

**N**ORTHERN  
**T**ERRITORY  
**E**LECTORAL  
**C**OMMISSION



**2005 LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
GENERAL ELECTION REPORT  
PART 1 OF 2**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

(i)	LETTER OF TRANSMISSION.....	1
(ii)	FOREWORD BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER .....	1
1.	INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.1.	PURPOSE .....	2
1.2.	TARGET AUDIENCE.....	2
2.	BACKGROUND .....	3
2.1.	ELECTION TIMETABLE .....	3
2.2.	ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES .....	7
2.3.	PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTION.....	7
2.4.	POLITICAL ADVERTISING AND CAMPAIGNING .....	8
2.5.	MEDIA COVERAGE.....	9
2.6.	POINTS OF INTEREST .....	9
3.	SERVICES TO ELECTORS .....	11
3.1.	ENROLMENT SERVICES.....	11
3.1.1	PRE-ELECTION ENROLMENT DRIVE .....	11
3.1.2	CLOSE OF ROLLS ENROLMENT ACTIVITY .....	12
3.1.3	COMPLETENESS AND ACCURACY OF THE ELECTORAL ROLL.....	13
3.2.	CALL CENTRE.....	16
3.3.	VOTING SERVICES.....	17
3.3.1	ORDINARY VOTING.....	18
3.3.2	ABSENT VOTING .....	20
3.3.3	DECLARATION VOTING – NAMES NOT FOUND ON ROLL .....	21
3.3.4	POSTAL VOTING & PRE-POLL VOTING.....	22
3.3.5	MOBILE POLLING.....	26
3.3.6	ELECTORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.....	30
3.3.7	PARTICIPATION AND FOLLOW-UP.....	31
4.	SERVICES TO CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES .....	34
4.1.	REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES .....	34
4.2.	INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES .....	34
4.3.	NOMINATIONS AND DRAW FOR BALLOT PAPER POSITIONS.....	34
4.4.	ELECTORAL ROLL DATA.....	35
4.5.	NOMINATION DEPOSITS .....	36
4.6.	FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE RETURNS .....	36
5.	FINANCE .....	38
5.1.	OVERALL EXPENDITURE.....	38
5.2.	STAFF COSTS.....	38
5.3.	OPERATING COSTS .....	39
6.	STAFF.....	40
6.1.	RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENTS.....	40
6.2.	MOBILE POLLING STAFF .....	41
6.3.	TRAINING .....	42
6.3.1	TRAINING PROGRAM.....	42
6.3.2	TWO CANDIDATE PREFERRED COUNT .....	44
6.4.	OPERATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES .....	45
7.	SUPPORT SERVICES.....	46
7.1.	SERVICE REQUIREMENTS.....	46
7.2.	PREMISES .....	46
7.3.	IT AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES.....	47
7.4.	ELECTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS) AND WEBSITE .....	48
7.5.	FINANCIAL AND OFFICE MANAGEMENT SERVICES .....	49
8.	LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS & NTEC ACTION ITEMS .....	50
8.1.	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	50
8.2.	NTEC ACTION ITEMS .....	51

**(i) LETTER OF TRANSMISSION**



NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

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The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative  
Assembly of the Northern Territory  
Parliament House  
Darwin NT 0800

Dear Madam Speaker

In accordance with Section 313 of the *Electoral Act 2004*, I am pleased to provide a report on the conduct of the 2005 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly General Election.

As you are aware, the *Electoral Act* requires you to table the report in the Legislative Assembly within three sitting days after its receipt. Additional copies have been provided for this purpose.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BSC' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

BILL SHEPHEARD  
Electoral Commissioner

26 April 2007

## **(ii) FOREWORD BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER**

The 2005 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly General Election represented a significant milestone for electoral administration in the Northern Territory. It was both the first election managed by the Northern Territory Electoral Commission as an independent statutory body and the first conducted under *Electoral Act 2004*. It was also my first General Election as Electoral Commissioner, having taken up the post only a matter of weeks before the election was called.

Service demands grew significantly for this election. The roll increased by 6448 electors, turnout dropped only marginally and informal voting showed a significant reduction. Also noticeable was the sharp rise in electors choosing to avail themselves of the range of voting services offered before Polling Day. This is a growing national phenomenon which is placing an increasingly greater burden on service delivery.

Whilst the election was successfully conducted, a number of opportunities for improvement exist in relation to the planning and delivery of election services in the future.

In particular, the election timetable prescribed in the *Electoral Act* needs to be reviewed in the light of the operational experience at the poll. The brevity of the current timetable is having a major impact on the Commission's capacity to deliver effective services to electors at election time and therefore needs to be extended in the absence of a fixed polling date.

Analysis of election outcomes also suggests that the Commission needs to work hard in the future to improve the public's awareness of their rights and responsibilities and knowledge of the electoral system itself.

Finally, the Commission must also facilitate more considered, open and transparent operations by re-engineering some of its processes and establishing better internal documentation of its own operational policy and procedures.

In closing, it also needs to be said that the success of any election is very much dependent on the hard work and commitment of a large number of permanent and casual staff. I therefore would like to thank everyone who contributed to the 2005 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly General Election, especially our very small band of permanent staff.



BILL SHEPHEARD  
ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a record and analysis of the events and issues that emerged from the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election and to make recommendations and identify action items that will lead to the improvement of election services in the future.

## 1.2. TARGET AUDIENCE

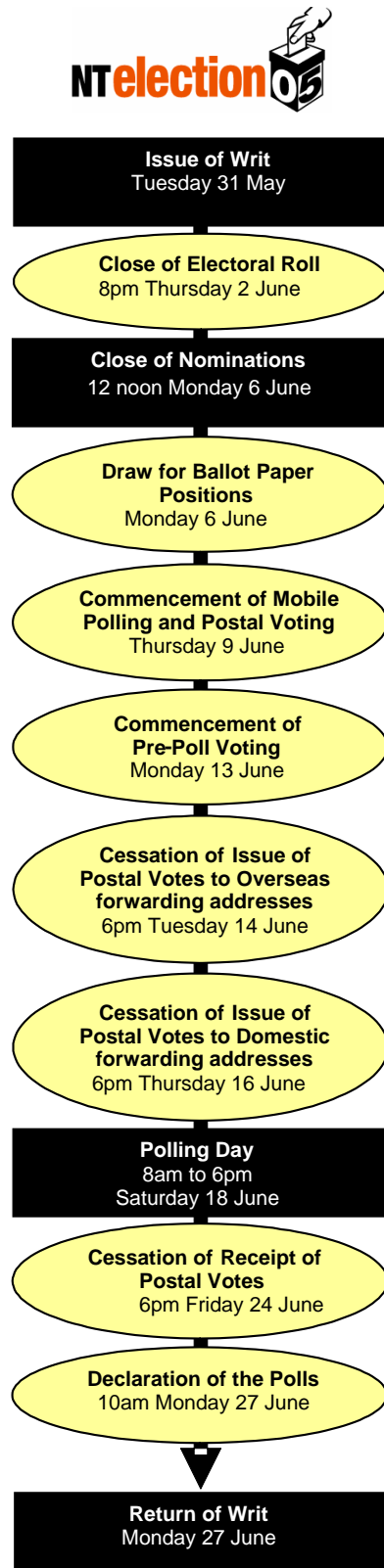
This report has been prepared for tabling in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly.

It has also been compiled to meet the information needs of other Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) stakeholders and interested parties, including:

- Eligible electors and the general public;
- The Chief Minister as responsible minister;
- Political parties and interest groups;
- Members of the media;
- Other electoral authorities;
- Students, teachers and electoral researchers; and
- Northern Territory Electoral Commission staff.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1. ELECTION TIMETABLE



#### TIMETABLE REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE ELECTORAL ACT 2004

##### Issue of Writ (Sect. 27)

The writ authorises the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to conduct the election in accordance with the *Electoral Act 2004*.

The Writ sets the date for the close of nominations, Polling Day and the return of the Writ.

The date of the Writ directly or indirectly triggers all other key milestones and operational deadlines.

Nominations must close at 12 noon 6 days after the issue of the Writ.

Polling Day must be 18 days after the issue of the Writ.

##### Close of Electoral Roll (Sect. 8)

The electoral roll is closed during the period starting at 8 pm 2 days after the date of the issue of a writ for an election and ending at the close of polling for the election.

##### Draw for Ballot Paper Positions (Sect 41)

A draw for ballot paper positions is conducted as soon as practicable after the close of nominations.

##### Mobile Voting (Part 6 Division 6)

Mobile Polling facilities may be provided in remote areas and special institutions.

Mobile polling may start 9 days after the date of the issue of the writ for the election and must end no later than 6 pm on Polling Day.

##### Postal Voting (Sects. 62, 112)

Postal votes may be dispatched 9 days after the date of the issue of the Writ.

An elector may cast a postal vote at any time during the postal voting period which concludes at 6 pm on Polling Day.

Postal votes must be received by 6pm on the Friday following Polling Day in order to be included in the count.

##### Pre-Poll Voting (Sect. 3)

Pre-polling starts 13 days after the date of the issue of the writ and ends at 6 pm on the day before polling day.

##### Declaration of the Polls (Sect. 31)

Results of the election are required to be publicly declared as soon as practicable after they have been determined.

##### Return of the Writ (Sects 133, 134)

The Writ traditionally sets out a date for its return, which is usually about 5 weeks after Polling Day.

##### Disputed Returns (Sect. 236)

An application to dispute the validity of an election must be made to the Supreme Court no later than 21 days after date fixed for the return of the Writ.

Under the *Electoral Act 2004*, a General Election normally cannot be called within three years after the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly that follows the previous General Election. Apart from extraordinary circumstances, the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election could therefore have been called any time between 16 October 2004 and 15 October 2005.

The Chief Minister announced the calling of the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election on Tuesday 31 May 2005 and the Writ was issued on the same day. The key milestones, operational deadlines and legislative base for the 2005 General Election are shown opposite.

The Northern Territory has a shorter election period than any other Australian jurisdiction. The following chart shows the number of days between issue of the Writ and Polling Day at the last General Election in each Australian jurisdiction arranged from the longest to the shortest. In this context, it is noteworthy that the shorter timeframes are generally associated with fixed elections, which allows for many program activities to be scheduled prior to the formal election period.

JURISDICTION	FIXED ELECTION	DAYS BETWEEN ISSUE OF WRIT AND POLLING DAY UNDER CURRENT LEGISLATION (INCLUDES DAY OF WRIT ISSUE)	ACTUAL DAYS BETWEEN ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTION AND POLLING DAY AT LAST GENERAL ELECTION
COMMONWEALTH	No	34 MIN/59 MAX	42
<b>ACT</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>37 FIXED POLLING DAY</b>
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	No <u>NOTE: WA IS CURRENTLY LEGISLATING FOR A FIXED POLLING DAY</u>	FIXED AT 35	35
TASMANIA	No	22 MIN/45 MAX *	29
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>25 MIN/55 MAX</b>	<b>27 FIXED POLLING DAY</b>
QUEENSLAND	No	27 MIN/57 MAX	27
<b>VICTORIA</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26 FIXED POLLING DAY</b>
<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20 FIXED POLLING DAY</b>
NORTHERN TERRITORY	No	19	19

\* In Tasmania, five to 10 days must elapse after the dissolution of the Assembly before the issue of writ, therefore the minimum period from announcement to polling day is 27 days.

*NOTE: In jurisdictions where elections are not fixed, the date the government announces the election may be earlier than the date that the Writ is actually issued. This effectively makes the election period longer.*

Currently 70% of Australian electors vote at fixed polls for their respective State/Territory parliaments. Should Western Australia adopt a fixed poll, that proportion would climb to 80%.



At 19 days, the Northern Territory has the shortest period of time between issue of Writ and Polling Day of any jurisdiction where fixed polls are not established. Queensland has the next shortest with a *minimum* period of 27 days.

The Minter Ellison Consulting Group closely examined the election timetable in its independent review of the NT electoral system prior to the drafting of the *Electoral Act 2004*. Following extensive consultation with stakeholders and the public, Minter Ellison reported that there was widespread support for a fixed poll date and a fixed election timetable with extended periods for the close of the roll, pre-poll, postal voting and mobile polling. It also expressed the view that a short election period made it difficult for voting facilities to be provided equitably to all electors in this jurisdiction and recommended a timetable that gave 33 days between issue of the Writ and Polling Day.

The following table compares the timing of recent Legislative Assembly General Elections, and shows that the situation has changed little under the timetable provisions of *Electoral Act 2004*:

MILESTONE	1994	1997	2001	2005
ISSUE OF WRIT	18/5/94 (DAY 1)	13/8/97 (DAY 1)	1/8/01 (DAY 1)	31/5/05 (DAY 1)
CLOSE OF ROLLS	18/5/94 (DAY 1)	13/8/97 (DAY 1)	1/8/01 (DAY 1)	2/6/05 (DAY 3)
CLOSE OF NOMINATIONS	26/5/94 (DAY 9)	21/8/97 (DAY 9)	9/8/01 (DAY 9)	6/6/05 (DAY 7)
COMMENCEMENT OF POSTAL VOTING	26/5/94 (DAY 9)	21/8/97 (DAY 9)	9/8/01 (DAY 9)	8/6/05 (DAY 9)
COMMENCEMENT OF MOBILE POLLING	30/8/01 (DAY 13)	24/8/01 (DAY 13)	13/8/01 (DAY 13)	9/6/05 (DAY 10)
COMMENCEMENT OF PRE-POLLING	26/5/94 (DAY 9)	21/8/97 (DAY 9)	9/8/01 (DAY 9)	13/6/05 (DAY 14)
POLLING DAY	4/6/94 (DAY 18)	30/8/97 (DAY 18)	18/8/01 (DAY 18)	18/6/05 (DAY 19)
<b>ELECTION PERIOD (IN DAYS)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>

*NOTE: The earliest commencement of mobile polling was not prescribed under the Electoral Act prior to the 2005 General Election. Therefore, the dates listed above represent the dates on which mobile polling actually commenced.*

Under the *Electoral Act*, the period between the issue of the Writ and Polling Day is fixed at 19 days. Under previous legislation, it was flexible and could have been set anywhere between 18 and 54 days, had the government of the day so desired. By way or further comparison, the minimum time between the issue of the Writ and Polling Day for a Federal General Election in the Northern Territory is 34 days and the maximum is 59 days. At the November 2004 Federal election, the writ was issued 40 days before Polling Day, more than double the time allowed for the 2005 Legislative Assembly poll.

Although it is not immediately obvious, the timetable prescribed by the *Electoral Act 2004* imposed even greater demands on electoral administrators than in the past. Despite the fact that the new timetable extended roll closure by two days, other tasks that depend on the supply of a roll were not similarly delayed. For example, pre-poll and postal services started on day nine, which was identical to the past, mobile polling was available three days earlier and the close of nominations was reduced by two days. Also, on this occasion, a public holiday during the 2005 election period further reduced the time to organise the election during business hours.

In the absence of a fixed poll date, the current timetable greatly compromises the level and effectiveness of service that can be provided to eligible electors. It also adds to the election costs through limitations on planning and the need to incur costs and charges at premium and penalty rates.

The current timeframe for conducting a General Election is unacceptably cramped and it is strongly recommended that consideration be given to increasing the election timetable by one week, if a fixed Polling Day is not supported. An additional week would at least provide some capacity to address the problems electors experienced in accessing various voting services at the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election.

A suggested 26-day timetable follows, based generally on the same fundamental principles that appear to underpin the current timetable:

DAY		MILESTONE
1	TUESDAY	ISSUE OF WRIT
4	FRIDAY	CLOSE OF ROLLS
7	MONDAY	CLOSE OF NOMINATIONS AND DRAW FOR POSITIONS ON BALLOT PAPERS (WITH PRE-POLL AND POSTAL VOTING TO START AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE)
15	TUESDAY	EARLIEST COMMENCEMENT OF MOBILE POLLING
22	TUESDAY	CESSATION OF ISSUE OF POSTAL VOTES TO OVERSEAS ADDRESSES
24	THURSDAY	CESSATION OF ISSUE OF POSTAL VOTES TO AUSTRALIAN ADDRESSES
26	SATURDAY	POLLING DAY

This timetable would provide an extra day for the close of roll, extend pre-poll and postal voting services by 10 days and allow for greater capacity to organise and give public notice of all services, especially to electors in remote, interstate and overseas locations.

### Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a fixed poll date be established or, if that is not supported, then the period from issue of the Writ to Polling Day be extended by at least a week.

## 2.2. ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

On 1 November 2004, the Augmented Redistribution Committee published both its report and gazettal notice in relation to the 2004 redistribution of electoral boundaries. These boundaries came into effect at the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election.

Although the Committee expressed the view that a major redistribution would be necessary in the future, it took a minimalist approach to changing the existing boundaries at the 2004 redistribution.

A summary of the changes to each Division at the Redistribution is shown in Appendix A.

Following the redistribution of NT divisions in 2004, addresses were aligned to the new boundaries. Although the transfers were eventually processed as bulk transactions, the individual locations for which individuals were enrolled needed first to be identified manually by staff to facilitate the process. During the identification and transfer exercise, however, the Sundowner Caravan Park was placed in the Division of Drysdale instead of Nelson.

Following the redistribution, every elector transferred received a letter notifying them of their transfer to a new Division. No queries were received about the erroneous transfer at this time and the error only came to notice early on the morning of Polling Day, once two electors from the caravan park had already voted.

As soon as the error was detected, arrangements were put in place to ensure that any further electors from the caravan park reporting to vote were given the correct Nelson ballot papers. The error did not affect the election outcome in the Divisions involved.

Subsequent checks confirmed that this was the only location found to be on the wrong roll for the election. Although additional internal quality control measures were put in place for the transfer following the 2004 redistribution, the error does highlight the human element involved in transfers and the degree of care that needs to be taken in such a detailed and delicate exercise.

### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 1**

The NTEC will introduce further quality control checks and more rigour in the transfer of elector enrolments following a redistribution of future electoral boundaries.

## 2.3. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTION

Rising speculation in the media over the weekend before the election was announced and the *NT News* declaring June 18 as Polling Day as a headline story in its edition on Monday 30 May, led the NTEC to book close of rolls advertisements on Channel 7 (Southern Cross Television) for the following day, subject to cancellation should an election announcement not eventuate. It was necessary to book these advertisements in advance and at that particular time in order to have them run in the desired timeslots the following day.

The announcement of the election was not made on the Monday and the Commission subsequently cancelled the booking for the advertisements. However, an internal oversight by Channel 7 failed to cancel bookings in some early morning timeslots and the advertisement consequently went to air. Channel 7 subsequently accepted full responsibility for the error that occurred.

## 2.4. POLITICAL ADVERTISING AND CAMPAIGNING

Candidates, parties and the general public raised a number of issues and complaints with the Commission about political advertising and campaign material. The matters generally related to authorisation of election material, erection and removal of signage, the defacing of signage and truth in advertising.

Very early in the campaign, the Commission also received a number of enquiries from candidates and parties about their authorisation obligations in relation to certain promotional items.

The *Electoral Act* provides that promotional material containing electoral matter must carry the name and address of both the authorising person and the printer. In other jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, items such as T-Shirts, lapel badges, pencils, balloons and the like are usually specifically exempted either by legislation or practice.

The essential purpose of the authorisation provisions is to ensure that anonymity does not become a protective shield for irresponsible and defamatory statements and that any perpetrator may be readily identified and contacted if remedial action is required.

Supported by a legal opinion, the Commission took a pragmatic approach to exempting certain items and conveyed this to candidates and parties through the Election Bulletin. Specific provisions dealing with exemptions, however, would be desirable in the future.

### Recommendation 2

It is recommended that commonly exempted items in other jurisdictions also be specifically exempted under the authorisation provisions contained in the *Electoral Act*.

Some members of the public and organisations contacted the Commission complaining about candidates or parties erecting promotional signs on their fences without permission and in public places. A few complaints were also registered with the Commission about the failure to remove candidate signage after the election.

The Commission also received complaints about the erection, manhandling and damaging of signs in the community and erection and moving of signs at Sadadeen polling place on the eve of Polling Day. Occasionally, interested parties also raised the veracity of content and the use of symbols shown on signs, in the context of deceptive or misleading advertising. In addition, complaints were also lodged regarding the distribution of defamatory material in the Division of Wanguri and bribery and undue influence at elections in respect to the Division of Macdonnell.

The Commission's role in policing the canvassing for votes is generally restricted to the precincts of the polling place (i.e. within 10 metres of the entrance to a polling place). Furthermore, the courts have invariably taken a narrow view in interpreting the provisions related to deceptive or misleading advertising, limiting responsibility to issues directly related to voter entitlement or the way in which an elector actually completes her or his ballot.

The *Electoral Act*, like the vast majority of other jurisdictions, also does not contain specific provisions that would make the Commission responsible for policing truth in advertising. Generally, allegations of slander and libel are seen as matters between individuals and they would be advised to seek their own legal advice and remedies where this is believed to have occurred.

Undue influence and bribery at elections are offences against the *Criminal Code* in the Northern Territory and therefore all information received in relation to those allegations was immediately referred to the police for action. On the conclusion of investigations, the police reported that no evidence was found to substantiate the claims and that no criminal offence had been committed by any person.

## 2.5. MEDIA COVERAGE

The Commission received some complaints from the public about alleged media bias in reporting and publishing unauthorised political comment.

Perceptions of media bias are often subjective and are certainly outside the scope of the Commission's responsibilities. The *Electoral Act*, however, does require letters to the editor containing political comment to carry the name and the address of the author.

A review of the letters to the editor over the period revealed that the vast majority identified the author and, where this did not occur, nearly all appear to clearly cover issues and individuals other than election issues, candidates and parties. Even in the very few remaining cases, it was debatable whether the content could be construed as political comment.

Nevertheless, a more concerted effort from the Commission to raise the awareness level of publishers once an election is announced may be desirable in the future.

## 2.6. POINTS OF INTEREST

At the 2001 Northern Territory General Election, the Australian Labor Party won a majority in the Legislative Assembly by securing 13 of the 25 seats (the CLP won 10 and independents two). In doing so, it had to survive a disputed return in the Division of Millner, which was won by only 82 votes after preferences had been fully distributed.

Eight seats were won with a margin of less than 6 per cent in 2001, earning them marginal seat status. The seats were Casuarina, Johnston, Karama, Millner, Sanderson (all held by the Australian Labor Party), Araluen (held by the Country Liberal Party), Braitling and Nelson (both held by independents).

Apart from Braitling and Nelson, the boundaries for all these seats remained unchanged at the 2004 redistribution and, as such, continued to be considered marginal. The changes made to Braitling and Nelson did not alter their marginal status.

Other seats contested in 2005 also generated heightened interest as a result of either incumbents retiring or high profile candidates being selected to contest the election against sitting members. Neither Tim Baldwin in Daly (held by 9.5 per cent) nor Peter Maley in Goyder (held by 14.8 per cent) were seeking re-election for the Country Liberal Party (CLP). Fran Kilgariff, the Mayor of Alice Springs contested the election in Greatorex (held by the CLP's Richard Lim by 9 per cent) and Chris Natt, the former General Manager of Australian Football League NT contested Drysdale (held by the CLP's Stephen Dunham by 15.7 per cent). Barbara McCarthy, a prominent media personality, also contested the seat of Arnhem (held by 11.4 per cent) for the Australian Labor Party (ALP) when the ALP's John Ah Kit did not seek re-election.



## **3. SERVICES TO ELECTORS**

### **3.1. ENROLMENT SERVICES**

Conducting a campaign to raise public awareness and mobilise the public in regard to enrolment is challenging in the absence of a fixed election date. Efficiency and effectiveness are also often compromised by uncertain lead-in times, resource limitations and the constant threat of a sudden closure of the rolls.

9627 enrolment forms were processed during the four months before the election was announced. This included 3767 additions and 6001 deletions to the roll, resulting in a net drop of 2234 in enrolled electors in that period.

The main reasons for deletion were the transfer of enrolment to interstate addresses (1826 electors) and the removal of names from the roll by objection (3858 electors). Most of the objections were generated by information received from the non-voter process undertaken subsequent to the 2004 Federal election.

In accordance with the Act, electors who do not appear to be living at their enrolled address are sent objection notices giving them 21 days to respond before their name can be struck from the roll. This process can be interrupted by a sudden close of rolls, resulting in the names staying on the roll for the election. However, in the lead up to the 2005 General Election, the removal process was done regularly so all objection activity was complete by the time the election was eventually announced.

#### **3.1.1 PRE-ELECTION ENROLMENT DRIVE**

In February 2005, amid uncertainty about the election date, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission worked closely and continuously with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to develop and roll out a campaign to prompt members of the public to enrol as a means to increase participation and ease pressure at the close of rolls.

The enrolment drive included media advertising, field visits to remote and rural centres, initiatives generating free publicity and the establishment of enrolment stalls at shopping centres and community events across the NT. In the absence of an election date, the campaign focused on a rolling three-month period, with continual reviews in the light of any rising speculation about an election date and a final review when the election was eventually announced.

The two Commissions also maintained their ongoing joint continuous roll update (CRU) program that specifically targets electors identified as having changed addresses from established data exchange arrangements. In addition, early in 2005, both Commissions also collaborated with the Department of Defence and other key occupational groups to provide information and enrolment forms to personnel, especially those who had recently moved to the Territory.

From late April 2005 to the announcement of the election, 24 enrolment stalls were set up at shopping centres and community events in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine to collect enrolments, distribute forms and allow electors to check their enrolment details. This initiative resulted in the lodgement of 277 additional enrolments directly (plus many more generated indirectly through the post before the election was announced) and 801

elector enquiries. A further 150 enrolments were also collected between the announcement and roll closure.

Details of urban enrolment stalls activity prior to issue of the Writ is shown in Appendix B.

An enrolment and voting awareness program covering 58 remote communities started on 23 May 2005. Field officers visited additional communities in connection with local community elections and the ongoing roll review program. After the close of rolls for the General Election, the field visits continued wherever possible in advance of mobile polling teams, raising election awareness and publicising arrangements for upcoming mobile polling. Up to the close of rolls this program was responsible for the collection of 341 enrolments and the identification of 1001 amendments to previous roll details.

Details of the enrolment and voting awareness program in remote areas is shown in Appendix C.

Overall, the pre-election campaign resulted in 618 enrolments being collected at 'point of contact' in the urban areas or during visits to remote communities. This total, however, underestimates the full impact of the campaign because additional forms were distributed and subsequently mailed/faxed back by electors.

### **3.1.2 CLOSE OF ROLLS ENROLMENT ACTIVITY**

The Writ for the election was issued on 31 May 2005, but enrolment receipts started to increase a little earlier, prompted by media speculation during the preceding days.

Advertising the close of rolls date officially commenced once the Chief Minister had announced the election. The NTEC also immediately established an Election Call Centre on the announcement.

In order to allow people to enrol within the short close of rolls period, the NTEC also established special arrangements with Australia Post that had been used successfully at the previous two Commonwealth elections. Special collection boxes were set up at Post Office counters in Darwin and regional centres, whilst Australia Post agencies in smaller communities were enlisted to assist by faxing completed forms direct to the Commission. As a result of this initiative, well over 500 enrolment forms, which otherwise might not have been received in time, were either collected or faxed from Australia Post offices on the day rolls closed.

Enrolment forms could also be downloaded from the Commission's website for completion and faxing. Many people took advantage of the service, which was highlighted in close of rolls advertising. Forms were also collected at the Commission's offices in Darwin and Alice Springs, which remained open until 8pm on 2 June.

In another initiative, the Commission worked for the first time with the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association to remind members of their enrolment rights and obligations. Copies of an electronic version of the enrolment form and registered postal vote application were emailed to all members for distribution, completion and return by fax to the Commission.



In the three days from the issue of Writ to the close of rolls at 8pm on 2 June 2005, the Commission received a total of 3311 enrolment forms, including 1647 additions to the roll. During the period there were 197 deletions from the roll, mainly due to interstate transfers and deaths. The number of enrolment forms received was more than expected and required additional staff for processing. A total of 2140 forms were received on 2 June (the day the roll closed) and processing was completed early on the morning of 3 June.

No comparative statistics are available for enrolment forms received up to and including Polling Day at the 2001 Legislative Assembly election and, in any case, rolls previously closed on the day of the issue of the Writ at that event. However, the records of the Darwin office of the Australian Electoral Commission show that it processed 4500 enrolments in the seven-day close of rolls period at the Federal Election in October 2004, which represents a 36 per cent increase on the 2005 Legislative Assembly three-day closure period.

The following table summarises enrolment transactions prior to the close of rolls and also provides details of enrolment forms received during polling:

TYPE OF TRANSACTION	1 FEBRUARY TO 30 MAY	31 MAY TO 2 JUNE CLOSE OF ROLLS	FORMS LODGED AT POLLING PLACES
NEW ENROLMENTS	895	478	686
RE-ENROLMENTS OF ELECTORS PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED IN NT BUT NOT CURRENTLY ENROLLED	709	404	960
RE-INSTATEMENTS	40	6	N/A
TRANSFERS IN FROM INTERSTATE	2 123	759	450
<b>NET ADDITIONS TO NT ROLL</b>	<b>3 767</b>	<b>1 647</b>	<b>2 136</b>
TRANSFERS BETWEEN NT DIVISIONS	2 311	1 016	1 471
CHANGES WITHIN DIVISION	1 492	451	846
ENROLMENT CARDS RECEIVED AND PROCESSED NOTIFYING SAME DETAILS	2 057	197	NIL
<b>TOTAL AMENDMENTS TO NT ROLL</b>	<b>9 627</b>	<b>3 311</b>	<b>4 413</b>
OBJECTION DELETIONS	3 858	7	N/A
DEATH DELETIONS	265	64	N/A
DUPLICATE DELETIONS	52	25	N/A
TRANSFERS OUT TO INTERSTATE ADDRESSES	1 826	101	N/A
<b>TOTAL DELETIONS TO NT ROLL</b>	<b>6 001</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>ACCUMULATIVE NET CHANGES TO NT ROLL FROM 1 FEBRUARY 2007</b>	<b>- 2 234</b>	<b>- 784</b>	<b>+ 1 352</b>

### 3.1.3 COMPLETENESS AND ACCURACY OF THE ELECTORAL ROLL

Any critical assessment of the completeness and accuracy of the roll for the 2005 General Election needs to take into account the very high level of population mobility within the Northern Territory and across state borders and the difficulties electors encounter participating from remote areas and outside the NT.

From 1 July 2004 to the announcement of the NT election in 2005, 30 000 enrolment forms were processed resulting in a net increase of 3 per cent in enrolled electors. As a major roll closure had occurred at the Federal election held only nine months earlier, the roll for Legislative Assembly General Election is likely to have been relatively complete and accurate. Certainly, the activities in the months leading up to the announcement of the election and the effectiveness of the advertising in the three days between the issue of the writ and close of rolls helped boost the quality of the roll for the election.

However, it is just as clear that the uncertainty over the timing of the election and the short close of rolls period affected the Commission's opportunities to improve roll completeness and accuracy.

The Commission had planned a range of activities to stimulate enrolment, particularly in the remote divisions; however it had to terminate these when the election was announced. Field activities consequently fell well short of being comprehensive and prioritising was guided by logistics and resource limitations.

The 3 per cent increase in electors on the roll from 1 July 2004 masks significant numbers of electors deleted from the roll after the Federal election. From 1 February 2005 to the close of rolls, the number of enrolled electors in the Territory actually declined by 784. While no follow up research has been undertaken on objection action, many of the declaration votes and the 960 re-enrolments received on Polling Day would have been from electors removed from the roll in the months before the election.

Also of significance is the high number of other enrolment forms received on Polling Day covering electors transferring their enrolled address between NT electoral Divisions and from first time electors. A fixed poll or a longer close of rolls period would increase the total number of eligible electors enrolled and reduce the number of people voting for electorates in which they no longer live.

Data is not available on the number or type of enrolments received between the close of rolls and Polling Day; however, it is estimated that about 350 forms were received during this period. Data is, however, available for the number of enrolment cards received in the three day close of roll period and in respect to the number of enrolment cards picked up by polling officials at the polls. These details are provided in Appendix I.

Forms are mainly completed by enrolled electors on Polling Day to correct their personal details, and by persons casting a Provisional Vote where their name cannot be found on the roll. A total of 4413 enrolments were picked up at polling places and entered on the roll after Polling Day. Of these, 2317 were people changing address and 2096 new electors on the roll.

Of the new electors being placed on the roll, 686 (30 per cent) were enrolments from electors who had never been previously enrolled, mainly picked up by mobile polling teams in remote communities.

The following table provides statistics for divisional enrolment forms received during the close of rolls period and from electors reporting to vote on Polling Day.

DIVISION	FORMS RECEIVED 31 MAY – 2 JUNE (CLOSE OF ROLLS)	FORMS RECEIVED AT POLLING PLACES	TOTAL REC'D
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## SERVICES TO ELECTORS

	No. REC'D	%	No. REC'D	%	
BLAIN	119	39	194	61	313
BRENNAN	149	33	308	67	457
CASUARINA	117	52	106	48	223
DRYSDALE	200	47	225	53	425
FANNIE BAY	168	50	166	50	334
JOHNSTON	106	44	134	56	240
KARAMA	78	38	128	62	206
MILLNER	175	52	164	48	339
NELSON	170	59	116	41	286
NIGHTCLIFF	194	56	153	44	347
PORT DARWIN	224	54	193	46	417
SANDERSON	134	51	127	49	261
WANGURI	127	49	131	51	258
<b>TOTAL METROPOLITAN DIVISIONS</b>	<b>1 961</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>2 145</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>4 106</b>
ARALUEN	191	53	168	47	359
BRAITLING	98	34	192	66	290
GREATOREX	117	37	200	63	317
BARKLY	145	38	239	62	384
DALY	95	39	149	61	244
GOYDER	88	35	164	65	252
KATHERINE	76	30	180	70	256
NHULUNBUY	39	20	160	80	199
<b>TOTAL - RURAL/REGIONAL DIVISIONS</b>	<b>849</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1 452</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>2 301</b>
ARAFURA	166	57	124	43	290
ARNHEM	21	8	250	92	271
MACDONNELL	174	41	251	59	425
STUART	140	42	191	58	331
<b>TOTAL - REMOTE DIVISIONS</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>1 317</b>
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b>3 311</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>4 413</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>7 724</b>

The large number of forms received on Polling Day indicates the difficulty of maintaining a complete and accurate roll in the Northern Territory, particularly in remote areas.

The differences in enrolment activity between the divisions can be partly explained by relative population movement and the concentration of political campaigning. The urban divisions with mobile populations, including Port Darwin, Brennan, Drysdale and Nightcliff, had high levels of enrolment at the close of rolls and on Polling Day, as did Araluen in Alice Springs. In the remote divisions of Stuart, Arafura and the non-urban parts of Macdonnell, enrolments before the close of rolls were above average. This was due, however, in some part to the pre-election public awareness campaign. In the other rural and remote divisions, roll close enrolment activity was low, yet significant numbers

of enrolments were picked up by all mobile polling teams, particularly in Barkly and Arnhem.

The enrolment statistics lend some weight to the contention that the short election timetable is having greater negative impact on roll accuracy outside of Darwin and its environs. The rate of enrolment cards taken in rural and remote divisions after close of rolls and on Polling Day was nearly double that taken in the three-day close of rolls period itself. In contrast, cards taken in metropolitan areas were fairly evenly divided.

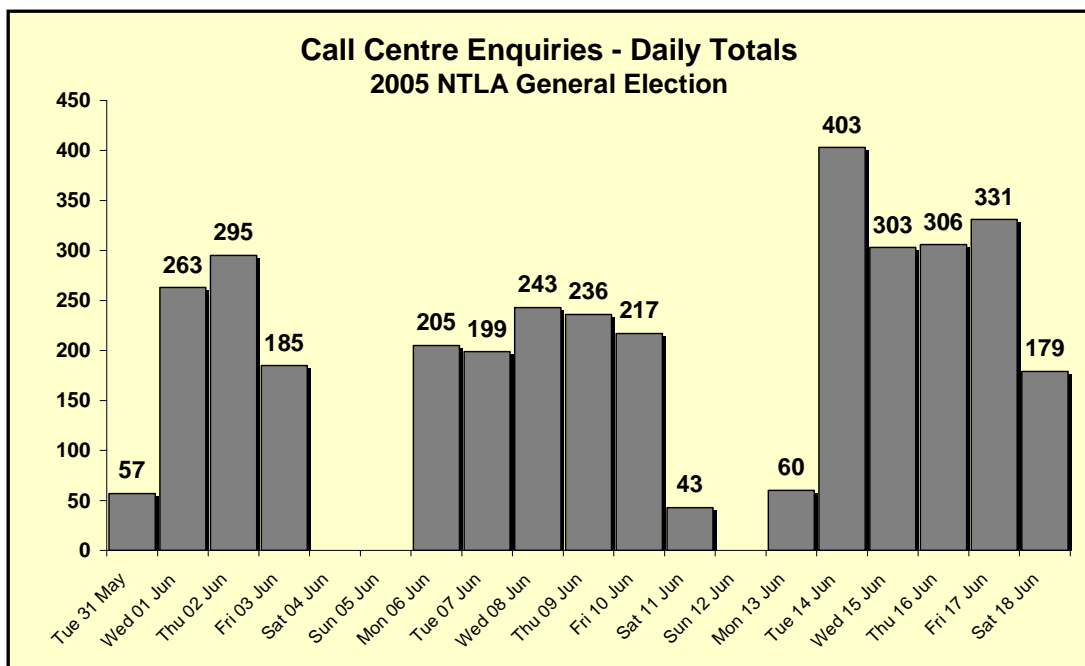
Full historical details of total enrolled electors by division are provided in Section 9.1 to 9.4.

### 3.2. CALL CENTRE

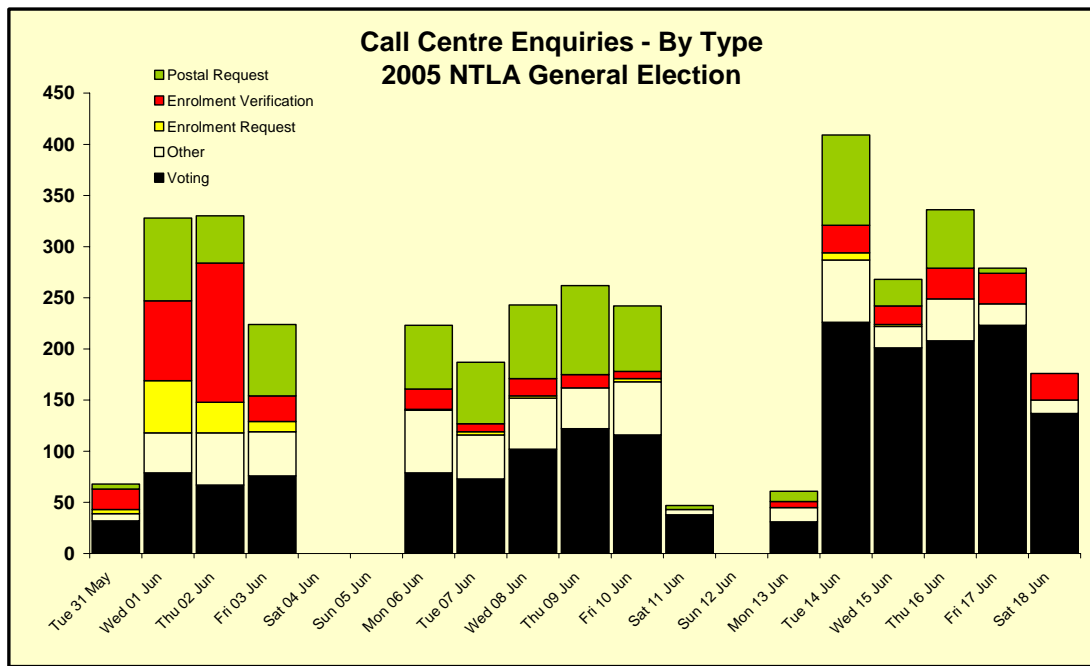
The Call Centre commenced operation on 31 May and continued to 18 June 2005. Normal hours were from 8am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday.

The average number of calls processed daily was 220 with a peak of 403 on the 14 June 2005. The average number of calls received on Saturdays was 51.5.

In total, 3525 calls were processed.



As the election progressed, the subject matters dealt with by the Call Centre changed, generally reflecting the current phase of the election process.



By far the largest percentage of enquiries related to general voting questions (1810 or 51%); these tended to increase markedly towards the end of the election period, particularly in the last 5 days.

The number of requests for a postal vote was also significant with 737 or 21% of callers seeking assistance to place a postal vote. Call Centre staff were able to direct callers to the website to download appropriate forms and forms were also faxed extensively.

The Call Centre Manager reported that the public were generally willing to go to significant lengths to cast a vote and were able to access and use available technologies. He also reported that many electors expressed frustration at not being able to vote owing to the constraints of distance and time and no convergent technologies to assist. Overseas, interstate and remote electors also consistently commented about a lack of information about the election itself.

### 3.3. VOTING SERVICES

In accordance with the legislation, electors were given a range of options for voting at the 2005 election. In addition to static polling places in urban areas and towns, voting services included postal voting and pre-poll voting services at eight pre-poll centres. Mobile polling teams also visited 260 locations in rural and remote areas and 18 hospitals and institutions.

Comparisons between the 2001 and 2005 Legislative Assembly General Elections show that the roll increased by 6448 electors, the voter turnout went down marginally by 0.49 per cent and the informality rate was reduced by 0.52 per cent (representing a 12% reduction in real terms on the 2001 figure). Other indicators remained fairly static, although significant trends occurred in how electors cast their votes.

The following table shows comparative participation rates for the 2001 and 2005 Legislative Assembly General Elections:

	2001 LA ELECTION	%	2005 LA ELECTION	%
<b>PARTICIPATION</b>				
ELECTORS ON ROLL	105 506		111 954	
FORMAL VOTES	81 367	95.73	86 288	96.25
INFORMAL BALLOT PAPERS	3 627	4.27	3 358	3.75
TOTAL BALLOT PAPERS COUNTED <sup>(1)</sup>	84 994	80.56	89 646	80.07
<b>TYPE OF VOTE CAST</b>				
ORDINARY VOTES:				
STATIC POLLING PLACES	59 667	70.20	55 247	61.62
MOBILE POLLING <sup>(2)</sup>	11 502	13.53	13 364	14.91
ABSENT VOTES	6 807	8.01	11 634	12.98
POSTAL VOTES	1 996	2.35	3 042	3.39
PRE-POLL VOTES	4 162	4.90	5 775	6.44
DECLARATION VOTES	860	1.01	584	0.65

**NOTE (1)** Total ballot papers do not include votes cast but not admitted to the count. At the 2005 election this included 458 postal votes (received too late or not signed in accordance with the Act), and 1206 declaration votes from people not found on the roll (rejected as not on roll for claimed division or declaration not signed). Data on numbers and reasons for rejected votes was not recorded at the 2001 General Election.

**NOTE (2)** Total is for ordinary votes only and does not include the additional Absent, Postal and Declaration votes issued that lifted the number of votes collected in 2005 by mobile teams to 16.75% of all votes cast.

In 2005, ordinary voting at static polling places showed a notable decline of 8 per cent of all votes cast. Absent, pre-poll and postal votes increased significantly while there was a reduction in declaration voting by people whose name could not be found on the roll (most certainly a result of supplying a Territory-wide roll to each of the polling places).

### 3.3.1 ORDINARY VOTING

Ordinary voting took place at 50 static polling places in the urban areas of the Northern Territory, including five dual polling places (an increase on the two provided in 2001) that provided ordinary voting facilities for both the local and an adjacent division. The following polling places were appointed:

DIVISION	POLLING PLACE	DIVISION	POLLING PLACE
ARAFURA	JABIRU	GREATOREX	SADADEEN
ARALUEN	BLATHERSKITE PARK		SETTLERS

DIVISION	POLLING PLACE	DIVISION	POLLING PLACE
	GILLEN	JOHNSTON	JINGILI
ARNHEM	ALYANGULA		WAGAMAN
BARKLY	TENNANT CREEK	KARAMA	KARAMA
BLAIN	MOULDEN PARK		MANUNDA TCE
	WOODROFFE	KATHERINE	KATHERINE
BRAITLING	BRAITLING		KATHERINE EAST
	LARAPINTA		TINDAL
BRENNAN	BAKEWELL	MACDONNELL	YIRARA
	* GRAY (SOUTH) <sup>1</sup>		YULARA
CASUARINA	NAKARA	MILLNER	LUDMILLA
	TIWI		MILLNER
DALY	BATCHELOR	NELSON	* KORMILDA <sup>3</sup>
	* BERRY SPRINGS (SOUTH) <sup>2</sup>		HOWARD SPRINGS
DRYSDALE	BAYVIEW		* HUMPTY DOO <sup>5</sup>
	* BERRIMAH <sup>3</sup>	NHULUNBUY	NHULUNBUY
	DRIVER	NIGHTCLIFF	NIGHTCLIFF
	DURACK	PORT DARWIN	LARRAKEYAH
	* GRAY (NORTH) <sup>1</sup>		* STUART PARK (SOUTH) <sup>4</sup>
FANNIE BAY	PARAP	SANDERSON	ANULA
	* STUART PARK (NORTH) <sup>4</sup>		WULAGI
GOYDER	BEEES CREEK	WANGURI	LEANYER
	* BERRY SPRINGS (NORTH) <sup>2</sup>		WANGURI
	MARLOW LAGOON		
	* TAMINMIN <sup>5</sup>		

\* Polling places that served as part of five appointed dual polling places.

*NOTE: No static polling places were established in the Division of Stuart (all polling being undertaken by mobile polling teams).*

A total of 55 247 ordinary votes were cast in static polling places, with an additional 13 364 ordinary votes collected by mobile polling teams in rural and remote areas. Ordinary votes cast in static polling places declined by 8 per cent in respect to all votes cast, a common and ongoing trend in all State/Territory and national jurisdictions.

The decline in ordinary voting is due in part to the increasing mobility of electors on Polling Day, their preference to vote at the most convenient time and place, the wider availability of services and more effective publicity campaigns on voting options. The decline in ordinary votes does not mean less voting at static polling places because the drop in ordinary voting is offset by an increase in the number of absent votes cast at polling places. It does, however, add considerably to the workload of polling staff as processing absent votes is more complicated and time consuming.

The five dual polling places were established where the only suitable location for a static polling place for two divisions was deemed to be at the one location, close to a common electoral boundary. Generally speaking, the increase in dual polling places for this election arose from the new boundaries that applied following the 2004 redistribution, but these circumstances may change following the next NT Legislative Assembly redistribution.



Dual polling places are generally avoided as they can cause voter confusion and make the work of party workers more difficult. To operate effectively, they also require additional staff, careful supervision and effective use of space within the premises.

### NTEC ACTION ITEM 2

The NTEC will review polling places critically following the next Legislative Assembly redistribution with particular emphasis on limiting the establishment of dual polling places.

### 3.3.2 ABSENT VOTING

Absent votes were issued in all static polling places and by mobile polling teams to electors who claimed an entitlement for an enrolled address in another division.

At the General Election, an A-Z list of all NT electors and new streamlined procedures for the issue of absent votes were used for the first time. Electors only needed to ask for an absent vote and, provided their name could be found on an A-Z roll for the Northern Territory supplied to polling places. Under these new arrangements electors were given ballot papers and crossed off the roll without the need to complete a separate written declaration and be marked off the roll later.

Details of the number of absent votes cast per Division are shown in the following table:

DIVISION	No.	DIVISION	No.	DIVISION	No.
ARAFURA	265	DRYSDALE	821	NELSON	491
ARALUEN	670	FANNIE BAY	559	NHULUNBUY	137
ARNHEM	311	GOYDER	444	NIGHTCLIFF	396
BARKLY	246	GREATOREX	403	PORT DARWIN	421
BLAIN	675	JOHNSON	696	SANDERSON	438
BRAITLING	459	KARAMA	404	STUART	423
BRENNAN	768	KATHERINE	291	WANGURI	265
CASUARINA	518	MACDONNELL	343		
DALY	524	MILLNER	666		
<b>TOTAL FOR ALL DIVISIONS</b>					<b>11 634</b>

A total of 11 634 absent votes were cast at the 2005 election, representing 13.71 per cent of all votes cast. A comparison of urban and remote divisions indicates that absent voting increased in all divisions, with the greatest increase in the urban areas.

The rise in absent voting is attributable to the increasing mobility of electors and their growing awareness that absent votes can be made in all polling places.

A comparison with the 2001 Legislative Assembly election indicates that, in 2005, there was a 30 per cent increase in the number of absent votes cast. The difference is even more marked in the number of absent votes admitted to the count. In 2001, only 6807 or 75 per cent of the 8980 absent votes cast were admitted, but in 2005 all 11 634 absent votes cast were admitted, because of the on-the-spot confirmation of enrolment of absent voters at the issuing point.



A further driver of the increase in absent votes is the location of polling places. The policy for all elections conducted in the Northern Territory, whether Federal, Territory or Municipal, is to set up polling places within divisions or wards that best serve the electors. However, electoral boundaries for each jurisdiction vary and are subject to changes at redistributions. It is therefore quite possible that the polling place carrying the “local roll” for one election may not be the same as for the previous election conducted, especially when different jurisdictions are involved.

For instance, at Federal and Municipal elections, Darwin residents can cast an ordinary vote at any polling place in their electorate (i.e. Division of Solomon in the case of the Federal Election and the relevant wards of the Darwin and Palmerston City Councils in the case of the Municipal elections). As a consequence, many people who had previously voted at more recent Municipal and Federal elections reported again to the same polling places for the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Election but had to cast absent vote this time as the polling place attended was not appointed for their Legislative Assembly Division.

Absent voting is also influenced by those electors who have moved but have not transferred their enrolment to their new address. On attending their closest polling place, which is no longer in their enrolled division, they claim an absent vote for their former address and complete an enrolment form for their new address. It is estimated from Australian Bureau of Statistics data that 1000 electors would have moved address between the close of rolls and polling day and even more would have moved over the previous months but have simply not updated their enrolment by close of rolls.

Redistributions that change boundaries from one election to the next can also have the potential to increase the level of absent voting because voters may continue to attend at their ‘old’ polling place. However, the 2004 redistribution of boundaries should not have been a major factor in the increase in absent voting because there were only around 5500 electors affected by the changes and all were individually advised by mail of the new boundaries and their new division. Furthermore, the level of absent voting was not above average for the four divisions with the greatest number of electors affected by boundary changes (the rural areas of Daly, Goyder, Katherine and Nelson).

### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 3**

The NTEC will review the election public awareness campaign to provide a modest amount of targeted information to electors who can be identified as likely to attend a polling place outside their Division because of previous voting habits or past voting arrangements.

### **3.3.3 DECLARATION VOTING – NAMES NOT FOUND ON ROLL**

The casting of declaration votes by people whose names could not be found on the roll declined by a third at the 2005 election.

In all, 584 declaration votes were admitted to the count but a further 1206 votes were rejected. The overwhelming reason for rejection (1138 cases) was that the claimant was not found to have been removed from the roll in error. Other reasons for rejection included 42 cases in which the wrong division had been claimed for their last enrolment and 26 cases where the claimant did not sign the declaration form.

Overall, the declaration votes were roughly evenly distributed between divisions with an average rejection rate of 67 per cent.

Details of declaration voting by division are provided in Appendix K.

The *Electoral Act* does not detail the grounds on which a declaration vote may be admitted if the elector's name cannot be found on the roll. In some other jurisdictions, legislation sets out procedures as to how these votes should be processed and guidelines on how to determine admission or rejection.

Given the small electorates and the potential impact admitted declaration votes of electors not found on the roll might have on results, some prescribed guidelines would be desirable to enhance transparency and support consistent treatment from election to election.

### **Recommendation 3**

It is recommended that more detailed guidelines are provided in the *Electoral Act* on the processing and assessment procedures in respect to declaration votes for unenrolled electors.

### **3.3.4 POSTAL VOTING & PRE-POLL VOTING**

Postal voting is available to electors who meet any one of a number of prescribed reasons (e.g. travel, illness, distance from a polling place, etc.) that makes attendance at a polling place particularly difficult or impossible. Where these circumstances apply, an elector can apply for a postal vote at any time, although any application only has a life of three months.

Where electors have an ongoing reason for being unable to attend a polling place (e.g. excessive distance from a polling place or infirmity), they may register as a Registered Postal Voter (RPV) and ballot papers will be automatically mailed to them without the need to lodge an application at the time of the election. Under the Act, Northern Territory voters are RPVs if they have registered with the Australian Electoral Commission as General Postal Voters under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. Prior to the election there were 1 337 registered RPVs on the Northern Territory register.

The distribution of postal vote applications was a priority once the election was called. Forms were mailed out on individual request, supplied by political parties or candidates, obtained from the Commission's website or faxed out from Commission offices and interstate electoral authorities. The completed applications were generally faxed or mailed back to the Darwin or regional offices of the NTEC or to the interstate electoral authorities acting as agents under reciprocal arrangements. After checking that the applicant was enrolled, the ballot papers and certificate envelopes were posted out for completion and return to the Commission in Darwin.

There are innate delays in processing applications collected by political parties on behalf of electors because these applications are initially returned to the party before being forwarded on to the Commission. The extra step in handling adds to turnaround time for the mailing out of the postal vote packs. It is not possible to determine to what

extent this delay may have resulted in applicants not being able to vote or return their completed ballot papers in time. The major parties did collect a large number of applications, but they were generally for electors living in urban areas with an Australia Post street delivery service and therefore less likely to experience mail delays.

The mail-out of postal voting papers started three days after the Close of Nominations. Mail was held back for a number of days in accordance with provisions in the *Electoral Act*, despite the fact that the enveloped ballot papers were ready for dispatch soon after the close of nominations. This delay of the dispatch exacerbated difficulties meeting postal delivery arrangements in some parts of the Territory where mail services operated only weekly.

Timely completion and return of postal ballots was especially difficult for those NT addresses where the Australia Post service is via an interstate delivery centre, for addresses where there is no mail delivery or where the location had no post office agency that was reasonably close. Due to mailing delays and wet weather in Central Australia, some postal ballots were only delivered to electors shortly before polling day. The ballots had to be completed immediately and returned to meet the seven-day post Polling Day deadline.

**Recommendation 4**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow for the issue of postal and pre-poll votes as soon as practicable after the close of nominations.

To assist with the difficulties being experienced by remote electors in returning their postal votes, the NTEC established some special arrangements with Australia Post in the week following Polling Day. These arrangements included the supply of secured ballot boxes to mail planes and regional Australia Post offices, which enabled returned postal ballots to be directly lodged by electors at the point of mail pick up or lodged immediately by sorters on receipt at the sorting centre. These boxes were then picked up by electoral officials prior to the return deadline at the Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy post offices and transported forthwith to Darwin for the count.

Appendices E, F and G provide full details of the dispatch, return and processing of postal votes (including votes from Registered Postal Voters) by Division.

A total of 4446 postal ballot paper packs were sent out to electors and 3281 (74 per cent) were returned by the receipt deadline.

The following table shows the overall response rate and processing details for the Postal Voting Service:

POSTAL VOTING DISPATCHES AND RETURNS	
POSTAL VOTES ISSUED TO POSTAL VOTERS	4 446
<b>RETURNS</b>	
COMPLETED AND RETURNED BY DEADLINE	3 281
COMPLETED AND RETURNED AFTER DEADLINE	219
RETURNED UNCLAIMED	99

POSTAL VOTING DISPATCHES AND RETURNS	
RETURNED CANCELLED BY THE ELECTOR AS NOT BEING USED	151
NOT RETURNED	696

POSTAL VOTING ADMISSIONS AND REJECTIONS	
RETURNED BY DEADLINE	3 281
ADMITTED TO THE COUNT	3 042
REJECTED - DECLARATION SIGNED AFTER POLLING DAY	150
REJECTED - NOT SIGNED	55
REJECTED - OTHER REASONS	34

In addition to the earlier dispatch of postal votes, the service to electors in remote, interstate and overseas locations would be significantly improved if legislation was amended to increase the current three months limit on the life of an application once the final year of the current Parliament is commenced. The extension of the life of an application would particularly increase the voting participation by the ever increasing number of 'grey nomads', whose travels often extend well beyond three months.

#### Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow electors to lodge an application for a postal vote for a nominated period of up to one year, at any time or at least once the final year of the current Parliament has commenced.

Mailing to interstate and international locations was even more difficult, particularly for addresses outside Australian capital cities. The cut-off for overseas posting was 6pm on the Tuesday before polling day and two days later for applicants interstate.

Postal voting by Defence force personnel also created special challenges. The NTEC made great efforts to supply postal votes to people deployed elsewhere in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Iraq. Despite the Commission consulting with the Defence forces at the time of the initial deployment to Iraq, large numbers of troops did not make a postal vote application before their departure. The Commission also generally found it hard to establish mobile polling, pre poll or postal services at short notice with the defence forces, whether it was in overseas theatres of operation or covert military field operations in the Tennant Creek and Queensland regions.

Once it became apparent that the troops overseas would not be able to submit a postal vote application and receive ballot papers by Polling Day using the existing procedures, arrangements were put in place with Robertson Barracks for applications to be faxed from overseas and for the urgent dispatch of the required postal vote ballot papers to Iraq. Eventually, the Defence Force was able to identify a regular plane to Kuwait that would fit in with the election deadline and 125 ballot issues were dispatched on 14 June 2005. The completed papers returned to Darwin on 23 June 2005, in time to be admitted to the count.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 4**

The NTEC will review the electoral services provided to Defence forces through consultation and planning with the relevant authorities.

In this context, it should be noted that New Zealand electors who are overseas at the time of an election are now able to vote by fax. In that country, the elector must first confirm their enrolment on the electronic roll via the internet. If enrolled, electors are then able to print out the ballot paper for the division that applies and a matching declaration form linked to ballot paper with a unique number. The elector is then required to complete the declaration with their personal details and signature, fill in the ballot paper and fax both documents back to a secure site at the electoral office where procedures are in place to maintain the secrecy of the ballot.

The New Zealand process allows the vote to be admitted to the count if the details on the declaration, including the signature, match the elector's enrolment details. This facility is only available to electors overseas and at the 2005 NZ General Election 18 000 votes were cast by fax. There is no provision for sending ballot papers electronically on request to individual claimants or to send completed forms back other than by fax, or for voting using the system from within NZ.

The Tasmania Electoral Commission now has a very similar system in place for voting at State elections for electors temporarily resident in the Antarctic. In its case, electors are able to request the forwarding of ballot papers by e-mail which then needs to be printed out and faxed back with an accompanying declaration. On receipt the vote is processed in the same way as for other declaration votes.

It should also be noted that the AEC has also indicated that it will be conducting a limited trial of electronic voting at the next Federal election, which includes voting via Defence Force Networks. If successful, it may provide further options to improve voting services for electors who are currently finding it difficult to vote because of their location, especially those located in war zones.

**Recommendation 6**

It is recommended that:

- The NTEC examine options for using electronic means to enhance services to remote, interstate and overseas electors.
- The *Electoral Act* is suitably amended so as to permit the application of electronic voting means where secure and certain prescribed circumstances exist.

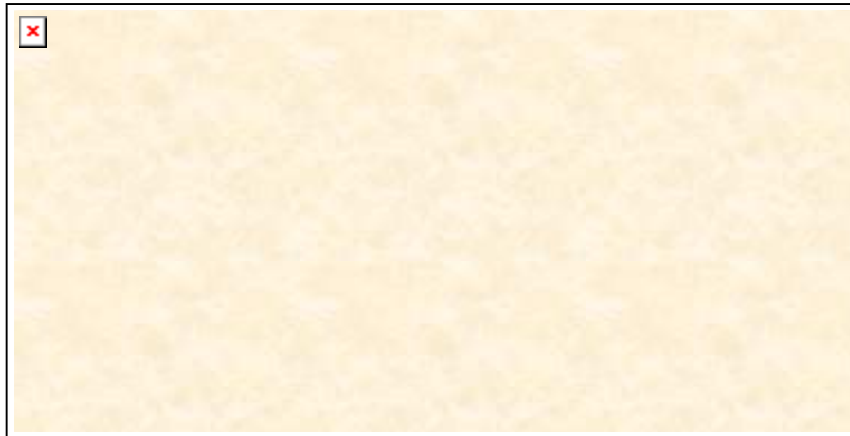
Electors unable to attend a polling place also have the option of casting a vote in person at a pre-poll voting centre. Pre-poll facilities were available at Casuarina, Palmerston and the Commission's offices in Darwin and Alice Springs. Temporary offices were also established in Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Jabiru and at state electoral authority offices.

In accordance with the *Electoral Act*, the pre-poll centres were open for polling in the week immediately preceding Polling Day, with the exception of Jabiru where facilities were available only on the Friday before Polling Day as a service to shift workers at the

mine. Although the Monday commencement day for pre-polling was a public holiday in the Territory, it was decided that the pre-poll centres would open for voting on that day as a service to electors, bearing in mind the short period of time afforded to the service in the election timetable.

A total of 5775 votes were taken at pre-poll centres (6.4 per cent of all votes), an increase of 1613 or 39 per cent on the 2001 election. The service was advertised widely in the media and this may have contributed to the increased number of votes cast. The service was particularly important for electors travelling interstate or overseas before Polling Day.

The use of both pre-poll and postal voting services rose sharply at the 2005 General Election as the following graph shows:



### 3.3.5 MOBILE POLLING

Mobile polling to institutions and particularly to remote communities is a distinctive feature of all elections in the Northern Territory. It accounts for 16.75 per cent of all ballots cast and takes up a significant share of expenditure, staff and administrative overheads. Mobile polling in remote areas provides special challenges given the difficulties of raising public awareness, recruiting and training officials, travelling between centres, the short time available for voting, field communication and a general lack of facilities at mobile polling locations.

At the 2005 election, the NTEC took advantage of the extended time allowed for in the Act and lengthened the period of operations to the full 10 days available. At the 2001 election, mobile polling was undertaken only in the six days up to and including Polling Day. Operating over a longer period enabled more flexibility with scheduling and reduced the number of mobile polling staff required.

Of the 278 locations mobile polled, 260 were in remote areas or town camps, and the balance was comprised of medical, aged care facilities and prisons. Polling was organised into 25 teams involving 65 field staff (including 20 team leaders). Details of the mobile schedules are shown in Appendix D.

Visits to hospitals, aged care facilities and prisons resulted in the collection of 216 votes. This represented a significant increase on the 129 votes collected at virtually the same locations at the 2001 General Election.



Before the election, four field officers were employed to conduct public awareness programs in remote communities and to gather information to help prepare the mobile polling schedule. They were also able to pick up enrolments in the short time available as part of their field duties before the close of rolls and then worked ahead of mobile polling teams where possible, to raise awareness and to assist with arrangements for mobile polling.

Planning for mobile polling started in early 2005. The Commission used community profiles held in its Election Management System database and current enrolment figures for various locations in remote areas. Draft schedules were created, mindful of the most effective use of transport, staff and available accommodation.

For the first time at a Legislative Assembly Election, the list of proposed polling locations (with suggested duration of poll) was circulated to the communities, political parties, MLAs and other stakeholders for their comment and feedback before scheduling was finally decided. This strategy had proven particularly useful at the past two Federal elections in gathering intelligence on matters that influence scheduling.

When the election was announced, final arrangements were made for the staffing of teams and the date and time of polling. The final schedules were widely advertised in the media, provided again to political parties and candidates and formally conveyed to communities by means of phoning, faxing, emailing and the dispatch of posters. Where possible, the Commission sought the help of communities to advance preparations in relation to the establishment of local resources, such as premises and the identification of local assistants.

Even after the final schedules were circulated, changes were needed to meet unexpected demand and contingencies, including last minute unavailability or grounding of planes. Additional sites visited included Aputula (during the Finke Desert Race), the Barunga Festival and Papunya Sports Carnival and at a remote site in the Maningrida area to allow a party of traditional owners and rangers to vote.

The remote mobile teams collected 13 364 ordinary votes and 1655 declaration (mostly absent) votes. The number of votes cast on mobiles at remote locations increased by 16 per cent on that at the 2001 General Election. Although the informality rate on ordinary votes cast at the mobiles continued to be higher at 6.2 per cent than the 3.8 per cent Territory average, it represented a significant reduction on the 8.1 per cent informality rate recorded at mobile polling in 2001.

One significant change that may have played a role in the increase in formality (and perhaps even participation) was the application of the new provision in the *Electoral Act* for assisted voting. At the 2005 General Election, electors were able to nominate someone other than a polling official to complete the ballot paper on their behalf.

It is difficult to determine overall turnout for locations visited by remote mobile polling because electors enrolled in those areas may cast postal and absent votes, or simply vote as an ordinary voter at a static polling place operating at a regional centre in the Division. For the eight divisions that may be categorised as remote (Arnhem, Arafura, Barkly, Daly, Goyder, Macdonnell, Nhulunbuy and Stuart) 36 117 electors were enrolled and 70 per cent voted. Adjusting for an obvious higher participation at static polling places within these divisions, it is estimated that the turnout of remote electors was between 60 and 65 per cent.

Based on sample data collected by a number of team leaders, an estimated 6 per cent of electors in remote communities called on assistance from someone to cast their vote. In Central Australia the percentage of voters requiring assistance ranged up to 10 per cent. The high unintentional informal rate at these locations would also indicate that those estimates might even be very conservative in measuring the actual level of need. This was indeed the finding after a more concerted and formalised effort was made at the Stuart By-Election in 2006 to gauge the level of assistance required by electors in that division at that poll. Statistics were gathered and ballots cast were later studied to determine the level of apparent unintentional informality. At least one-third of the electors in that division required assistance to complete a formal ballot paper.

In any case, there is a clear and strong correlation between the need for assistance and the elector's level of literacy, isolation and capacity to understand electoral concepts and the English language.

It is desirable that the Commission provides greater ongoing commitment to providing electoral education to remote areas, including some increased program activity at an earlier stage in the lead up to a General Election, most logically once the parliament has served its first three years.

**Recommendation 7**

It is recommended that additional funding for a public awareness information program for remote communities is provided to the NTEC once parliament has served its first three years.

Candidates often have great difficulty in attending and having their voting material distributed at polls conducted by mobiles in remote areas and hospitals. Shadowing remote mobiles is especially challenging where transport options may be limited and polling schedules may be changed at short notice.

Some electors appreciate the provision of how-to-vote cards when reporting to vote, especially in remote areas and hospitals where they can often be used to facilitate the provision of assistance to voters.

In response to a request, the Commission agreed, under a proviso of 'all care and no responsibility', to offer candidates the opportunity to lodge how-to-vote cards with the remote mobile teams. The *Electoral Act* is silent on this issue, although it is specifically prescribed and implemented at Commonwealth elections.

It would be desirable that specific legislation covering this aspect was included in NT legislation along similar lines to the Commonwealth. Alternatively, rather than simply carrying supplies of various how-to-vote cards for set up outside of polling place precincts, a system could be devised to allow copies of all lodged how-to-vote cards to be displayed publicly within the polling place or be made available on request from the mobile team leader.

**Recommendation 8**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to establish a how-to-vote card distribution service for mobile polling that is overseen by the NTEC.



On the first day of mobile polling, a complaint was made by a political party that a polling official assisted political party workers in their activities during polling at Belyuen. The Commissioner undertook immediate enquiries into these allegations, including contact with the party official in attendance at Belyuen from whom the claims had originated. It soon became clear, however, that these claims were not well founded, being generated largely by individual perceptions of proceedings and some early teething problems for all concerned.

The incident did, however, highlight the need to review remote mobile organisation, recruitment and training, particularly in relation to the locally employed staff. It also raised the need for extra support for field staff on the first day of mobile polling to cope with the heightened interest from the media and political workers.

In the past, schedules have displayed a heavy emphasis on air transport. Efforts were made on this occasion to conduct more travel by road and greater regard will be placed in the future to seek out the most productive use of the mobile polling period, hopefully resulting in the devotion of at least a little more time to surface travel to avoid some of the inflexibility, access and self sufficiency problems being experienced in covering certain areas by air.

The NTEC had originally intended to establish a mobile poll at Robertson Barracks. A mobile poll had been established there at Council elections in 2004 and appeared to have been well received by those involved. Access was denied on this occasion by authorities, however, because of the short notice and their concerns about generating confusion with an earlier notice promulgated by them about voting arrangements.

Section 78 of the *Electoral Act 2004* provides for the establishment of mobile polling and further allows those services to be restricted to a certain class of voter, such as an in-patient of a hospital or an inmate of an institution. Unlike the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*, it does not limit these services specifically to declared remote Divisions and hospitals.

At the Territory and local government level, mobile polling services have been extended to defence establishments, aged care facilities and indigenous town-camps. Basically, these services have been established wherever electors are deemed to be better and more appropriately serviced by specialised mobile arrangements in the lead up to Polling Day. Amongst other things, mobile locations have been selected where residents are thought to experience particular difficulty in attending other polling places, where a high level of special needs exists at the location or where a distinctive self regulated community exists but its residential numbers are not sufficient to warrant the establishment of a static polling place on Polling Day.

The broader application of mobile polling has regularly been criticised by politicians and a few others at election times. It would therefore be desirable if the *Electoral Act* could be amended to address the matter more specifically, preferably to reflect the current practice.

**Recommendation 9**

It is recommended that Section 78 of the *Electoral Act* be amended to more specifically set the criteria for the selection of locations for mobile polling.

### 3.3.6 ELECTORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

At all elections there are challenges providing voting services to people with special needs, such as people who are infirm or have other physical disabilities or have English as a second language.

Elections are not a daily or regular community activity but, rather, are irregular events, occurring at significant intervals against short and immutable deadlines. Premises that are generally designed for other purposes such as schools and community halls are frequently used for polling purposes and these venues may not fully comply with ideal access standards for those with disabilities.

Services to electors with special needs include providing mobile polling in hospitals, nursing homes and other aged care and medical facilities, employing local staff to help operate polling places in remote communities where people speak languages other than English and using pre-polling locations with suitable access for people in wheelchairs.

At the 2005 election the Commission provided for people with special needs by:

- Providing interpreters/linguists at some polling locations through the Northern Territory Interpreter Service.
- Implementing the provisions of the *Electoral Act* that provide the option for a private person to assist a voter to complete a ballot paper without the scrutiny of polling officials or party workers.
- Implementing Section 88 of the *Electoral Act* to allow polling staff to take votes outside a polling place, usually from a person with a disability who remains seated in a vehicle.
- Advertising polling places with disabled access.

The engagement of the polling officials with indigenous language skills to officiate at local polling places and mobile polling locations has tended to be difficult and problematical in the past. In an effort improve the situation, the NTEC appointed 37 polling officials through the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. These officers were appointed in 16 static polling places and 11 remote communities across the Northern Territory.

In other jurisdictions there has been considerable consultation with relevant advocacy groups to improve access to voting services by people with disabilities. These consultations have been responsible for several initiatives elsewhere, including provision of disabled parking at polling places, publicising polling places with disabled access, public awareness drives with registered postal voters, provision of drive-through polling places, computer based voting for people with impaired vision, etc. Other jurisdictions also maintain an ongoing Disability Plan.

More consultation is required with peak local groups in the Northern Territory to ensure local services reflect, within the limits of reason and our resources, the standards currently in place in other jurisdictions.

#### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 5**

The NTEC will liaise more closely with disability advocacy groups in the Northern Territory to develop a Disability Services Plan that will appropriately improve those

specialised electoral services.

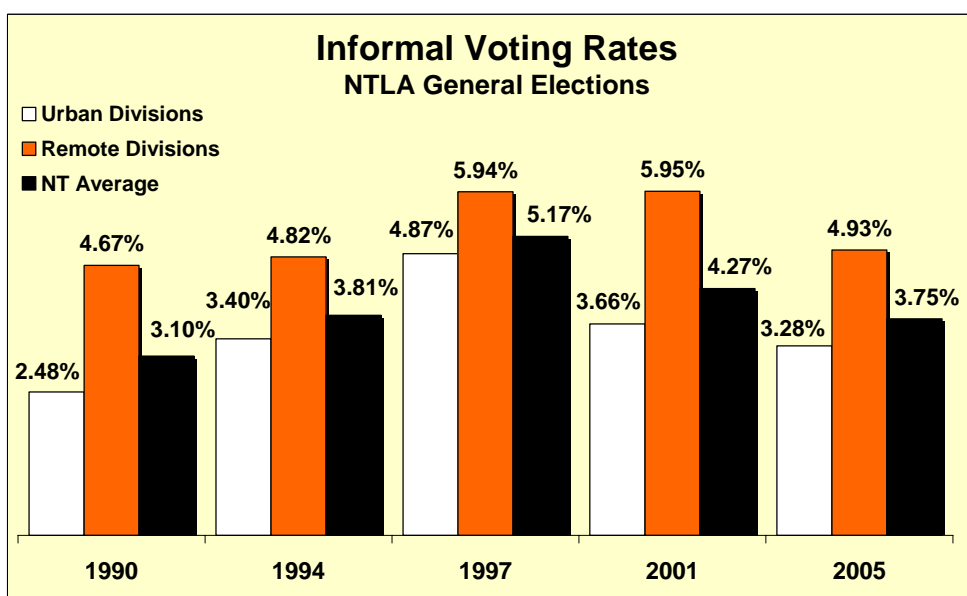
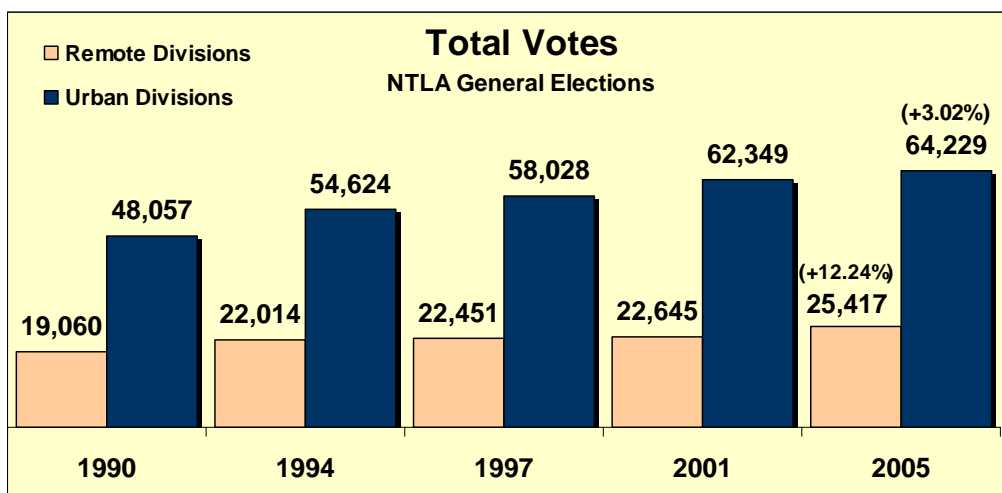
In addition, there is a pressing need to quantify and monitor the level of elector assistance required throughout the jurisdiction. The compilation of statistics on the provision of assistance was undertaken for the first time at the 2005 General Election and they, along with other statistics related to special needs groups, will be maintained at future polls to assist in trend analysis and the targeting of electoral education.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 6**

The NTEC will review statistics to be collected at future elections on voter assistance and other special needs matters to assist with trend analysis and the practical customisation of electoral education and voting services.

**3.3.7 PARTICIPATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

The following graphs show comparative statistics for elector participation and informality at recent Northern Territory Legislative Assembly General Elections:



Voting data is extracted from the certified lists used at polling places, records of postal and declaration votes cast and other data collected at the election. All electors who cast a vote are marked off certified lists that are subsequently scanned to consolidate a voting record. The scanned data is further adjusted for death deletions to the roll and for other information received on or before Polling Day (e.g. electors unable to get away from work or to get to a polling place, illness or infirmity, or being interstate or overseas). This information is mainly provided at polling places by relatives or conveyed to the NTEC before the election.

At the close of rolls there were 111 954 electors enrolled, of whom 89 646 were recorded on a certified list as voting. After allowances for information received in advance, 19 314 apparent non-voters were identified for follow up and, in accordance with the *Electoral Act*, infringement notices were sent to these electors within the three-month statutory deadline.

A total of 3572 electors provided a valid and sufficient reason for not voting and 1100 electors paid a fine as not having a valid and sufficient reason for not voting. Cases of unclaimed mail and non-response (which includes large numbers of remote electors) were subsequently targeted for follow up fieldwork and possible objection action.

The 2005 General Election was the first Legislative Assembly election where NT electors were able to pay the penalty directly without having the matter dealt with in court. They had the choice of either paying by cash at the NT Electoral Commission or by mailing a cheque or money order.

Experience at Commonwealth and State elections suggest that more flexible payment arrangements (e.g. BPay or over the counter payments at other government offices) significantly increase the number of fines paid and result in a reduction of follow-up action.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 7**

The NTEC will reassess the current non-voter payment arrangements with a view to providing more options for payment.

The assessment of elector participation needs also to take into account the level of informal voting. For the first time, the NTEC undertook a survey of informal voting following the General Election and the full results are shown in Sections 9.15 to 9.18.

It is difficult to conclusively establish whether some forms of informal voting were either intentional or unintentional on the part of the elector, especially where low levels of literacy and numeracy are known to exist. The survey results would indicate, however, that the level of informal voting in urban areas is split fairly evenly between intentional and unintentional, whilst only a third at the most of the remote informal voting could be classified as intentional.

In reality, the loss of votes through unintentional formality in remote areas is probably much greater than even the survey suggests. Many of those informal votes (e.g. multiple ticks/crosses and total blanks) that were categorised as intentional informal votes in the survey are more likely to have been related to the elector's lack of understanding of the system rather than a conscious effort not to participate. In any case, the level of unintentional informal voting is known to be inordinately high in remote

areas and this, coupled with the fact that the level of informal voting in remote Divisions also runs at about double the rate of urban Divisions, where more than two candidates contest an election presents a significant challenge for the NTEC in its ongoing electoral educational role.

## **4. SERVICES TO CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **4.1. REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

The *Electoral Act 2004* provided for the registration of political parties for the first time. As party registration was a new provision at Legislative Assembly elections, an information briefing for political parties was held on 23 February 2005.

Four parties eventually registered: Australian Labor Party (NT Branch), the Country Liberal Party, the Greens and the Socialist Alliance. Although it registered as a party, the Socialist Alliance did not endorse any candidates at the election. The Australian Democrats did not register as a party although it did run a candidate in the Division of Blain.

Registration allows party names to be shown against candidates' names on the ballot paper and permits the registered officer of the party to nominate candidates as a bulk nomination. A bulk nomination was lodged by the ALP, the CLP and the Greens at the 2005 election. Registration also carries with it the responsibility to lodge financial disclosure returns.

### **4.2. INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

Before the election, CLP Members of the Legislative Assembly requested and received a detailed briefing on the disclosure provisions of the *Electoral Act*. No similar requests were received from other Members, endorsed candidates or political parties.

Draft lists of mobile polling locations and estimates on polling duration were provided to interested parties, including parties and candidates for their information and feedback before the schedules were settled.

The Commission prepared a Candidate's Handbook that was distributed with other relevant information and forms in a Candidate's Pack upon request. A handbook on the financial disclosure was also prepared and made available to candidates and parties.

To ensure that candidates and parties simultaneously received prompt and consistent information, the Commission for the first time established an election bulletin system as soon the election was announced. Bulletins were distributed regularly via email throughout the election period, providing updates on the progress of the election, advice on emerging issues, timely instructions and reminders of the rights and responsibilities of candidates and parties and the latest developments in relation to mobile polling.

### **4.3. NOMINATIONS AND DRAW FOR BALLOT PAPER POSITIONS**

The Commission's offices were open for nominations from 3 June until 12 noon on 6 June 2005. On receipt, nominations were checked for compliance. At the close of nominations 76 nominations had been received at the Darwin office and four at the Alice Springs office.

Nomination forms were provided for party nominations (bulk) or for single nominations (individuals). Staff received enquiries from numerous callers about the nomination

process and other candidacy matters. Where a caller required a Candidate's Pack, it was provided over the counter or sent by mail.

The nomination process proceeded smoothly, although a late rush of nominations received just before the close resulted in a delay to the draw for positions on the ballot paper. In cases of individual nominations, all nominators have to be checked against the roll to ensure that they were enrolled.

As required by the *Electoral Act*, the draw for positions on the ballot paper took place publicly at the office of the Electoral Commission in Darwin as soon as practicable after the close of nominations.

Restricting the draws to the office in Darwin effectively means that the event cannot commence until all nominations are cleared and with the inevitable late rush this can be expected to delay proceedings. Confining the draw to Darwin also means that many candidates, media representatives and interested parties based regionally cannot attend and it makes for a long, drawn out process. This would not be the case if separate draws were conducted at the Commission's regional offices.

### **Recommendation 10**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow the draw for positions on the ballot paper to be conducted at sites determined by the Electoral Commissioner.

One nomination was rejected as required information had not been supplied by the close of nominations. There was also one other known case of a prospective nominee failing to reach the office to lodge his nomination before the nomination deadline.

Of the 80 candidates nominated for the 25 Legislative Assembly divisions, 61 were endorsed and nominated by parties (25 each from the ALP and the CLP and 11 from the Greens). As they were nominated under the registered party name, this name was listed underneath the candidate's name on the ballot paper.

A further 19 candidates nominated, 18 of whom chose to be identified as Independent on the ballot paper. The remaining candidate wished to be known as a Democrat but, as the party was not registered, the only option available was for the candidate to be shown as an Independent or to have no title under the candidate's name on the ballot paper. In this case, the candidate chose the latter option.

The number of candidates at the 2005 election was down by eight on the 88 that nominated in 2001. At the 2001 election there were 68 candidates claiming party endorsement, with the ALP contesting all 25 divisions, the CLP fielding 27 candidates in the 25 Divisions, three candidates from the Australian Democrats, five from the Territory Alliance Party, three from the Socialist Alliance, five from One Nation and 20 Independents.

## **4.4. ELECTORAL ROLL DATA**

In line with the *Electoral Act*, the Commission must at least once a month give Members of the Assembly a copy of the roll on request for their Division and registered political parties a copy of the roll for all divisions. The data has been routinely provided in electronic format and supplied at the end of each month. The supply is subject to



security and privacy provisions to ensure that it is used only for purposes set out in the Act. There is no provision in the Act for the supply of roll data to candidates who are not sitting Members.

As the election was announced on 31 May with the rolls closing on 2 June 2005, a request was received from a party that it be supplied with its monthly update as at the close of rolls. In accordance with the *Electoral Act*, the Commission acceded to the request. Other registered parties and sitting Members were subsequently contacted to determine if they wanted the roll as at the close of rolls to ensure all were given equitable treatment in this regard.

While the supply of a roll as at close of rolls is an entitlement under the *Electoral Act*, it does create further differences between the information made available to Members of Parliament/Parties (including endorsed candidates) and unendorsed candidates.

In this context, it is noted that the Commonwealth provides a roll to all candidates, subject to an undertaking from the candidate that it will only be used for electoral purposes, with the threat of heavy penalties if this does not occur.

#### **Recommendation 11**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow the roll as at roll close be made available to all candidates, subject to an appropriate undertaking being made by the candidate that restricts its electoral usage to the election period only.

### **4.5. NOMINATION DEPOSITS**

Candidates are required to lodge a deposit of \$200 at the time of their nomination. These nomination deposits are forfeited to the Territory unless the candidate is elected or polls more than 20 per cent of the total of first preference votes cast for the candidate who is elected.

At the 2005 General Election, a total of 60 nomination deposits were returned to candidates or political parties on 4 August 2005 and 20 nomination deposits were forfeited (see below):

CANDIDATES	REFUNDED	NOT REFUNDED
ALP	25	0
CLP	25	0
GREENS	3	8
INDEPENDENTS	7	11
OTHERS	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>20</b>

### **4.6. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE RETURNS**

The financial disclosure provisions adopted by the Northern Territory in the *Electoral Act 2004* mirrored the requirements and thresholds contained in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* at the time. Approved forms also mirrored their Commonwealth equivalents.



Summaries of the disclosure returns were placed on the Commission's website and copies of all returns were made available at both of its offices in Darwin and Alice Springs.

The Commission made routine compliance checks where inconsistencies were detected and also for a number of randomly selected candidates. All defects were minor in nature and the returns were corrected. Minor errors in financial disclosure returns are not uncommon and the number recorded at this election was quite low, especially considering this was the first time disclosure was required at an NT election.

Under the current financial disclosure provisions, a candidate endorsed by a party may file a nil return and rely on their party's annual return to disclose expenditure made on his/her behalf. This arrangement means the amount of detail and timeliness of disclosure will vary between candidates because party returns are done annually and the figures are not categorised in the same way on the forms lodged. This system provides practical convenience but is not equitable for all candidates.

Recent changes to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* increased the Federal disclosure threshold from \$1500 to \$10 000. This change is causing a review of thresholds by Territory and State jurisdictions where the provisions are identical to those of the Commonwealth.

The adoption of a \$10 000 threshold in respect to the small NT electorates would appear inappropriate for meaningful disclosure. Any new customised arrangements and returns designed for the Northern Territory should draw consistent information from both endorsed and unendorsed candidates.

### **Recommendation 12**

It is recommended that the financial disclosure provisions be amended to set a specific Territory threshold that is lower than that for the Commonwealth and that the returns be redesigned so as to draw identical information from both endorsed and unendorsed candidates.

## 5. FINANCE

### 5.1. OVERALL EXPENDITURE

Expenditure for the election was \$985 502, with about 40 per cent allocated to wages and allowances (not including ongoing salaries) and 60 per cent to operating expenses. A summary of election expenditure is shown in Appendix J.

The main expenses at the General Election were polling and office casual staff (\$380 000), travel expenses (\$200 000), staff seconded from the Australian Electoral Commission (\$70 000), advertising and promotion (\$73 000) and vehicle hire (\$45 000). In previous elections some costs were able to be met through ongoing operational budgets before the election was called, whilst some election staff members were provided by other NT Government agencies without formal cost recovery. Now that the Commission has become an independent statutory body, it has implemented procedures to ensure that all election specific expenditure is accounted for consistently and transparently for the purposes of ready comparison at future events.

The cost of the 2005 election was \$8.80 per enrolled elector, which is similar to costs incurred at other recent State elections, despite the considerable additional costs of extensive mobile polling. These costs also compared favourably to the \$1 million spent by the NT office of the AEC at the 2004 Federal election, especially since the local Commonwealth costs exclude certain AEC national expenditure items, including all advertising and a broad range of corporate support services.

Although the funding of the election was never in question, no detailed General Election estimate for the election was submitted to Treasury prior to the calling of the poll. This is not a satisfactory arrangement, given the scale of the event and the size of the Commission's current annual budget. It also does not promote a culture of ongoing planning and review of arrangements by the Commission itself, especially since General Elections may still be called in extraordinary circumstances at any time.

#### **Recommendation 13**

It is recommended that the Commission annually prepares a detailed financial estimate for the conduct of an NT Legislative Assembly General Election and that the estimate be submitted for approval during the third and fourth years of the life of the Parliament.

### 5.2. STAFF COSTS

Expenditure on staff for polling place staff, mobile polling teams, office casuals, call centre staff, tally room staff, pre-poll centres and postal vote processing staff was \$380 000 (including travelling allowance, payroll tax and superannuation). The number of staff employed is determined by formula using the number of issuing points in static polling places, the minimum staff requirements for pre-poll and postal voting and the number of mobile polling teams and days in the field. Mobile polling staff costs did increase marginally as the program was expanded slightly to improve service to electors but other casual staff costs only grew commensurate with increases in hourly rates of pay.

A significant additional staff cost was the \$70 000 for ten officers seconded from the Australian Electoral Commission for varying periods of tenure. At previous elections the Australian Electoral Commission only requested payment of staff overtime, travel and allowances. However, due to new national policy on cost recovery, the Australian Electoral Commission also invoiced the NTEC for the costs of ordinary hours worked by these officers on this occasion.

The use of interstate electoral authority staff to assist with key electoral tasks is an increasing feature of State/Territory elections across the nation. While the charges by the Australian Electoral Commission have increased the cost for the Legislative Assembly poll, it is offset by our capacity to charge the Commonwealth similarly at future federal elections.

The release of some staff from NT Government agencies under a special arrangement to work on mobile polling teams did create problems at the 2005 General Election. Only a small number of officers were eventually seconded and their engagement led to a complex remuneration system and payment process. It also created tension among some staff because of the remuneration differences generated and has generally not been helpful for planning purposes (see Section 6.2).

### **5.3. OPERATING COSTS**

The major increases to operating expenses, other than for seconded AEC staff, were advertising, travel, air charters and accommodation and allowances for mobile polling and interstate staff. These costs were all generally affected by the increase in prices since the last election and particularly by the significant increases in air charter and freight costs. In addition, there was a modest increase in television and radio advertising.

## 6. STAFF

### 6.1. RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENTS

At the time the election was called, the Commission had six permanent and five contract staff engaged, four of whom were employed short term as field officers specifically working in public awareness activities in remote communities. For the election an additional 370 individual casual staff members were subsequently employed to fill 402 administrative positions related to polling and support.

The following table shows a break up of polling and support staff appointments:

STAFF CLASSIFICATION	No. OF APPOINTMENTS
OFFICER IN CHARGE – STATIC POLLING PLACE	49
2 <sup>ND</sup> OFFICER IN CHARGE	8
DECLARATION VOTE ISSUING OFFICER	64
ORDINARY VOTE ISSUING	144
BALLOT BOX GUARD	31
MOBILE POLLING TEAM LEADER	20
MOBILE POLLING TEAM MEMBER	45
POSTAL VOTE ISSUING STAFF	4
PRE-POLL CENTRE STAFF	10
SECONDED FROM OTHER ELECTORAL AUTHORITY	11
CASUAL – PHONE CENTRE, TALLY ROOM, COUNT	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>402*</b>

\* These 402 positions were filled by 370 individuals.

Casual staff members are contracted for work under a Determination by the Commissioner for Public Employment made on advice from the Electoral Commissioner. Polling place staff members were employed on a package rate based on expected hours of work and training. Casual staff undertaking electoral pre-poll, office and mobile duties were employed on an hourly rate.

Ten experienced electoral officers were seconded from the AEC at various times during the election period on a fee for service basis to fill specialist election positions including project leaders in the Darwin office, regional co-ordinators and mobile team leaders. A small number of staff members were released from NT Government agencies for mobile polling work.

Most election staff members are employed casually for Polling Day or a few days of work at most, they are required to be courteous toward electors and to follow strict guidelines and instructions. They must also have literacy and numeracy skills for the issuing of ballot papers and conduct of counts. All casual staff are required to sign a

political neutrality statement and agree to basic electoral good practice principles that are included in their offer of employment. Formal training is required for staff undertaking more complex tasks such as mobile polling, issuing declaration votes and supervising polling places.

Temporary staff members were recruited from a range of sources, including a list of people who had worked satisfactorily at previous elections. Additional new casual employees were employed to supplement experienced casual staff. Key staff, for mobile polling, the call centre and pre-poll and postal voting centres were identified where possible before the election. All positions were filled but recruiting was adversely affected by the competitive labour market, generally in the urban areas of the Northern Territory.

Staffing of static polling places does not usually pose a problem and generally enough experienced workers are available to ensure the smooth operation of polling places. However, this is not the case with many other key positions such as mobile team leaders, local assistants at many remote polling locations, managers of pre-poll and postal services – positions that must be filled almost immediately after an election is announced.

## 6.2. MOBILE POLLING STAFF

Mobile polling takes place in a physically demanding environment and staff may need to deal with candidates and party workers in often highly charged and difficult circumstances. Mobile team leaders undertake the duties of an Officer in Charge of a polling place with the additional tasks of moving safely and on time between polling locations, maintaining the security of materials, assisting voters in casting their vote and ensuring that the operations of polling run smoothly and in accordance with electoral law. In particular, mobile team leaders, despite having local recruits and team members on hand to support them, need to be particularly resourceful and competent to cope with the many challenges that regularly confront them over an extended period of time in the field.

Staffing of mobile polling teams for the 2005 General Election was difficult. Mobile team leaders and members are usually required to be away from a permanent job and their home bases for periods of up to 10 days. Although efforts to confirm staffing were made before the election, there was a need to fill most vacancies in mobile teams once the actual election date became known as many staff members found themselves unavailable. Particular difficulties were experienced in recruiting leaders for teams operating out of Alice Springs. As a consequence, seconded AEC officers recruited for other purposes were reassigned to this work in a number of cases.

In the end, large numbers of outstanding vacancies were only able to be filled with reference to AEC staff records at a late stage. This illustrates the need and desirability for the maintenance of a common pool of mobile polling officials and other key staff, who could be trained jointly and be subject to joint annual review.

### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 8**

The NTEC will endeavour to seek the support of the AEC in the development of a common pool of trained mobile polling and other key staff which is maintained jointly.

At previous elections Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS) agencies were directed to release staff on leave for mobile polling. This policy was amended for the 2005 election to one of 'request' for release. In 2005 only three mobile leaders and five other team members were released, with the Commission paying their overtime (at the rate of their substantive salary) and allowances. In theory, this arrangement allows staff to be tentatively identified before the calling of an election, but as availability is not guaranteed at any given time, it can prove counter-productive for planning purposes. It can also be argued that the arrangement is inconsistent with the approach taken in respect to many public servants who work in polling places across the NT on Polling Day itself. In those cases, all workers receive the standard polling official rate of pay.

The arrangements also currently do not generate much in the way of savings in salaries, with the various penalty rates that are being applied often approaching and sometimes exceeding the applicable standard daily rate for a polling official. Moreover, the current two-tier recruiting arrangements also creates significant disparities in remuneration in respect to officers performing identical tasks on the mobile teams, as NTPS staff members were paid at different rates according to their substantive levels and non-NTPS staff members were paid standard rates as mobile team members. In fact, this situation led to some staff complaints and known discontent.

The number of staff released by agencies was significantly lower in 2005 and this decline brings into question the need to employ such complicated recruitment and pay arrangements. Although some NTPS staff may come with a little better local knowledge and familiarity with the communities to be polled, the benefits of a well trained, dissociated personnel controlling polling in these small communities should also not be underestimated.

#### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 9**

The NTEC will seek a new remuneration determination for polling officials that eliminates the current two-tier structure.

### **6.3. TRAINING**

All polling staff receive procedure manuals and, in most cases, homework books specific to their duties. Preparing training materials and manuals was an important task for the Commission's permanent staff and was completed prior to the announcement.

The Commission also provided face-to-face training on aspects of polling relevant to key positions with emphasis on changed procedures and legislation. This included the use of the A-Z Territory wide roll for absent votes, changes to procedures for providing help to voters and the conduct of a two candidate preferred count.

#### **6.3.1 TRAINING PROGRAM**

In all, 198 staff members were trained at 24 separate training sessions conducted in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy and Jabiru between 4 and 16 June 2005. As in the past, the training sessions were presented by permanent Commission staff. Details of the program are provided in the following table.

STAFF CLASSIFICATION	NO. OF OFFICERS	TRAINING SESSIONS	VENUE
REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS	4	1 SESSION	DARWIN

STAFF CLASSIFICATION	No. OF OFFICERS	TRAINING SESSIONS	VENUE
PRE-POLL STAFF	8	(7 JUNE) 1 SESSION (8 JUNE)	DARWIN
MOBILE POLLING TEAMS	65	7 SESSIONS (4 - 13 JUNE) 3 SESSIONS (8 - 10 JUNE)	DARWIN ALICE SPRINGS
OICs POLLING PLACE SECONDS IN CHARGE DEC VOTE ISSUING OFFICERS	121	12 SESSIONS (13 -16 JUNE)	DARWIN, ALICE SPRINGS AND REGIONAL CENTRES

The current training program, documentation and support materials have been much the same for many years. Face-to-face training sessions rely heavily on the skills and experience of a small number of permanent officers as presenters. Presentations also do not tend to incorporate much in the way of hands-on exercises.

In other jurisdictions, training is far more formalised, structured and supported by more contemporary training materials, including detailed training guides for presenters, a series of practical exercises and more user-friendly manuals in hardcopy and electronic form. On-line access to resources also is a common feature, including the capacity for polling officials to complete training exercises on-line.

#### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 10**

The NTEC will review training materials and tools, post materials on the Internet and provide all polling official training materials in electronic form.

Despite a last minute inclusion of a hands-on exercise on the TCP counts (a new concept at Territory elections in 2005), OICs displayed a poor understanding of the task and this led to problems with the accuracy of those figures conveyed to the Tally Room on polling night.

Difficulties attracting sufficient and suitable staff need to be addressed by earlier recruitment, ongoing maintenance of staffing records and improved training, especially in respect to key personnel such as mobile team leaders and OICs of polling places.



**NTEC ACTION ITEM 11**

The NTEC will put in place:

- Procedures for the early recruitment and training of key staff well before the anticipated date of future General Elections.
- Maintain more regular contact with existing staff between elections to confirm their continued interest in working at elections.
- Conduct periodic public calls for expressions of interest in working at future elections so that the register of potential polling staff is more effectively replenished.

### 6.3.2 TWO CANDIDATE PREFERRED COUNT

Polling place staff undertook a two candidate preferred count (TCP) at the polling place on polling night. The TCP is a notional count only that provides an indication of the likely outcome of a distribution of preferences to the two main candidates under a full preferential system of counting. It is accomplished by sorting the ballot papers showing primary votes for the minor candidates to the most preferred of the two major candidates.

Two candidate preferred counts took place for the first time at the 2005 Legislative Assembly General Elections. These counts are common in all jurisdictions and polling officials have been conducting these counts at Commonwealth elections in the NT over several elections.

Despite including specific training on TCP, including a hands-on exercise at their face-to-face training session for the first time, it was clear early on polling night that many officers did not have a good grasp of their task in this regard. This was a major concern for those receiving the figures at the Tally Room as the TCP count, not the primary vote count, was the indicator of the likely outcome of the election.

In the Division of Goyder, the accuracy of the figures transmitted for the TCP count was questioned by the Tally Room Manager before posting. Attempts were made to contact the two OICs for Goyder in the hope that they could undertake a cursory check of their bundles to ensure they had been thrown to the correct candidate in the TCP count before the figures were released. Only one OIC, however, who was already in transit to the receiving store, could be contacted and she was asked to do the cursory check at the first available opportunity.

The incident was later widely reported, often in exaggerated fashion, in the local press after Polling Day. Although there was never any suggestion of any impropriety on behalf of electoral officials, the Commissioner was required to respond to a number of enquiries on procedures that followed.

For the record, the TCP figures transmitted from the other polling place in Goyder were found to be incorrect at the recheck conducted in the week following Polling Day, with the figures for the two major candidates being interchanged.

The incident did, however, bring into sharp focus the Tally Room's capacity to offer advice to Polling Place OICs at point of contact on the night and to manage quality control of the figures as they were being received. Clearly, there were also other shortcomings and the following improvements will be implemented for the next election:

- Additional training on the TCP count will be provided to polling officials, perhaps along with some other generic training conducted outside of the election period.
- More detailed briefings on TCP and counting procedures will be given to the receivers of figures or more officers provided with electoral experience on the ground at the Tally Room.
- A requirement that at least 2 polling officials will bring materials to the receiving base where significant distances are being travelled.
- The packaging system will be reviewed to bring it in line with current best practice for security of ballot material in transit.

#### **6.4. OPERATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

In other jurisdictions, electoral administrations are generally supported by detailed internally-produced operational manuals and project documentation relating to the conduct of elections. Such a support system ensures that detailed knowledge of policy and procedure is well considered, constantly maintained and consistently applied from election to election.

The NTEC, however, currently does not have operational manuals and/or project documentation that are commonplace in other jurisdictions. It relies heavily on the personal knowledge of a very limited number of officers within its small staff structure. This does not lend itself to easy delegation of tasks and a project management approach at election time.

##### **NTEC ACTION ITEM 12**

The NTEC will develop appropriate documentation to support election operations.

## 7. SUPPORT SERVICES

### 7.1. SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Electoral authorities operate with a relatively small staff and limited resources outside of general elections, whilst being prepared for a rapid expansion when one is called. This expansion can only take place by seeking additional services and resources from other agencies, contracting-in services, and recruiting a large temporary labour force. There is also a requirement for additional IT resources, key specialist staff and temporary premises. These various resources are often not readily available at short notice or for short-term hire.

### 7.2. PREMISES

The Commission's Darwin office and adjacent vacant space in the building provided accommodation for the expanded team of election staff, training, the Call Centre, pre-polling and formal announcements and public events required under the *Electoral Act*. The nearby Australian Electoral Commission training facilities were also used, free of charge, and the NTEC also established itself in the unmanned premises of the AEC's office in Alice Springs.

It is highly likely that the NTEC will not be able to acquire the necessary vacant areas in its Darwin building at future elections. Potential ongoing resource sharing opportunities between the two Commissions are immense and would be further enhanced if both Commissions were permanently located in the same building in Darwin. Such an arrangement previously existed for over two decades until the AEC moved to new premises in 2003.

#### **Recommendation 14**

It is recommended that the NTEC explores options to regain permanent co-location with the Australian Electoral Commission.

The quality of accommodation for the regional offices varied. Government Centre space was used in Katherine and Tennant Creek and the NT Housing office in Nhulunbuy. The Tennant Creek office was on the first floor without disabled access. The use of NT Government premises does ensure availability and the provision of suitable furniture and office equipment.

The main accommodation problems occurred at the Pre-poll Voting Centres in Palmerston and Casuarina. Despite considerable efforts to locate and lease suitable premises in Casuarina, they could only be confirmed immediately before polling started. The delayed preparations resulted in the late delivery of furniture and other equipment and the connection of utilities. Both premises had reasonable access for the disabled and were well sited, being near bus interchanges and car parking.

Most static polling places, mainly schools, are commonly used at Federal, Territory and local government elections. Their suitability is reviewed between elections but options are often limited. Dual voting polling places are avoided wherever possible as they can

pose problems for stakeholders and require additional space, furniture and staffing. However, five dual polling places were deemed necessary at the General Election.

Some polling places were busier than anticipated because a number of highly visible locations such as Karama received more absent votes than predicted. There was also increased absent voting by Drysdale electors at Ludmilla and Stuart Park, apparently because of lack of awareness of the relatively new polling place at Bayview. At Parap School there was high demand for absent votes from people visiting the Saturday markets. This caused overcrowding and delays, but the current renovations at the school should improve facilities for future elections.

Polling places and other polling locations need to be reviewed well in advance of the next election and need to take into account operational experience at the 2005 Legislative Assembly and next Federal election. Ideally, polling places should be established near public transport and should possess suitable parking and disabled access.

Section 345 of the *Electoral Act* provides that electoral papers must be retained and securely stored until at least the commencement of the election period for the next General Election. Storage of this material takes up considerable office space and, whilst it may still be used for research purposes, the need to retain it generally diminishes significantly once the period for lodging a disputed return has elapsed.

#### **Recommendation 15**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow for the destruction of electoral papers relating to a General Election to occur at the discretion of the Electoral Commission once returns can no longer be disputed.

### **7.3. IT AND COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES**

The provision of additional equipment and communications links was the subject of considerable planning before the election, including technical advice from the Department of Corporate and Information Services. Most of the installation work was completed or planned for by the end of April 2005, so there was a smooth transition to full services on the announcement of the election. The only additional service installed after the announcement was a facsimile facility for desktops in the Call Centre and the installation of equipment at the Tally Room.

To supplement existing Commission IT and office equipment facilities, an additional 14 desktops were provided for staff in Darwin, Alice Springs and the regional centres, plus five desktops and two printers at the Tally Room. In addition, 14 additional telephone lines and three facsimile lines were provided in the Darwin and Alice Springs offices and five telephones were established at the Tally Room.

Satellite phones were provided to mobile polling teams for the first time and, despite some network problems in obtaining a line on occasions, they allowed team leaders to relay progress at each stop, exchange information with home base and raise any emerging issues, including any safety concerns, with the Commission office.

IT support for the temporary regional offices was poor. Officers stationed there relied heavily on other nearby agencies or their own initiative to undertake many tasks, which

was especially difficult when many tasks had to be undertaken outside of business hours. In future, these locations should be more self sufficient and better resourced by being provided ideally with laptops, internet access, connection or access to the government system, electronic access to the roll and the Commission's election management system.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 13**

The NTEC will ensure that IT services provided to the regional offices in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy are significantly upgraded for the next General Election.

The use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) is now becoming commonplace in the delivery of polling services across the nation. The NT's relatively small electoral roll can be easily loaded on a PDA which then opens up a multitude of uses for the technology as a reference tool in the delivery of voting services in this jurisdiction. Conceivably, searches can be done by surname, given name or location and the technology can even, if required, be used to maintain a record of voters in lieu of a scanning list. The cost of the technology is steadily reducing and, in any case, ample units would likely be available on loan from other jurisdictions.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 14**

The NTEC will explore the potential application of PDAs in the delivery of electoral services in this jurisdiction and incorporate their use at future elections.

## 7.4. ELECTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS) AND WEBSITE

Electoral administrations rely heavily on their electronic Election Management System to plan and implement elections. These systems cover all the key areas of planning and management, including finance, staffing, mobile polling scheduling, materials and equipment and results service. These days the EMS is also integrated with websites and various corporate reporting outputs to eliminate error, duplication and research man-hours.

The Commission's EMS is a Microsoft Access database developed more than a decade ago by the then NT Electoral Office. It does not have some of the features of more contemporary systems that have become standard in other jurisdictions and it is not integrated with the Commission's other operating systems for ease in automatically producing reports and distributing information.

During the election, the EMS generally operated to specification and was networked to users in the Commission's Darwin and Alice Springs offices. However, it did not readily provide information and problems are now being experienced because of the growing volume of data to be managed and the difficulties in maintaining an in-house IT application. Also, there is a particular need for any new election management system to provide hard copy reporting and a feed into the Commission website.

The Commission's current website was also designed many years ago and, by modern standards, is outdated and inflexible. It requires review, particularly if it is to be used to effectively deliver the Commission's ongoing enrolment, public awareness and election programs to a high standard.

**Recommendation 16**

It is recommended that the Commission's EMS and Website are reviewed and significantly upgraded or replaced.

**7.5. FINANCIAL AND OFFICE MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

At the 2001 General Election, financial and human resource services were managed by the Department of Corporate and Information Services (DCIS) and the Department of the Chief Minister.

With the Commission's move to become a stand alone agency and the consequential changes to legislation and delegations, the financial and human resource services were brought in-house, with the exception of wage processing. More specifically, at the 2005 General Election, the Commission became directly responsible for managing election finances, procurement, travel bookings, accounts processing and recruitment from its own resources throughout the course of the election.

Some polling staff wages were paid late because of end of financial year processing delays. Also, partly because of the lack of EMS support, it was difficult to estimate and monitor overall election costs and provide timely reporting on expenditure.

DCIS did provide support for processing transactions; however, streamlining the process is highly desirable, given the high volume of transactions that occurs in a very short period. In fact, it would likely lead to a much more efficient and effective service, if a DCIS officer was out posted to the Commission office for the busiest weeks.

**NTEC ACTION ITEM 15**

The NTEC will seek to negotiate the secondment of a suitable DCIS officer to the NTEC during the election period to streamline and improve the processing of election accounts and staff payments.



## 8. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS & NTEC ACTION ITEMS

### 8.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a fixed poll date be established or, if that is not supported, then the period from issue of the Writ to Polling Day be extended by at least a week.

#### Recommendation 2

It is recommended that commonly exempted items in other jurisdictions also be specifically exempted under the authorisation provisions contained in the *Electoral Act*.

#### Recommendation 3

It is recommended that more detailed guidelines are provided in the *Electoral Act* on the processing and assessment procedures in respect to declaration votes for unenrolled electors.

#### Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow for the issue of postal and pre-poll votes as soon as practicable after the close of nominations.

#### Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow electors to lodge an application for a postal vote for a nominated period of up to one year, at any time or at least once the final year of the current Parliament has commenced.

#### Recommendation 6

It is recommended that:

- The NTEC examine options for using electronic means to enhance services to remote, interstate and overseas electors.
- The *Electoral Act* is suitably amended so as to permit the application of electronic voting means where secure and certain prescribed circumstances exist.

#### Recommendation 7

It is recommended that additional funding for a public awareness information program for remote communities is provided to the NTEC once parliament has served its first three years.

#### Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to establish a how-to-vote card distribution service for mobile polling that is overseen by the NTEC.

#### Recommendation 9

It is recommended that Section 78 of the *Electoral Act* be amended to more specifically set the criteria for the selection of locations for mobile polling.

#### Recommendation 10

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow the draw for positions on the ballot paper to be conducted at sites determined by the Electoral Commissioner.



**Recommendation 11**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow the roll as at roll close be made available to all candidates, subject to an appropriate undertaking being made by the candidate that restricts its electoral usage to the election period only.

**Recommendation 12**

It is recommended that the financial disclosure provisions be amended to set Territory-specific reporting thresholds and that the returns be redesigned so as to draw identical information from both endorsed and unendorsed candidates.

**Recommendation 13**

It is recommended that the Commission annually prepares a detailed financial estimate for the conduct of an NT Legislative Assembly General Election and that the estimate be submitted for approval during the third and fourth years of the life of the Parliament.

**Recommendation 14**

It is recommended that the NTEC explores options to achieve permanent co-location with the Australian Electoral Commission.

**Recommendation 15**

It is recommended that the *Electoral Act* be amended to allow for the destruction of electoral papers relating to a General Election to occur at the discretion of the Electoral Commission once returns can no longer be disputed.

**Recommendation 16**

It is recommended that the Commission's EMS and Website are reviewed and significantly upgraded or replaced.

**8.2. NTEC ACTION ITEMS****Action Item 1**

The NTEC will introduce further quality control checks and more rigour in the transfer of elector enrolments following a redistribution of future electoral boundaries.

**Action Item 2**

The NTEC will review polling places critically following the next Legislative Assembly redistribution with particular emphasis on limiting the establishment of dual polling places.

**Action Item 3**

The NTEC will review the election public awareness campaign to provide a modest amount of targeted information to electors who can be identified as likely to attend a polling place outside their Division because of previous voting habits or past voting arrangements.

**Action Item 4**

The NTEC will review the electoral services provided to Defence forces through consultation and planning with the relevant authorities.

**Action Item 5**

The NTEC will liaise more closely with disability advocacy groups in the Northern Territory to develop a Disability Services Plan that will appropriately improve those specialised electoral services.

**Action Item 6**

The NTEC will review statistics to be collected at future elections on voter assistance and other special needs matters to assist with trend analysis and the practical customisation of electoral education and voting services.

**Action Item 7**

The NTEC will reassess the current non-voter payment arrangements with a view to providing more options for payment.

**Action Item 8**

The NTEC will endeavour to seek the support of the AEC in the development of a common pool of trained mobile polling and other key staff which is maintained jointly.

**Action Item 9**

The NTEC will seek a new remuneration determination for polling officials that eliminates the current two-tier structure.

**Action Item 10**

The NTEC will review training materials and tools, post materials on the Internet and provide all polling official training materials in electronic form.

**Action Item 11**

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- Procedures for the early recruitment and training of key staff well before the anticipated date of future General Elections.
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**Action Item 12**

The NTEC will develop appropriate documentation to support election operations.

**Action Item 13**

The NTEC will ensure IT services provided to the regional offices in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy are significantly upgraded for the next General Election.

**Action Item 14**

The NTEC will explore the potential application of PDAs in the delivery of electoral services in this jurisdiction and incorporate their use at future elections.

**Action Item 15**

The NTEC will seek to negotiate the secondment of a suitable DCIS officer to the NTEC during the election period to streamline and improve the processing of election accounts and staff payments.

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