AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

Electoral Commissioner

Ms Mary Watson
Committee Chair
Local Government Representation Review Committee
PO Box 2075
Parap NT 0804

Dear Ms Watson

Submission to the 2026 Local Government Representation Review

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Local Government Representation Review.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) recognises the importance of local government and appreciates the role local councils play in supporting strong, representative, and accountable democratic outcomes.

The AEC's submission focuses on the importance of electoral participation, enrolment and electoral system integrity in supporting local democracy.

An accurate electoral roll is critical to local democracy

An accurate and comprehensive electoral roll is one of the foundations of a well-functioning democratic system. The current electoral roll is highly accurate, complete and underpinned by the highest levels of integrity.

The AEC works closely with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) and other agencies to support enrolment outcomes for Territorians. The quality of the Northern Territory electoral roll has improved significantly in recent years. As at 30 June 2026, the Northern Territory enrolment rate is 91.3%. This represents sustained enrolment growth in the Northern Territory since 30 June 2017 when the enrolment rate was 83.1%. However, this is the lowest enrolment rate of all states and territories and, as such, the AEC recognises there is still more work to do to support electoral participation, particularly for people living in remote and very remote communities.

The AEC remains committed to working collaboratively with NTEC and other government and community partners to improve enrolment outcomes and ensure eligible Territorians are accurately represented on the electoral roll.

First Nations Participation

The Northern Territory continues to experience lower levels of electoral participation than the national average. While there is no single environmental factor that can be attributed as the primary reason, the remoteness of some communities, mobility and voter awareness can affect participation.

First Nations Territorians make up 26.3 per cent of the population. Through the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP), the AEC works with Indigenous organisations and communities across the Territory to support enrolment, electoral education and participation. During the 2025 federal

election, the IEPP secured eight partnership agreements and delivered more than 100 engagement activities across the Northern Territory, including enrolment activities, Yarn and Learn (education) sessions, community engagement and collaboration with local organisations. This engagement underpins the AEC's ongoing commitment to providing accessible and culturally appropriate polling services to First Nations communities across the Northern Territory.

Through its Remote Voter Services (RVS) program, the AEC delivers in-person polling services to remote communities, with 189 locations serviced across the Northern Territory during the 2025 federal election. To support this work, the AEC works closely with communities to ensure genuine consultation informs the ongoing refinement of these services, supporting increased First Nations participation and engagement in the electoral process.

Community feedback highlights the value of trusted organisations, local workforce participation and familiar community settings, while increasingly linking electoral participation with community representation and self-determination.

Participation, compulsory voting and voter understanding

The AEC supports the continued importance of electoral participation at all levels of government. Compulsory voting has been a longstanding feature of Australia's democratic system and helps ensure broad participation across federal, state, territory and local government elections. It contributes to the legitimacy and representativeness of elected candidates and parties by encouraging participation from all parts of the community, rather than only those who are already highly engaged.

The AEC also notes that electoral participation is supported when voting systems are clear, consistent and well understood by voters. The Northern Territory currently utilises slightly different voting models across federal, territory and local government elections, including full preferential and proportional representation. While these systems differ in certain respects, they are underpinned by the common principle that voters can express preferences between candidates and that election outcomes reflect those preferences. Although the differences between these systems are relatively subtle, they nonetheless require targeted voter education to support voters and limit informality rates.

If there is consideration of electoral system reforms, the Committee may wish to consider the impact on voter understanding, informality rates, voter education requirements and administrative complexity when there are different voting systems in place across one jurisdiction.

The AEC's experience is that consistency in voting systems, simplicity of voting processes and effective voter education support voter confidence and participation. Regardless of the electoral model ultimately adopted, maintaining clear voting instructions and supporting understanding will assist voters to participate confidently and cast a formal vote that accurately reflects their intentions.

Conclusion

The AEC appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Local Government Representation Review. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the NTEC, local governments, Indigenous organisations and other partners to support enrolment, participation and confidence in democratic processes across the Northern Territory.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Jeff Pope APM

30 September 2026