinator (AEC)

Each of the candidate briefing sessions was attended by a liaison officer and early contact was established with councils, their business managers, media contact personnel and customer service officers to facilitate the election process.

Bulletins were emailed to all CEOs as well as to candidates (the latter after the close of nominations) to keep councils informed of emerging issues relating to candidates and the election.

Council cooperation was sought during the closing of the rolls, premises used for polling, the issuing of pre-poll votes in Palmerston and Katherine, vote counting in Katherine and Alice Springs. At all times, support from council staff was readily given.

The NTEC thanks councils for their positive responses. It has also sought, and will welcome, feedback from councils on any matter associated with the election.

*Recount in Alice Springs*

A full recount of the aldermanic election was ordered by the returning officer within 24 hours of provisional figures being received after the distribution of preferences. It was clear from those provisional results that the computer count procedures had not been properly undertaken. The requirement to conduct a recount delayed the declaration of the result of that poll by four days.

The faults in the initial count were a result of input failures in Alice Springs. It was later identified that a small number of merging or input errors had caused some batches to show up as entirely informal and that verification of the data which would have picked up the error had not been conducted on all batches.

This was determined as an administrative error and no charge for the recount was passed on to council. It is hoped that the planned acquisition of a more user friendly system in the future by the NTEC, supplemented with improved documentation and supervision, will avoid any similar occurrence in the future.

### **3.3 Looking to the future**

Following the elections for the new shires in 2008, a conjoint general periodic election for municipal and shire councils will be held at four yearly intervals commencing in March 2012. Voting will be compulsory. The Electoral Commissioner has roll responsibilities under the new Local Government Act and the returning officer will be appointed by council (or by the Minister). New electoral regulations will be in force.

The NTEC would welcome the opportunity to conduct elections again in 2012 and the chance of working with councils to improve election service delivery at the local government level in the interim.

**Bill Shephard**  
**Returning Officer**

May 2008

## 2008 Municipal Council Elections – Timetable

Date	Time	Election Program	Venue
Friday 22 February 2008	6pm	<b>CLOSE OF ELECTORAL ROLL</b> Nominations Opened	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine Council Offices
Friday 7 March 2008	12 noon	<b>CLOSE OF NOMINATIONS</b>	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs and Katherine Council Offices
	Approx. 2pm	Pre-Poll Voting and Postal Vote Mail-out Commenced	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine Council Offices
Tuesday 25 March 2008	8am	Pre-Poll Voting Commences	Casuarina
	9am	Mobile Polling Commenced	Mobile Polling Places – as per Schedule
Friday 28 March 2008	6pm	Mobile Polling And Pre-Poll Voting Ceased	Mobile Polling Places and All Pre Poll Voting Centres
		Postal Voting Dispatches Ceased	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs, Palmerston and Katherine Council Offices
Saturday 29 March 2008	8am	<b>POLLING DAY</b> Static Polling Commenced	All Static Polling Places
	6pm	Static Polling Ceased	All Static Polling Places
		Primary Counts of Ordinary Votes in Static Polling Places Commenced	All Static Polling Places
		Preliminary Scrutiny, Primary Counts of Pre Poll Votes Commenced	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs and Katherine Council Offices
Monday 31 March 2008	9am	Declaration Vote Verification Checks Commenced Recheck of all counts	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs and Katherine Council Offices
Thursday 3 April 2008	9am	Primary counts of Accepted Declaration Votes	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs and Katherine Council Offices
Friday 4 April 2008	6pm	Deadline for receipt of postal votes at NTEC	
		Primary Counts of Postal Votes Commenced	NTEC Darwin/Alice Springs and Katherine Council Offices
		Distribution of Preferences	
Monday 7 April 2008	10am	Declaration of Results of Poll	Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs Council Offices (latter mayoral only)
Friday 11 April 2008	1pm		ASTC Aldermanic

Study of informality - municipal mayoral elections 2008

Mayoral elections	Apparent deliberate informality					Apparent uninformed informality							Admin error	SubTotal	Total		
	Blank	Scribble	All the same	Other	Sub-Total	Only		Numbering				Signed				Alpha used	
						1st preference	✓ or ×	Duplicated	Non-sequential	Incomplete	Illegible						
<b>Darwin</b>																	
No.	1016	556	314	43	1929	155	66	210	143	369	14	1	0	13	971	<b>2900</b>	
%	35.0	19.2	10.8	1.5	66.5	5.3	2.3	7.2	4.9	12.7	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.4	33.5	<b>9.5</b>	
<b>Palmerston</b>																	
No.	372	172	126	19	689	47	49	3	21	3	5	0	1	2	131	<b>820</b>	
%	45.4	21.0	15.4	2.3	84.0	5.7	6.0	0.4	2.6	0.4	0.6	0.0	0.1	0.2	16.0	<b>8.3</b>	
<b>Katherine</b>																	
No.	35	24	24	1	84	17	8	5	14	2	2	1	1	0	50	<b>134</b>	
%	26.1	17.9	17.9	0.7	62.7	12.7	6.0	3.7	10.4	1.5	1.5	0.7	0.7	0.0	37.3	<b>4.1</b>	
<b>Alice Springs</b>																	
No.	156	77	56	2	291	42	12	36	51	34	1	0	1	2	179	<b>470</b>	
%	33.2	16.4	11.9	0.4	61.9	8.9	2.6	7.7	10.9	7.2	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.4	38.1	<b>4.6</b>	
<b>Total</b>																	
No.	1579	829	520	65	2993	261	135	254	229	408	22	2	3	17	1331	<b>4324</b>	
%	36.5	19.2	12.0	1.5	69.2	6.0	3.1	5.9	5.3	9.4	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.4	30.8		

Notes:

1. Aldermanic informality was not examined on this occasion
2. Over 2/3rds (69.2%) of informality was apparently deliberate and dismissive of voting: highest 84.0% in Palmerston and lowest 61.9% in Alice Springs
3. Less than 1/3rd (30.8%) was apparent uninformed informality: highest 38.1% in Alice Springs, lowest 16.0% in Palmerston.

Legend

Blank	As described
Scribble	Slashes or comments dismissive of voting
All the same	eg 2, 2, 2, 2, 2 or 3, 3, 3, 3, 3 in all voting squares
Other	Insertion of own candidate's name
1st preference	Marked with 1 only
✓ or ×	Marked with a tick or cross only
Duplicated	Preferences repeated eg 1, 2, 2, or 1, 2, 3, 3
Non-sequential	Sequential preferences omitted eg 1, 2, 4, 6,
Incomplete	Insufficient preferences recorded eg 1, 2, 3, and 11 candidates on the ballot paper
Illegible	As described
Signed	Elector identified
Alpha used	Elector used eg A, B, C, D to indicate preferences
Admin error	eg wrong ballot paper in count



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