Commissioner to set the locations of mobile polling places at locations to service a specific class or classes of voters;

- the capacity for the Electoral Commissioner to approve the use of automated or electronic systems to facilitate election processing, voting and vote counting;

- absent voting procedures and ordinary voting outside wards;

- resolution of ties in counts and election results; and

- lodgement of nominations and nomination checks for candidates.

Part 5 also includes a provision to remove the requirement for $100 candidate nomination deposit for local government elections. Consultation with local government councils and peak bodies regarding the removal of the candidate nomination deposit for local government elections highlighted the requirements to pay a nomination deposit presented a challenge to individuals on low disposable incomes to raise the deposit without financial support of other family or community members; presented barriers for Indigenous candidates in those places where there was no Electoral Commission presence to pay and formally lodge the deposit; presented difficulties for council staff and caused potential conflict of interest, particularly in communities where the council office is generally the sole support for community residents; and resulted in confusion with many candidates not understanding the process of obtaining a refund for their deposit. My government considers the removal of the $100 candidate nomination deposit is justified, as it will increase the participation of Territorians in local governments, and nominations from candidates at future local government elections.

Part 5 also contains a transitional provision which provides that the amendments relating to the removal of the $100 candidate nomination deposit at local government elections does not apply to the nomination of candidates for the local government elections to be held on 24 March 2012.

I previously referred to the inclusion of a provision in the *Electoral Act* to make it acceptable for a tick or a cross to be marked on a ballot paper which will allow the ballot paper to be treated as formal, where all other candidate squares have been marked on the ballot paper with consequentially increasing numbers. Given the high number of informal votes at the local government level, my government considers this provision has equal application in the local government context. Accordingly, a similar provision has been inserted into the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations to reduce the number of informal votes at local government elections, and will be operational at the local government general election in 2012.

Part 6 deals with a number of miscellaneous matters and removes references to 'returning officer' and replaces these with references to 'Electoral Commissioner', or removes obsolete provisions due to the establishment of the Electoral Commissioner as the sole provider for local government elections. These include: issuing of general directions to a returning officer; nomination of candidates to a returning officer; and closing of the roll. It also contains a provision that will allow the Electoral Commissioner, as the sole provider for local government elections, to approve the use of automated or electronic systems for the purpose of election processing, voting, vote counting, and certifying lists and polling places to accelerate processing times.

Last, Part 7 of the bill deals with minor consequential amendments to the *Local Government Act* and Local Government (Electoral) Regulations, and Part 8 contains a standard expiration clause.

In conclusion, I believe this bill will improve and update the Territory's electoral procedures and processes, provide internal consistency within the Northern Territory electoral legislation, and align the Northern Territory's electoral legislation with contemporary electoral practices adopted in other Australian jurisdictions. The technical provisions included in the bill will assist the Electoral Commissioner conducting elections, and will improve their operation processes and procedures. The bill will also ensure that all Territorians actively participate in our political system by reducing the number of informal votes at local and Territory elections, and by making sure every vote cast by Territorians is counted.

Madam Speaker, I commend this bill to honourable members, and table the explanatory statement to accompany the bill.

Debate adjourned.

MEDICINES, POISONS AND THERAPEUTIC GOODS BILL (Serial 180)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr VATSKALIS (Health): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read for a second time.