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## **Election 2016: Half of NT's Indigenous population not enrolled to vote, electoral commission says**

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Half of the Northern Territory's Indigenous population is not enrolled to vote in the upcoming federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission has estimated. AEC NT electoral officer Mick Sherry said community elders have told his staff the electoral system lacks relevance for many Indigenous people in the NT.

"We're of the view that only about 50 per cent of Indigenous people are currently on the roll at the moment," Mr Sherry said. "The feedback that we are receiving is that a lot of Indigenous people have a lack of understanding of how the electoral system really relates to their life."

Mr Sherry said enrolments remained low despite a small NT-based team dedicated to fixing the problem.

"We're putting significant resources into this area," he said.

"Their sole focus is to educate Indigenous people about the electoral process.

"Right across Australia, we have teams visiting 170 remote communities, where we are putting people on the roll and updating their details."

### **'No awareness campaign out bush'**

NT Parliament's Independent member for Namatjira Alison Anderson said the Indigenous enrolment rate was "appalling".

"I think the figure is so low because people don't understand that they can enrol, there's not the material out bush, there's not the awareness campaign out in the bush," Ms Anderson said.

"I haven't seen the Australian Electoral Commission in a major community like Hermannsburg or Papunya or Kintore or Ayers Rock, for that matter, enrolling people. "It should be their job to do that."

Labor's candidate for Namatjira in the upcoming NT election Chansey Paech said he worked hard to ensure his relatives were on the federal electoral roll before the cut-off date on Monday.

"That was a mammoth task itself, just to get them to enrol to vote," Mr Paech said.

"Sometimes people feel a little bit apprehensive on community to sign up to vote because they might not be fully aware of what it is actually that they're signing up for."

## **Young people 'could be better targeted**

The NT has the highest proportion of Indigenous people in the country - about 30 per cent, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

In 2013, the ABS described the NT federal seat of Lingiari as the youngest electorate in the country, along with the inner-city seat of Melbourne.

Mr Paech and Ms Anderson both said younger people could be better targeted by the AEC. "You have choices and you have rights, to make sure that people you like get into power to speak on your behalf, otherwise you get these drongos," Ms Anderson said.

Country Liberal candidate for Namatjira Heidi Williams said the AEC could be using social media to a greater extent. "I think we could do our messaging a little bit better, about what the benefit is," Ms Williams said.

Ms Anderson said the AEC should employ more interpreters to address language barriers in communities. She said many community members who were not enrolled will be disappointed on election day.

"They will turn up to vote and they'll be told to wait until four years time or three years time and I think it's very, very unfair."