

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Finance and Administration

Estimates Hearings 14-18 February 2005

Question: F32

Outcome: Australian Electoral Commission

Topic: Aboriginal enrolments in East Arnhem Land for 2004 federal election

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Senator Carr asked:

How many Aboriginal enrolments were taken in AEC visits to communities in the subdivision of East Arnhem Land for the 2004 federal election?

Answer:

Although there is not a Commonwealth subdivision of East Arnhem Land, generally speaking, the area in focus encompasses major Aboriginal communities at Millingimbi, Gunyangara, Galiwinku (Elcho Island), Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella), Angurugu (Groote Eylandt) and Yirrkala (near Nhulunbuy). A network of smaller communities/outstations emanating from these major communities are spread throughout vast (sometimes difficult to access) areas, the most notable being the Yirrkala outstations of far northeast Arnhem Land. There are also major non-indigenous settlements at Nhulunbuy (Alcan Mines) and Alyangula (Gemco, Groote Eylandt).

The main method of generating enrolment in remote indigenous communities in the lead up to a poll is through the engagement of Community Electoral and Information Officers (CEIOs). These officers work in the field with the purpose of encouraging enrolment activity and raising public awareness. A complementary media advertising and publicity campaign is also run concurrently during their field work.

During 2004 Federal Election enrolment drive, some special measures were taken in an attempt to improve outcomes in the NT. Permanent AEC officers spent substantial time in the field during the 2004/5 financial year, with CEIOs taking over at the first available date (1/7/04). Further, most of those officers engaged as CEIOs later took up positions of responsibility in the planning and delivery of remote mobile polling.

As another initiative, Community Enrolment Days at major communities and rural centres around the NT were arranged and advertised daily on Imparja television until the close of rolls. All major political parties were advised in advance of the Enrolment Day scheduling and advertising.

The following table outlines the results of the enrolment drives in Aboriginal communities in the region:

2004 FEDERAL ELECTION ENROLMENT DRIVE VISITS BY CEIOs

LOCATION	SUBDIVISION	ENROLMENT CARDS COLLECTED	ENROLMENT DETAILS VERIFIED	TOTAL TRANSACTIONS EFFECTED
Angurugu	Arnhem	19	545	564
Bulman	Arnhem	8	123	131
* Galiwinku	Nhulunbuy	61	0	61
Milingimbi	Arnhem	17	623	640
Ngukurr	Arnhem	49	542	591
Numbulwar	Arnhem	4	419	423
Ramingining	Arnhem	25	469	494
Umbakumba	Arnhem	32	213	245
Weemol	Arnhem	14	49	63
*Yirrkala	Nhulunbuy	19	0	19
TOTAL		248	2983	3231

Note: the table does not detail all locations visited in the Arnhem region

* Galiwinku and Yirrkala were visited just before close of rolls

For a fuller picture, transactions generated at the 2004 Federal Election enrolment drive by field officers in remote areas must also be viewed in the light of the extensive fieldwork undertaken in the lead up to the 2002 ATSIC General Elections. With the benefit of a long lead in time to close of rolls for that particular election, considerable effort was directed to updating the roll in the Nhulunbuy region, especially in respect to those in the 17-25 years-of-age cohort.

The following table provides details of the enrolment cards generated by AEC field officers in the 2002 ATSIC General Election enrolment drive:

LOCATION	SUBDIVISION	ENROLMENT CARDS COLLECTED (17-25 AGE GROUP)	ENROLMENT CARDS COLLECTED (ALL OTHER AGES)	ENROLMENT CARDS COLLECTED TOTAL
Angurugu	Arnhem	56	40	96
Bickerton Island	Arnhem	3	13	16
Galiwinku	Nhulunbuy	100	88	188
Gapuwiyak	Nhulunbuy	45	66	111
Gunyangara	Nhulunbuy	9	20	29
Milingimbi	Arnhem	30	30	60
Numbulwar	Arnhem	49	19	68
Ramingining	Arnhem	23	50	73
Umbakumba	Arnhem	13	13	26
Yirrkala	Nhulunbuy	34	43	77
TOTAL		362	382	744

Note: Above figures compiled by ATSIC Regional Returning Officer (Nhulunbuy Region)

However, the enrolment card collection figures for AEC field officers do not reflect the whole picture of enrolment activity for an election. Advertising, election speculation and proactive interest groups also prompt electors into action in this regard.