Chief Minister Adam Giles has confirmed that the next local government elections will be deferred to August 2017 to avoid a clash with Territory and Federal Government polls due in 2016.

Mr Giles made the announcement at the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory Conference in Darwin this morning.

“I have listened to the concerns raised by both Councils and the NT Electoral Commission and have acted to ensure elections at all levels of government run smoothly in 2016 and 2017,” Mr Giles said.

“Elections in our remote areas are extremely complicated operations and it is simply not practical for all three polls to be conducted in a single year.

“This will mean existing members of local governments will have their terms extended until the new election date on the fourth Saturday in August 2017. Polling day will then be fixed to this day in August every four years.

“Changing the elections to August every four years will have the added benefit of giving council members more time to become familiar with the workings of local government before they start framing a council budget for the next financial year.”

The date change is among a number of election-related reforms being introduced by the Giles Government in response to recommendations by the NTEC.

“To minimise the enormous cost of local government by-elections, we are extending the period in which casual vacancies can be filled by appointment, out to 18 months before a general election,” Mr Giles said.

“Councils are already allowed to appoint an eligible person to a council position if they resign in the last 12 months of the Council’s term. By extending this period to 18 months, it will reduce the number of by-elections, which can hugely expensive for the council involved.
“Under the package of changes, Councils will be given the choice to conduct by-elections themselves, engage external providers or use the NTEC for their polls. A council conducting its own by-election frees up the NTEC’s resources and may deliver savings to councils.

“In municipal areas, councils will also be given the option to conduct by-elections by postal voting only, reducing inconvenience to constituents.”

These amendments will be discussed in detail with all councils over the next two months before the changes are legislated early next year.

“The Country Liberals are proud of the way we are re-building local government after Labor’s disastrous shires experiment stripped Territorians of their local voice,” Mr Giles said.

“Local Authorities have now been established in 63 communities across the Territory and each has now has its first meeting marking a return the grass-roots representation that’s been missing for so long.”

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