

Bank Closures in Regional Australia

Submission to

Rural and Regional Affairs and
Transport References Committee of
the Australian Senate March 2023



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Sector Union**

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Terms of Reference

- A. The branch closure process, including the reasons given for closures.
- B. The economic and welfare impacts of bank closures on customers and regional communities.
- C. The effect of bank closures or the removal of face-to-face cash services on access to cash;
- D. The effectiveness of government banking statistics capturing and reporting regional service levels, including the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's authorised deposit-taking institutions points of presence data;
- E. Consideration of solutions; and any other related matters.

Recommendations

Banking is an essential service

No guaranteed universal minimum standards for access to banking services exist in Australia. Banking should be declared as an essential service with a minimum set of service standards developed based on principles of accessibility, affordability, transparency, fairness, security, and responsiveness.

A new code for branch closures

There is a desperate need for a new protocol for bank branch closures that should be developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. For the banking code to have substance it must be more than a public relations document for the Australian Banking Association (ABA) and their member banks. Based on the UK model the code should have three phases, phase one is the initial announcement, phase 2, post announcement and pre-closure, phase 3 is post closure. This code should be monitored and enforced by the appropriate regulator and strict penalties applied when the code is breached. The Banks too easily ignore their current voluntary code and if they breach the code, the punishment(s) are next to worthless.

Community impact assessment

When closing a bank branch bank customers and stakeholders should have the right to transparent and accessible communication of closure information and its impact on customers and stakeholders. Banks should be required to conduct a community impact assessment to understand the potential effect of a branch closure on customers and the local community. This impact assessment should consider factors such as the availability of alternative banking options, the accessibility of these options, and the potential impact on vulnerable customers and it should be mandatory to consult with the workforce, local council, and community.

An appeal mechanism

An appeal mechanism should be introduced based on providing customers and stakeholders with the right to appeal based on a fair and impartial process, clear guidelines, accessible information, opportunity to provide evidence, timely decision-making, and confidentiality.

Right of review

A 'right to review' should be implemented so that anytime a regional community is suffering because whatever arrangements the banks put in place before exiting that town aren't working or have collapsed, that community can ask for a review that brings the relevant parties back for further consultation and a fix.

Closure statistics

The Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority (APRA) should develop a system that is able to update the number of branch closures and ATMs in real time or as close to real time as possible subject to the appropriate privacy considerations.

Telecommunications in regional and rural areas.

Access to stable and functional internet and (mobile) telephony services is essential to underpin the provision of digital banking services. Any changes to allow the provision of banking services via digital means must include an assessment of the suitability and accessibility of cheap, reliable internet and mobile telephony services. Where this is not currently available it must be a national priority before face-to-face banking services are removed. A reliable, cheap, and prompt internet roll out should be a national priority.

Worker Health & Safety

As banks close their branches and withdraw their ATMs Australia Post will become the primary source for access to cash. Staff will be required to handle and store larger volumes of hard currency than previously, and this represents a material risk to their health and safety. The FSU campaigned long and hard and over an extended period for better protection of our members and whilst bank robberies are now in the past the potential for robberies to restart will be an omnipresent threat to these Australia Post workers.

Access to cash & coins

The use of cash for day-to-day transactions has been declining for many years and this has implications for all aspects of the cash system. The ongoing adequacy of cash access is vulnerable to further withdrawal of the access points that provide cash to the community and this issue warrants regular monitoring. The continued ability to use cash for purchases should be monitored and a prudential standard should be developed by APRA that guarantees the role of cash in our economy.

Community service obligations.

In recognition of the vital role that bank branches play in regional & rural communities, it should become an operational policy of all Australian banks who have a retail branch network to undertake community service obligations by keeping bank branches open in regional & rural Australia. This type of policy can only happen through government mandate and regulation, a mandate which the banks have resisted time and time again. The FSU sees a mandate on this issue as a more than reasonable trade-off for the tax-payer support provided to banks such as the government guarantees of deposits and the access to

plentiful cheap funds via the Reserve Bank. We have drafted a model policy statement on community service obligations for the committee's consideration.

Background

The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has represented workers in the finance, banking, and insurance and superannuation industry for over 100 years. This industry consists of approximately 4% of the workforce with women making up 49.8% of the total number of workers within the sector, and the majority of FSU members.

Introduction

In recent years, the number of retail branches has decreased dramatically as companies have sought to reduce costs given retail banking is the most expensive type of banking to operate and maintain.

The banking sector has long been planning for a decrease in retail banking branches and in 2014 predicted a decrease in retail banking by 2020 of approximately 20%.¹ The strategy to reduce retail banking branches has been accelerated by the COVID-19 related state and national lockdowns with an additional 350 retail branches closed or planning to be closed by the big 4 banks between January 2020 and the end of 2021.²

According to our statistics, based on closure notifications from employers we estimate that there have been over 1300 hundred branch closures in Australia since 2016, however we believe the true number is even higher possibly at around 1600+ which includes approximately 500 regional closures. Over 2000 jobs have been lost in that time.

The FSU does not have accurate number of branch closures because currently there is no obligation for companies with banking licences to notify the FSU of a branch closure. The Fair Work Act requires that employers notify "worker and their representatives" only when there is a "major change" which will have an impact on workers. While the FSU is of the view that a retail branch closure constitutes a "major change" our view is not shared by every company that operates a retail bank, particularly those companies that do not have an ongoing working relationship with their workers' representatives. Some organisations define "major change" as one that impacts on 15 or more workers, and in the case of retail banks (particularly those in rural and regional areas) they rarely contain more than 15 workers.

The FSU does not claim to be the arbiter or source of an accurate number of branch closures, and we recommend that APRA develop a publicly available reporting system to keep the numbers of branch closures updated in real time.

¹ <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/banking-capital-markets/banking-2020/assets/pwc-retail-banking-2020-evolution-orrevolution.pdf>

² <https://www.afr.com/companies/financial-services/big-four-banks-shut-350-branches-during-virus-crisis-20210711-p588o5>

Workers in retail banking are required to meet performance targets, and these targets often include migrating customers to digital banking, thereby reducing the number of customers coming into the branches. They are trained and coached to redirect customers to ATMs and/or online banking to reduce foot traffic in branches. If they fail to meet these targets, they may be subject to performance management and in some cases, this results in termination of their employment.

If they meet the targets, then the reduction in customer numbers and branch transactions leads to their branch being slated for closure. Either way these workers face high levels of job insecurity. The majority of front-line retail banking staff are women³ which means that the job losses due to branch closures disproportionately impact women who have much lower job security than their male counterparts - who are more likely to work in business banking and sales roles.

For both individuals and businesses, there are also safety and security matters arising from the lack of access to a branch; the loss of economic opportunities; limited choice in obtaining professional advice and finance, especially venture capital; and potential exclusion from the financial world. The loss of a bank branch, especially if it is the last one in town, has wide reaching implications for the economic and social life of the community. Some regard the departure of a bank as the beginning of the end for a small town.”⁴

A. The branch closure process, including the reasons given for closures.

Banks claim that the public prefer to complete their financial transactions online however it is disingenuous for Banks to single out their customers as the reason for these closures. It is the Banks themselves that are enforcing this change – it has long been part of their business model. Banks have engineered the move to digital banking and herded their customers into these options, by introducing performance targets on bank workers to convert customers to digital banking.

Bank workers have had limits placed on the number of over-the-counter transactions and have targets on how many new online banking accounts they must open. Bank workers have been made to participate in the demise of their own jobs.

Here are several verbatim examples out of hundreds from our members:

- “Just the other day we were told that we’re not allowed to deposit cash into customers credit cards. We have to tell them no we can’t do it and take them to the ATM”.
- “I feel it is unfair to force customers to digital. I feel that by being unable to open an account unless registered for internet banking may be placing our customers at a greater risk of fraud.”

³ <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/bank-workers?occupationCode=5521>

⁴ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Corporations_and_Financial_Services/Completed_inquiries/2002-04/banking/report/b02

- “We are now unable to open a simple essential transactional account for a customer if they don’t have an email address, which is extremely discriminating and potentially risky for the majority of elderly customers who have never and will never use email.”
- Every single day. Your customer interactions get converted to numbers and those numbers make you look like a failure because they should be tracking down not up!

There are always early adopters of new technology however not everybody can move to digital banking. People with disabilities, the aged, those with low levels of digital literacy, and those with English as a second language or who have limited access to transport find the move to digital banking either difficult or impossible. Unstable internet in regional and rural areas means customers can go for hours without access to their funds. What do people who live in places like Coober Pedy, where the next bank branch is 500 kilometres, do when the internet is down? They don’t have a choice; they wait and wait.

B. The economic and welfare impacts of bank closures on customers and regional communities.

Not everybody has access to the Internet. While you must have access to a bank account to receive a social security payment, rough sleepers, and other poor Australians, including from Indigenous backgrounds, often don’t have a smart phone or a web enabled device. Their only way to obtain money is to come into a branch. Not everybody is physically or mentally capable of using either an in-bank Internet banking kiosk or the increasingly complex “smart” ATMs.

Towns such as Tullamore and Trundle in central western NSW lost their banks many decades ago. They are up to an hour’s drive from the nearest communities with operational bank branches. Other country communities such as Yass lost their ANZ some years ago. The Westpac closed last December and the NAB is only open for half a day at a time. This has left the Commonwealth as the last full-service bank, and we suspect that its days are numbered. In Cooma, to the south of Canberra the NAB also closed last December (2022).

All of these towns, like most of regional Australia, have a disproportionately high number of elderly, Indigenous, disabled, and impoverished residents. They feel the loss of their banking services very keenly and often have to pay significant transaction fees of up to three dollars for balance inquiries and withdrawals to access their accounts through privately operated auto tellers. These costs can add up to a significant amount over time. The other downside is that those residents with the ability to travel to a regional center to access banking services will then do their shopping while they are there. This, of course, undermines the viability of local businesses and is just another step on the downward spiral.

The loss of its banks can be a death sentence for a country town, particularly for cash dependent businesses such as car washes, laundromats and the like.

While limited banking services are available through the Post Office network many privately operated Post Offices are surviving on very narrow margins and there is no guarantee such services will be available in two, five- or 10-years' time. However, and this is even more important, Post Office staff are not trained bankers. Unlike professional branch staff they have not had the training to identify money laundering, financial elder abuse, phishing, and fraudulent transactions. This creates a massive loophole that circumvents all the work that has been done to protect bank customers in recent years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

We offer the following partial testimony of Nathan Boyle senior policy analyst with the Indigenous Outreach Program within the Financial Capability team at the Australian Securities & Invest Commission (ASIC) and Lynda Edwards Coordinator, Financial Capability, at Financial Counselling Australia.

This testimony was given on July 3, 2018 at the round 4 Darwin hearings of the Hayne Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation, and Financial Services Industry. The FSU encourages all committee members to read the full testimony that was provided on that day.

MS ORR: Thank you, Mrs Edwards. Now, could I move to asking both of you some questions. Can I start, Mrs Edwards, with you, by asking you about the obstacles that are faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in regional and remote communities when engaging with financial services entities?

MS EDWARDS: Yes. There are a number of barriers that – that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote and regional communities come into contact, and that's – certainly, one of those is about access. So many communities are long distances from branches and, you know, an example of that is the community of Mutitjulu, at the base of Uluru, is 470 kilometres from the nearest branch. And so, people – many people living in remote communities find it very difficult to access any bank – any bank branches due to, obviously long distances, but also to the environment. So many people have to travel across, you know, dirt roads. So, when the rains come, you know, roads are cut for months at a time.

Language and literacy are a major problem for regional and remote particularly remote communities where English is, you know, can sometimes be, you know, second, third or even a fourth language. So, understanding, you know, what banking products are, and particularly products where it's written, is – is always really difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There's very limited understanding of banking products. So – there's – you know, there's not that understanding of what actually an interest rate is and what does it actually mean.

And certainly, the total – you know, cost of a loan is – is something that, you know, that a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in those communities do not understand. We have culture and kinship within our communities, and the understanding that one person can be responsible for another and the environment that they live in, so having kinship, which is a type of cultural obligation, will actually play a role in people's financial affairs, and unfortunately most of the financial services don't understand cultural obligation when it comes to hardship policies. The other barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – is that there is a trust, so it's really inappropriate to disagree or not talk to someone.⁵

ID Problems

MS ORR: Yes. Yes. And in the banking context, how do identification issues emerge?

MR BOYLE: Identification issues emerge really at two key points in the banking system. So, the first is at establishing a bank account. If you don't have adequate identification documentation, it can be almost impossible to even open a standard bank account which means that a proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are completely financially excluded and don't have access to even basic financial products. The second place that we see identification play a role – and I think I mentioned it briefly earlier – was where someone might lose a debit card, for example, or lose a banking product and need to have a new card issued. And they will contact their bank via the telephone, and it can be quite difficult for people to identify themselves or to answer the questions that are asked over the telephone.

Sometimes, we see financial services have policies about the types of questions that are asked, and they can only ask questions in a certain way which might not make sense to an Aboriginal person in a remote community. So, for example, one that we come across quite regularly is where we will contact – we will be assisting someone to contact a financial services entity and they will be asked, "What is your street person will say, "I don't have a street address." Or they will be asked three or four times what the street address is, whereas if they were asked, "What number is on the front of your house?" Then they can answer that question.⁶

Geographic Isolation

MR BOYLE: And, yes, we see a lot of barriers that come from geographical isolation. People being significant distances from bank branches does mean that it's difficult for them to get a face-to-face service, and that is compounded by identification issues for indigenous people – and I know we will talk about that as another issue, but if an indigenous person in a remote community wants to access a financial service and they don't have appropriate identification or communication, then at the moment

⁵ Hayne Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation, and Financial Services Industry (2019), Round four hearings, Final Report, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

⁶

often they're being asked to travel to the nearest branch, and as Ms Edwards – or as Lynda said – that would be 480, 500 kilometres away.

And that request is often made to people if they lose a key card, for example, and they contact the branch and they're unable to pass the authentication process over the telephone. Then they're asked to go to the local branch. So geographical isolation really does present a major barrier. Also, in a lot of particularly remote and very remote indigenous communities, information and communication technology is only relatively recently implemented into the communities. And as an example, I was in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands in north-west South Australia four weeks ago, and mobile telephone networks were only turned on in that community six weeks ago. So, there are still communities in Australia that don't have reliable internet or telephone coverage, and that makes it very difficult for people to contact their bank branches as well.⁷

Mr Boyle: But sometimes the language means that people aren't able to meet the identification requirements. And, as I said earlier, that often results in – has in the past resulted – we've had specific examples of it – of people failing that identification process and then being told to travel to their nearest bank branch. And Lockhart River is a community I will come back to again in that circumstance. So, the closest bank branch to Lockhart River is in Cairns, and I had a call a couple of years ago from a lady who had lost her bankcard, had failed the identification processes, and was then told to travel to Cairns to visit her local branch. And it was during the wet season, so the only way that she could get to Cairns was to fly, which was quite expensive, and she was quite distressed when she contacted us.⁸ (Authors note: Cairns is 760 kilometres from Lockhart River)

[Sustainable and secure jobs for regional workers](#)

Once upon a time securing a role in a retail banking branch meant a worker had pretty good job security. The FSU estimates that 2000+ jobs have been lost in retail banking since 2020. Banking is an essential service. In the Australian community when a local bank branch closes it has a much broader impact that simply just the removal of an essential service from the local community. The "Money Matters in the Bush: Inquiry into the Level of Banking and Financial Services in Rural, Regional and Remote Areas of Australia" which took place almost 20 years ago (January 2004) noted that:

"Where banks have withdrawn their branches, residents and businesses experience a number of problems such as the trouble, anxiety and costs associated with rearranging or transferring accounts, the uncertainty of having to adapt to new ways of banking and the inconvenience involved in travelling long distances to conduct face-to-face banking."⁹

⁷ Hayne Op Cit

⁸ Hayne Op Cit

⁹ Money Matters in the Bush: (2004), Senate Inquiry into the Level of Banking and Financial Services in Rural, Regional and Remote Areas of Australia, Canberra

For both individuals and businesses, there are also safety and security matters arising from the lack of access to a branch; the loss of economic opportunities; limited choice in obtaining professional advice and finance, especially venture capital; and potential exclusion from the financial world.

The loss of a bank branch, especially if it is the last one in town, has wide reaching implications for the economic and social life of the community. Some regard the departure of a bank as the beginning of the end for a small town.

In the 17 years since this Inquiry took place thousands more local bank branches have closed leaving workers without jobs and made many more communities vulnerable.

Worker/Ex-Worker Comments

- Yes. As I am on a contract and the bank has no obligation to find a position for me internally. There is also limited work with the hours and pay I need to keep up with my financial requirements. I will be forced to travel possible as far as 1.5hrs away to work.
- My local branch did close, I was told I had to get a role in the next town over as part of my contract. It's 32km away. I expect that this branch will also close soon. Then the next nearest branches will be 104 km away in one direction or 64 km in the other direction.
- Incredibly, I have no labour skills which are the main jobs going at the moment in my town. The only chance I would have would be transited to work and that won't work well with a young family. I don't want to miss my kids growing up just for the bank

C. The effect of bank closures or the removal of face-to-face cash services on access to cash;

Access to cash is critical in regional and rural communities. Many small businesses need access to cash and change for their day-to-day operations. Access to cash is especially important when there are natural disasters such as flood or fires. Access to cash is not just a national issue, as part of a recent review, the Reserve Bank considered the experience of a number of other countries facing the consequences of lower volumes of cash in their distribution systems, including New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, and several European countries:

"Recent survey evidence suggests that the initial acceleration of lower transactional cash use in the early stages of the pandemic is persisting These behavioural shifts are putting pressure on the economics of cash distribution. Some countries are also experiencing material reductions in the public's

ability to access and use cash, due to banks reducing their public access points and, to a lesser extent, fewer merchants accepting cash.”¹⁰

Access to use cash should be monitored and a prudential standard should be developed by APRA.

D. The effectiveness of government banking statistics capturing and reporting regional service levels, including the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's authorised deposit-taking institutions points of presence data;
The Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority (APRA) should develop a system that is able to update the number of branch closures in real time or as close to real time as possible subject to the appropriate privacy considerations. Co-location or consolidation of bank brands into one branch should not be double counted by APRA as we believe is currently happening. APRA should consolidate its data base as the ultimate source of branch closure numbers in Australia. This data base should be publicly available and accessible online.

E. Consideration of solutions; and any other related matters.

Industrial Relations

The FSU is not always advised of branch closures despite the industrial relations requirements for consultation on major change. In particular it is the smaller banks like the Bank of Queensland and Suncorp Bank who are notorious for failing in these obligations. All banks must cease the “tick the box” exercise when introducing a significant change. Consultation defies the purpose when the bank simply tells workers what they are going to do. Where is the opportunity for workers to influence the decision making by the bank? It simply does not exist. There must be a more stringent measure for banks to genuinely consult with workers and their union/representatives before a definite decision is made to introduce major change.

There are also issues with the redundancy provisions of the Fair Work Act as applied to bank workers. The difficulty members in regional areas face when branches close is that employers rely on redundancy provisions in enterprise agreements to redeploy displaced employees into other roles such as call centre work. When NAB for example closes a regional branch the message being provided to workers is that there will be no retrenchments during the process. We have at times been able to negotiate on their behalf however that is a poor starting point as it denies workers a choice of a redundancy if the redeployment position offered is not suitable for them.

The Fair Work Act is of limited help or use in this situation because it just states that employees are entitled to redundancy pay if they're made redundant, but it doesn't describe or define redeployment or redeployment into a comparable role (except only very broadly in transfer of employment situations).It's

¹⁰ Reserve Bank of Australia (2022), Review of Banknote Distribution Arrangements: Conclusions Paper Box B: International Experience, Canberra.

then left to an employer's interpretation, and in many cases, a reliance on an EA and case law, to redeploy employees into other roles and avoiding having to pay redundancy pay.

And if an employee wants to challenge or dispute the comparability of a new role, they have the choice of going to the FWC (if the Enterprise Agreement allows it) or taking their employer to court and suing for redundancy pay (which is what the ex-CBA financial planner in the case Senator Whish-Wilson brought up at the Sale hearing is currently doing in the Federal Court). It would mean a substantial overhaul of the redundancy provisions in the Fair Work Act and the inclusion maybe of a definition of what a comparable role is.

Whilst not in the purview of this committee the FSU would like to see an acknowledgement of these issues and we are happy to address these issues further with the Committee if required.

[Too Big to Fail: Banks and their Community Service Obligations.](#)

Access to banking services is essential for the economic and social well-being of regional & rural Australia. However, many of these communities are facing the closure of their local bank branches as banks seek to maximise their profits. In recognition of the vital role that bank branches play in regional & rural communities, it should become an operational policy of all Australian banks to undertake community service obligations by keeping bank branches open in regional & rural Australia. Recent bank mergers and acquisitions, such as the proposal of ANZ to purchase Suncorp Bank also reduce the footprint of retail banking. Recent examples such as the purchase of BankWest by the Commonwealth Bank have seen the complete eradication of BankWest branches on the east coast of Australia. The experience was also similar when Westpac purchased St George, the acquisitions of smaller and mid-size banks by the big four are predicated on the cost savings they can manage by closing branches that service the same town or region.

Submission numbers 80 from the East Gippsland Shire in Victoria, 91 from the Country Women's Association of WA and 124 from the Moree Plains Shire Council in NSW are an indictment on the rush to close branches without proper consultation and are classic examples of the lack of foresight and intransigence of the banks.

This type of policy can only happen through government mandate and regulation, a mandate which the banks have resisted time and time again. The FSU sees a mandate on this issue as a more than reasonable trade-off for the tax-payer support provided to banks such as the government guarantees of deposits and the access to plentiful cheap funds via the Reserve Bank. The Federal Government currently applies a small levy on banking profits of the big 4 banks and Macquarie Bank ostensibly as a contribution by those banks in case the Government is needed to bail them out of a financial crisis.

They are considered too big to fail. When the levy was introduced by the Morrison Government in 2017 the banks vigorously resisted its implementation however no other private business is afforded this

government guarantee in Australia. To state the obvious this is an incredibly privileged position for the banks and as such this status should come with some community service obligations.

The banks have always resisted calls for the imposition of community service obligation however the time has now come to renew these calls and for the banks to establish a new social contract with the communities they purport to service. The FSU has drafted a model policy statement for the Committee's consideration:

Model Policy statement on Community Service Obligations:

Banking is an essential service. All Australian banks shall undertake community service obligations in accordance with this policy. The objectives of these obligations are to:

1. Ensure that regional & rural communities have access to basic face to face banking services.
2. Support the economic development of regional & rural communities.
3. Provide employment opportunities in regional & rural areas.
4. Enhance the reputation of the bank as a responsible corporate citizen.

Scope

This policy applies to the big four Australian banks, including their subsidiaries and associated entities and smaller banks with a branch network.

Minimum number of branches

All banks shall maintain a minimum number of branches in regional & rural Australia, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The number of branches shall be reviewed annually and adjusted as necessary to ensure that regional & rural communities have access to basic banking services.

Note: For example, the Federal Department of Health has a classification model entitled 'The Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA)', the classification divides Australia into 3 zones and 7 classes based on census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS):

Metropolitan zone (RRMA 1 and 2)

Rural zone (RRMA 3 to 5)

Remote zone (RRMA 6 and 7).

Access to banking services

All banks shall ensure that their regional and rural branches provide access to face-to-face basic banking services, including deposits, withdrawals, access to cash, and loans. The hours of operation shall be sufficient to meet the needs of the community, including businesses and farmers.

Investment in regional & rural communities

All banks shall commit to investing in regional communities through their branches. This may include supporting local businesses, contributing to community projects, and providing financial education and literacy programs.

Employment opportunities

All banks shall provide employment opportunities in regional areas through their branches. This may include providing training and development programs for local employees, as well as creating employment opportunities for young people. Supporting local businesses and community groups:

All banks shall commit to supporting local businesses and community groups in regional Australia. This may include offering financial products and services tailored to the needs of local businesses, providing sponsorship for community events and initiatives, and partnering with local organizations to offer financial education and literacy programs.

Reporting

All banks shall report on their community service obligations annually to the Rural Regional Affairs & Transport Senate Committee, including details of their investment in maintaining bank branches in regional & rural areas, the range of services provided, and the number of customers served.

Conclusion

Banks are an essential part of our communities and neighbourhoods, and Australians need to be able to access face-to-face banking services where they live. We know that when bank branches close there are serious ramifications for the community and local business. Bank workers have told the Union they are shattered at the prospect of losing their jobs at a time of such uncertainty, with little prospect of getting work. We need to demand more from our most profitable financial institutions and as the banks are abandoning regional and rural communities Government at all levels can no longer be timid in their response.

Appendix 1

The FSU conducted a brief member survey to assist in our submission preparation and we have included their responses to the questions relevant to this submission. The survey to all regional and rural members asking for comments to the following questions. 168 responses were received.

1. Do you know anyone having difficulty accessing banking services since the closure of their bank branch? Please describe.
2. Have you noticed any particular group of people who have found it difficult to move to digital banking or who have not moved at all to digital banking? If yes, please describe these groups
3. What have been the impacts of branch closures in your community and local economy? Have businesses been impacted? Have people moved away to seek work? Please describe in detail.

Do you know anyone having difficulty accessing banking services since the closure of their bank branch? Please describe

1. *Banks assume people will readily adapt to online banking because they were forced to bank online during the pandemic. I have noted big differences in the queues at my local branches since the pandemic. They are much smaller or even non-existent. Counter staff positions have been reduced in consequence.*
 2. *When we suggested that they split the Renmark branch to cover half customer facing and half call centre we were told they wouldn't do that....a few months later they moved approximately 100 branches to multi-channel*
 3. *I don't think a branch closing has the same impact on a town that it once had due to internet banking, however I think a bank is essential to every town especially to businesses and for access to the elderly.*
 4. *It just makes it harder for all the businesses in the area. Some customers are making 2-hour return trips to the nearest branch. When one shuts, customers go to the next nearest branch and the staff cop it.*
 5. *We are now on a rollercoaster ride both staff and customers - the postponement of the decision by Westpac to close the branch in Gatton, does not provide any confidence or hope that the right decision will be made. At the end of the day - the CEO and general management don't seem to listen or care. For a customer to phone a call centre to obtain assistance with their banking is a lengthy process and often frustrating and the problem or question is not sufficiently answered, or problem solved. On numerous occasions, customers are advised to -'call into your local branch', as the call centre cannot assist them. Overseas call centres leave customers' and*
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- staff frustrated and angry. The banks have for many years had a bad reputation and the media reports re: annual profits, CEO wages and bonuses and focus on shareholders only provides customers with a feeling of continued neglect and there is definitely no reward for loyalty. Staff at Gatton Branch continue to care and provide a high level of professionalism and service to every customer that chooses to bank with Westpac. Current campaign being run by Westpac is called - Face-To-Face Feb - yet decisions are being made to close branches. It is a shame this type of care and service is not deemed to be an essential part of the Westpac business plan.*
- 6. As bank workers in the nearest town, we have knowledge of the absolute debacle that Maffra branch has been over the last 12 months. Our people leaders only know what they know, but the executives had little to no communication, terrible hiring decisions and no clear leadership or strategy on what would happen with the branch.*
 - 7. We were also under the impression that it would reopen and told customers that it would considering they had hired people for the role and now we are left with egg on our faces and our credibility as staff undermined."*
 - 8. Banks are really showing who they value and it's not the majority of our customers it's for the shareholders. It's heart breaking for customers. It would be the right thing to do for banks to keep branches in regional communities open. If anything, the closures should be more concentrated in metro areas where the public has many options of drawing money out as an example and the urban population digital banking uptake has been successful so why not start there and work the way out of metro.*
 - 9. I am a retired ANZ officer with little need for daily mainstream access to a physical branch. This is because I adopted the technology as it developed. But I have several friends my age that have not and remain reluctant to do so. I believe that Banks have a "social obligation" to remote communities in particular, to be directly involved in helping their clients learn about and adopt new technologies in this sector, as they develop. Just gradually and subtly forcing them by progressively withdrawing physical access is not acceptable*
 - 10. My heart is broken not for myself who has worked here for 9 years but for the customers I have helped and supported when no one else would. I hope the elderly will stop being pushed the side and treated like they don't exist and that big banks should realise and speak to their frontline workers that it is never going to happen with them and digital it's too overwhelming for them.*
 - 11. I believe overall the closures of bank branches in community has negative impact as being financial institution it's something that every community needs to function without that the wider business community suffers with lower confidence and being regional town already hard to attract young people to move to these towns to maintain health services, age cares, skill workers required in town. It just makes the town less attractive if this is the case we might as well all move to our closest city.*
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12. *After 43 years in Banking, I am retiring on 30th of June this year. I am bringing retirement forward due to the extremely poor handling & communication of the Bank of Melbourne Regional Victoria Branch closures. I have been on Branch Amalgamations teams going right back to the 1980's & been in branches amalgamated & closing, and this the poorest handling of it I have seen in 43 years. 32 years Westpac, 2.5 Years ANZ, and 8.5 Years BOM/Westpac in the past customers had alternative. generally, instead of a 5-minute drive, they may have needed to drive 30/45 minutes for service. A 3 - 5 hours' drive, that they now need to endure is just not acceptable. My sales targets have also increased, even with smaller branch footprint to source new business from.*
 13. *It seems to me that the Bank has moved to close branches, hurriedly, before they had alternative solutions in place. Branch closures were emotional and the staff who received redundancy have not returned to the Banking industry. The staffing levels of the nearest branch is not considered at all because internet banking is considered the be all and end all of banking. This is not the case for many customers*
 14. *I was brought up in a world of customer service. Face to face service is valued by customers and they feel they are treated with respect; they are not just a number and that they feel important.*
 15. *Bankwest has been in Mount Barker, as Rural Bank and R&I, since before 1910 (we have photos). I think the town would feel quite betrayed if we close.*
 16. *They are wrong and need to stop. There is such a reduced presence now that people struggle. No more. The government may fail to recognise this fact, but internet and phone service is often patchy or non-existent in some of our areas and people have to travel to town to get service. It is inconvenient and unfair not to have financial accessibility and representation in regional and rural areas. Please stop the closures, we go without enough services in regional and rural areas. All the investment and spending by governments is concentrated to cities especially Sydney in NSW.*
 17. *The nearest ANZ branch to Wongan Hills is in Northam, which is 1 hour away, so 2 hour round trip, this is a lot for some demographics within our community.*
 18. *Yes, community groups/sports volunteers have to travel further now to bank, sometimes large sums of cash. This is often scary as they could be targeted for a hold up. They also need to get change for floats. Clubs are struggling for volunteers to do this for the time and effort is too great. Also, they are losing volunteers on the gate as EFTPOS is too complex for them. I also have fears for the future after many companies were hacked in 2022 that there may be a catastrophic break down in the banking sector and there will be no staff to help. I remember in the 1980's if you worked in a bank branch you were royalty now, you're just a front for a computer and organisation that does not care for its customers.*
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19. *Other than it's a disgrace, a betrayal of the community & a blatant rush towards super bonuses for the already overpaid upper management. No - nothing else.*
 20. *Banks closing in rural and regional areas are only thinking of lining their pockets, not actually helping customers who should be treated as their 'bread and butter'. Staff who were impacted had abysmal contact or assistance in the redirection of our employment. Staff were told that our branch "wasn't profitable" when figures of OTC, digital banking and business banking were equal that of or in excess of our hub branch and others in our LAM. Our branch prided ourselves in our friendly, knowledgeable, and quick service across all aspects of banking. Closing of branches in rural and regional areas is disgraceful and banks should be ashamed.*
 21. *The community needs access to basic banking, and every person in that community needs access when and if needed - look to enhancing existing platforms, services that are Government/semi-government controlled - as an example Australia Post is an agent for many Banks now, expand what they are permitted to do in remote and regional communities, not to become another bank but to expand their licenses to assist clients from current banks. Perhaps enhance NDIS/Aged Services to have some ability under license to assist people who need help navigating the finance world or just get cash for them (this would need to be managed very transparently to protect clients). We want people to stay in their home longer, something like this could help.*
 22. *Yes, new no name ATMs are popping up replacing the big 4 and this service costs the Australian people to access their money. If the ATM takes their card, they need to wait at least 1-2 weeks to get a replacement, meaning they need access to transport to a branch to access their money until the card comes. This costs the customers time, money, and effort. It costs the bank nothing.*
 23. *Yes, now Huskisson Hours have changed 9:30-1pm daily it's impacted the community more every day we hear we're closing down rumours in the community*
 24. *NAB is the first bank to close. The BCU closed due to being hit by flood, so they did not reopen. It sent panic through the community with NAB closing and being one of the big 4 banks. To be honest I was embarrassed I have worked for Nab for 38 years and in Murwillumbah and just can't believe it.*
 25. *No matter which bank, the closure of a branch increases the workload on remaining bank branches as customers vote with their feet. Community groups in particular are impacted due to their basic requirements e.g., cash deposits, floats for fundraising events etc. overall banks leave a location and do not even leave an atm where their customers can continue to transact with the nearest branch sometimes 100km away.*
 26. *It is disappointing when a bank closes in remote or rural communities. Where I live my branch closed August last year, there is also a Bank SA in town, but this particular branch has just announced they are reducing their opening hours from 5 days a week to 3 days only open for 4*
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hours a day. It makes it really hard for those that can't drive to another town to access banking services, or can't get into the branch due to their work hours etc.

Appendix Two

Have you noticed any particular group of people who have found it difficult to move to digital banking or who have not moved at all to digital banking? If yes, please describe these groups

1. *A large percentage of men over 50 do not want to be bothered with internet banking. Generally, it is the population over 50 that struggle. This is also leading to people getting caught up in fraud matters. Lack of understanding consequences of just answering a phone or email and believing who the person is on the other side that can actually get to their money. We are leading people to do banking online and we do protect clients from card fraud, however we are seeing clients lose thousands of dollars when caught up scamming. Clients need more protection in this area.*
2. *Elderly persons and still a large amount of cash to deposit from markets and open-air events where Wi-Fi and thus eftpos is limited.*
3. *Older customers, customers living in areas where there are 'black spots', customers concerned with digital fraud and possible increase in being scammed. Customers who just choose not to do online or telephone banking. Obviously, customers with disabilities or poor education - immigrants etc.*
4. *Older generation and old school generation - most tend to refuse to go to a digital way of banking.*
5. *Yes, a lot of aged customers who will the ask family to assist and in some instances end up losing money as their loved one taking advantage of having access to their online banking and transferring funds to themselves and then the customers too embarrassed to come and ask for help until sometimes most of the money is gone or they don't realise.*
6. *Truly the Indigenous locals have struggled with digital banking and the vulnerable people with disabilities have suffered due to unprecedented closures.*
7. *As discussed above, the elderly and those with disabilities find this most difficult, or not possible at all. In my town, Westpac has closed, and ANZ is due to close in April (currently operating shorter hours). This has caused a panic amongst this demographic, and many have opened new accounts with my bank. But they invariably ask if we also have plans to close. In the neighbouring town, which had six banks, five of these have closed. Customers of Westpac and ANZ in my town, after ANZ closes, will need to travel half an hour either east or west, if they need to visit a branch. In a country area, for somebody who is elderly or has a disability and does not drive, this is near impossible as there is not the frequency of public transport that they rely on to be able to go into their local CBD, or maybe they still drive but will only drive within their own town.*

8. *Farmers who do not use internet banking & some that don't have the option unless they pay \$179.00 P/M for Starlink. and it's not cost effective for them to change. These customers are already driving up to 3 hours for banking. Also, now impossible to open some accounts unless you attend a Branch in person, so pretty much impossible. Some BOM Tellers being relocated into a Westpac Branch, Warrnambool/Horsham/Mildura are also not permitted to discuss ""product"" with customers. As mentioned previously, not offering alternative ways of banking is disgusting. It appears that the Bank has rushed through the closures without putting alternative banking options in place. Also, a complete lack of consultation & respect with staff. After giving several examples of customers never being advised of Branch closures (including even my wife) the Bank has just turned a blind ear to this feedback. I understand the Banks are to give 90 days' notice to customers before a branch is closed, putting a sign up, or sending letters out to ""some "" retail customers, just does no cut it. "*
9. *Yes - our community has 2 very close aged Facilities and 3 more reasonably close, these residents have been disadvantaged as they have been forced to change or rely on public transport to take them to the nearest Bank in the next community, Those that have no one (either living alone at home or even homeless) to help are in the worst situation, many struggle to understand change and there is nothing in the community to help when things go wrong (e.g. medically) - they have absolutely no way of getting money from their Bank if they are house bound for any period of time. There needs to be some form of community service that can help them navigate the financial world and actually assist in day-to-day finances (e.g., paying bills, just getting cash, avoiding scammers, etc).*
10. *Many of our aging population just don't want to risk using digital options because they're uncomfortable using them and afraid of being scammed*
11. *Every day I serve numerous elderly people who either cannot use a computer or is very scared of even trying. The elderly are the ones being left behind. I had ladies almost in tears because they can't pay some bills in cash at the PO any longer (Telstra and Unity home care in particular)*
12. *Elderly, low income and people with disabilities have been impacted for various reasons including branches being inaccessible, too far to travel if they don't have a car or enough money for public transport.*
13. *When Rainbow branch was open it did not have an atm. Now that it is closed the customers are not willing to use atm, NetBank or phone banking and travel to other towns just to do their banking. The elderly (over 60) and the disabled are not willing or capable of digital banking without small country branches they would be unable to bank at all.*
14. *Some of the Aboriginal people who are not well aware of the technology comes to branch for small queries like checking balances*

15. *Yes, not all people specially for us in the country and in regional areas would be able to do digital banking. For our small town the branches does not only offer banking support but also a much important community support. People with disabilities looks forward to coming to branches for their psychosocial development . Elderly people looks forward to coming to the branch to have a chat to the tellers and do their banking it makes them feel less isolated . Region branches is an important feature of "the village".*
16. *Not everyone has an up-to-date phone or access to a computer and in this age of scamming many people are too nervous to try. Had a couple in today nearly lost 15k due to Telstra scam and they classed themselves as white collar educated*
17. *The elderly and those with disabilities are highly impacted by branch closures who need the face-to-face contact to help them with their banking. They are not confident or not able to use online/digital services making them vulnerable to scammers and dishonest people who they have to rely on to assist them with their banking. Banks take no responsibility for keeping these people safe. They are forced into digital banking without the skills to keep them safe online. Also, with dementia and similar diseases impacting many elderlies these days remembering countless passwords and numbers makes them even more vulnerable. Also call centres are not the best solution for some of these customers as they may not be able to speak clearly or have trouble understanding/hearing the call centre person. Banks make no allowances to assist these customers, again making them feel like they don't matter. It is shameful that profits are put before community and those vulnerable people in our society. Banks talk a lot about what they do in the community by sponsoring this and that, but they have no social conscious.*
18. *Yes, many of our regular customers who have disabilities, we know would have no chance as they might be physically disabled and unable to operate a phone or computer and may also be nonverbal. Some of these customers also get financially abused by caters. We have lots of customers who are continually forgetting passwords and also have family who financially abuse them, so their online banking gets blocked. There's lots of vulnerable customers who also get used for scams. Without a branch nearby, these customers would have zero ways of accessing their money and no idea of how to find a resolution. They would be forced to use another bank which would be still open.*
19. *Indigenous communities will find it difficult hard to the transition especially with learning difficulties, the elderly who depend on branch assistance for the privacy of their banking due to family not taking advantage of their banking in both groups. Some Local sporting community accounts member expressed concerns transition from restrictions of 2 to sign on accounts NOA. Outside stations, tourist/eco retreat, mining company, Shire BEDS so many, local schools' entire community affected. Contact our local member, Peter Foster.*

20. *Aged customers, people who are computer illiterate and people without smart phones have been left behind or forced to seek help from family members despite being told not to share passwords. Speaking with customers prior to closure, most older customers were opting to move to banks that offered local service.*
21. *Yes, particularly elderly people and low socio-economic people have been disadvantaged with the move to digital banking. Many refuse to make the change and therefore rely on the branch to access their funds. A lot of elderly customers cannot grasp the technology, are not used to it, and seek help constantly from branch staff to fix errors they have made online. People in low socio-economic groups often don't have access to phones/computers to be able to do online banking so visit the branch instead.*
22. *Yes, as a teller, I have "regulars" who are unable or unwilling to change to digital. These range from those with debit cards who prefer to do their banking in branch, and those with no cards at all, who do all their transactions in bank. There are also a fair percentage of customers - mostly Aboriginal & TSI - who will come into the branch and deposit funds into family accounts. This is nearly always done by giving me the BSB and account number, with no cards involved.*

Appendix Three

What have been the impacts of branch closures in your community and local economy? Have businesses been impacted? Have people moved away to seek work? Please describe in detail.

1. *Although several OFI have closed in our area us along with two other majors have gone to reduced hours. Mount Barker BankWest has reduced its opening days. Albany BankWest is ceasing to conduct business accounts and has already ceased offering online Term Deposits to business customers - including me. I am shifting my business accounts to Westpac. Community members either have to drive 20mins to attend a branch or change banks. Only minimal public transport available and many elderly people are unable to travel.*
2. *Had closures at Merbein and red cliffs and also a Mildura Plaza branch. Reduced opening hours at Robinvale to 4 hours per day. We have one branch in our area now at Mildura. Staff numbers continue to reduce and waiting times to see a person continues to increase.*
3. *I lived and worked in Bank SA Wudinna I assume the people making the decisions to close rural branches have not taken into account that in these rural communities the internet signals for digital banking is either very slow or not working. This is why most country communities depend on a branch for their banking.*
4. *CBA Howrah has been closed. CBA Rosny is nearest branch 6km away. Pension day, the telling line was 25 people deep with 2 tellers. And the staff are being abused left, right and centre.*
5. *Yes, people have been leaving in droves to other face to face banks. A lot of the elderly cannot commute the 2hour drive to the closest branch if we were to close. A lot of them still use passbooks and DO NOT want to go digital. Our town will be a ghost town if we close. They do*

not want key cards either. Other banks in our area have told businesses they cannot facilitate opening business accounts.

- 6. Yarram branch closing has heavily impacted both ours and sale branches customers. We are busier and have less staff. The customers are having to drive well over an hour to do any of their banking and they are not happy. Many left us however many stayed, and we now cope regular abuse about it. They give us no extra staff to handle the higher flow of customers.*
- 7. We are a small town with a small but bustling main street, there is also a quite a lot of older customers that don't use internet banking and have moved to Westpac purely because the commonwealth bank shut in Maclean and the next branch is 30 mins away which is tricky for someone to leave a small business to travel that time to deposit cash and other transactions or a lot for an older person that relies on help to travel*
- 8. Branch Closure impact - numerous customers have now moved their banking to Heritage in Gatton - non-digital customers are anxious, concerned, angry and so disappointed in the decision to close the branch. Travel to Toowoomba or Ipswich is not affordable or logical. Bank@Post is limited to what services they can provide. No consultation with Business Customers, Personal Customers, or staff re: impact of closure, was and is insulting.*
- 9. When ANZ closed it devastated the one bank town. With a nursing home and retirement village older people had nowhere to bank and had to drive at least 28 Ks (nursing home residents had nowhere to go). The businesses had nowhere to lodge takings, obtain change or pay/get wages. Every banking need required a 56K return trip. As the manager I lost my house, my job, and my town in one day.*
- 10. Our elderly members in the community are devastated. While they have been advised they could still bank through Australia Post, they feel that is not about advice, every day banking advise. ""I want to send my grandson some money for his birthday, what's the safest, easiest way.? I don't do online banking."" As bankers we have certain access that could assist them, for instance if her grandson banks with us we can look up an account number and deposit direct. They often come into branches for other advice, please can you explain what this letter from centreline means, etc.*
- 11. Bank branch closures continue to affect communities such as Yass in my local community where Westpac exited last month. This is a regional community where local services have reduced, including banking and medical. NAB has reverted to part time hours (half days) and CBA is the only other bank in town. Business, farming folk and the elderly have been severely affected. This community has 5 aged care facilities servicing a large rural area.*
- 12. Rochester closes 4 years ago, Kyabram, Cohuna and Numurkah branches all closed in the last 2 to 3 years. These were the closest branches to ours and now the customers have to travel to us if they want face to face transactions or assistance. My team have had to deal with them being upset about the closures and still years later we get complaints. Officially are these branch customers, other than Rochester get managed by Shepparton and Kerang, however*

many chose to come to ECHUCA as we have less wait times and more convenient parking. However, we didn't get any additional FTE.

- 13. Businesses are struggling to bank their money due to erratic unscheduled closures. The local community in particular the local indigenous people have really taken the brunt of these poor services. Approximately 10 businesses have been impacted in Newman WA. I know of people who have relocated due to looming closure and the uptake of digital banking. The local indigenous community do not have the IT infrastructure that we take for granted for example 1 in 5 Indigenous people do not own a mobile phone and actually rely on face-to-face transaction with banking personnel.*
- 14. Rockhampton East set branch closed almost 12 months ago. Rockhampton north is within 10 mins. I believe it made sense to close the branch. But the Rockhampton North branch was refit 6mths prior and didn't take into account the change of customer numbers it would see. Businesses were affected with the ability to do the banking, but many have moved to post offices.*
- 15. The impacts of branch closures in my community have been devastating in less than 4 years we had 3 banks. First was ANZ then Suncorp few months later and 2 years later Bendigo bank closed. Recently 4th one just announced they close which as well is Westpac. Which just leave two banks in town CBA and NAB. This means loss of jobs in community also makes the community as whole less attractive for people to move to regional town with less services being offered. A lot of customers in our community do switch banks to go with the ones that still in town and the ones that stay with banks that have closed find it hard to do some of the banking as they have to drive over 100km which is 1.5hr drive there and another 1.5hr back when they run into trouble with complex enquiry.*
- 16. I look after SME Customers in all of Regional Victoria. Very upset customer, coming across other BOM customers in the community & they are tracking me down. Even if not my customers. I have had several in tears, due to lack of communication, not being advised at all of the Branch closure. And no suitable alternatives put in place. i.e., ones with too much cash to use Bank @ Post, multiple cheques to deposit. Due to the new enterprise agreement getting pushed through with the \$1K bribe the bank paid before Christmas, the Bank is no longer offering redundancies, and alternative ways to work are not acceptable, so Regional Staff are just resigning, leaving branches short on staff in the lead up to Branch closures.*
- 17. I was employed by Goldfields Money in Esperance for 20 years as Finance Manager. Decision to become digital Bank in 2020 resulted in the closure of the Kalgoorlie office after 35 years of business and the Esperance office 20 years. Loss of 6-8 jobs with many dissatisfied businesses and community groups taking their Banking elsewhere.*
- 18. There have been 2 branches closed in our region in the last 18 months. Customers have to travel an hour each way to visit local branch. Many young people move for work. Business have*

a 180km round trip to bank takings. Also, our branch has to cover customers from 2 closed branches with no extra staff or hours.

- 19. I have worked in the ANZ Bank for 27 years. I have seen Laura, Crystal Brook, Wirrabara and Booleroo Centre all close in Rural Towns, yes small populations but serviced a larger community. Many businesses have been impacted as a result of this. They used to be able to bank at the local Post Office but unfortunately the ANZ no longer has ties with Australia Post, and this is no longer an option.*
- 20. Our town has lost both the CBA & ANZ banks in the last few years. Both have taken their ATMs from the town as well, leaving only NAB & Bendigo Bank ATMs to service a community of roughly 4000 people*
- 21. My regional branch closed a few years ago now which has resulted in negative impacts on my life and that of current customers, former customers, and the wider community. I am still employed at another branch but am now part of the busy commute into the city. I now spend an extra hour in my car each day and the cost of fuel is added to that time. My former branch serviced a whole area with customers coming from communities up to 121 klms away. They now need to travel even further to receive face-to-face service. My community had lost 6 people who would spend money in the town. The town is now left with one of the major 4 banks.*
- 22. The current branch I'm at services 5 branches in 1 and will soon service another 2 more branches in the next few months. The amount of work required at this branch more staff is needed but is not happening.*
- 23. Since ANZ has closed the Wongan Hills branch & subsequently now the Westpac Bank in Wongan Hills, the locality of Wongan Hills has had a massive turn down in the main street, most businesses have now closed & we now have empty shop fronts*
- 24. Morwell and Moe's closure has left town centres almost deserted. Business owners often close early now so they have time to attend a bank in other towns.*
- 25. Every branch close by closed no employee ever came to work at one of our branches in my 4 years their customers were furious and would close their accounts due to no branch*
- 26. The closure of the ANZ had a big impact on our customers. They then needed to travel 20 kms to the nearest branch go into the shopping centre wait to be served and back which was impossible within a lunch hour. Very inconvenient for our business customers. Many closed their accounts and went to Bendigo Bank.*
- 27. Businesses and mum and dad customers as well as, and probably especially the elderly have been impacted. Those who are able to move to another bank have done so. The elderly almost heartbroken hearted at losing a very important (to them) institution. A good many have had a relationship with "The bank" for several decades! Many have had home loans, business loans and investments with the place they called "My Bank". They were told over and over how much the bank wanted a relationship with them - a lifelong relationship!!! Only to be discarded when they, now retired are no longer able to finance The Banks profit machine! Even though they did*

fill the coffers with interest rates (often higher than any amount paid on their savings) for many decades.

- 28. Business and personal customer have had to overhaul their existing banking habits. Including having to travel to other branches/towns or closing accounts and re-opening with another bank still operating in town. Customers that did stay with NAB had to deal with limited banking through AusPost outlets and long wait times when turning to call centres to assist with issues that were impacted by branch closure (i.e., lost cards, change of address/contacts, card disputes, transaction inquiries). Customers also impacted with turn to 'digital banking' - aging and low socio-economic demographic were severely impacted. Staff had been misled with alternate employment opportunity through NAB, NAB had no accountability for their actions. Staff at my branch were advised of closure when our union rep contacted to offer support hours before our manager and area manager came to tell us in person.*
- 29. Customers in Bacchus Marsh were very angry. Majority closed ALL their accounts. The elderly who couldn't drive relied on friends or relatives to take them to the bank. Many in the end just closed their accounts because they inconvenienced their family/friends.*
- 30. At this stage our Kingston closure postponed but Robe closure several years ago impacted businesses and many opened accounts with Bendigo to allow day to day banking but left loans with BankSA*
- 31. Previously working in the Central Coast and living through branch closures such as Morisset where I had previously managed, it was very upsetting to witness the impact firsthand, and also be at the brunt of customers anger and hurt.*
- 32. Yes, community very impacted. Customers now have to drive 40mins to deposit cash. They closed both Murwillumbah and Kingscliff branches that were 25mins apart leaving no branch within 40mins. Now that poor branch being Coolangatta is extremely busy with not enough staff.*
- 33. Berrimah, Jabiru, Tennant creek and Katherine. Coober Pedy Business have been impacted greatly by a combination of the removal of branches AND ATM's. For example. there is now Westpac representation for 1500kms + from Alice Springs to Darwin... and Alice Springs to Port Augusta. Not only is rural Australia impacted. farmers on remote communities might only come into these towns once a month and need support locally to perform banking tasks... but we have a huge responsibility to support our indigenous communities and with these closures we turn our backs on their needs.*
- 34. I am at Alice Springs where we have only one Vance and it is a small town but a very busy environment . Other bank branches closed, and their account holders have issues with depositing funds and wait times with phone enquiries*
- 35. Port Augusta. The ANZ branch in Port Augusta has reduced its opening hours recently, opening till lunch time Monday - Friday. The Westpac bank has amalgamated (moved its staff and business) in with BSA - both operating out of the same building. NAB - still open normal banking hours.*

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36. *We have had many branch closures in surrounding towns which has hugely impacted the local people & businesses. Most recently WBC closed in Coober Pedy (which was the last open bank in that town). It is 650klm to the nearest town for the community. We have had many community members & businesses distraught about not having any bank in the town & having to drive the long haul for service. The businesses are worried about either running out of cash or holding excess cash. It is predominately a tourist & opal mining town.*
37. *The same has just occurred in Roxby Downs - NAB is closing. I believe this is also the last bank in that's town. In Pt Augusta WBC has amalgamated into the same building with BSA , reducing the required staff. Also, ANZ is now running on limited hours closing at 1pm every day, as is CBA in Pt Pirie & Kadina. I am very thankful CBA in Port Augusta has continued with full opening hours.*
38. *Our branch in Maclean closed a few years ago and the branch in Bellingen where my family lives also closed recently. It really changed the landscape of the town in Maclean losing both NAB and CBA within a couple of years of one another. Sadly, I do feel that businesses have been impacted as well as the local post office who now does a lot of the banking for these businesses. Especially in a town where there is such an elderly population it's sad to see. Visiting the branch was part of their daily life and it's these interactions that are small yet so impactful on people's lives. I used to work from the branch when I needed to but now, I am travelling 40 minutes to Grafton.*
39. *I live in Regional NSW and works remotely from home. In case of system issue, I need to come to the branch to connect to CBA systems. The branch is still open however they have reduced their trading- business hours. It would be difficult for the branch people to seek employment elsewhere, it's not fair as well to move out now. Living in big city to look for employment will have a strong financial difficult impact on our regional colleagues.*
40. *We are still open as the largest branch in the area but smaller branches like Denmark Mount barker and Esperance due to staffing their opening is sporadic. Plus, Denmark and Mount Barker each close two days a week and the staff stay in branch and help the call centre on those days. Whilst their frustrated customers come to use and complain at Albany making our queues longer as we are on minimum staff too.*
41. *Currently seeking work after my Gisborne Branch closed in November. Staff were moved to other branches having to arrange alternative ways to work, businesses have moved to other banks as unable to get change/coin where required as not offered at Aust Post. No Westpac in entire Macedon Ranges Shire where I live has left Westpac with a bad name locally. The staff were given little notice to the closure and not provided roles in a time sensitive fashion nor given hours/days that suited (forced to work Saturdays when transferred from a non-Saturday trading branch)*
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42. *Our town is growing, and we were the most sought-after bank in Yass. It has been catastrophic for the town and our customers. They are still coming to me for help, and we have been closed since 30th December.*
43. *Vulnerable community was most impacted (elderly, indigenous and people with disabilities) where no access to vehicle to travel 15min to next branch. only one bank left in community, and it isn't a great one. In our local community we have already seen closure of 3 banks in space of 4 years. This has seen lot residents in the community had to switch banks to ones that remain in town as they require face to face service. This also overall has made the regional community less attractive place to live as it seems have fewer services to offer when the community as whole already struggle to attract young families to move here to fill other important roles like nurses, doctors, and other skilled area of work.*
44. *Our bank has gone from 3 branches in Ballarat to 2 and this has impacted the staff and community greatly. Both existing branches are in the centre of town. So, there are no branches on the outer areas of an increasingly expanding large rural town. Customers and businesses were greatly inconvenienced by the closure in Wendouree and the community outrage was huge. Some businesses took their banking elsewhere as it is too difficult to find parking in the centre of town to get to a branch. Customers complained loud and clear to the banks management. Staff who worked at that branch were divided between the other two branches with some losing their jobs all together. Staff were kept in the dark about the banks plans and lied to by management up until the last minute. Customers still complain about the closure, and this happened two years ago now.*
45. *A whole generation of people have been left feeling pushed to the side without ease of access to their local branch. Customers who are not as adept in technology are forced to drive distances to talk to someone in person or do simple banking over the counter. They have been expected to adapt and overcome their issues with technology education which they explain they struggle with. Dysart Branch closed in December 2022 since then we have had an influx of customers as Bank at Post is not serving these customers to the standard a bank can. With this NAB have not allowed to employ additional team members.*
46. *Peterborough as a town has been devastated. Businesses are being affected badly because people are travelling to Jamestown for banking, so they shop out of town. Some businesses can't bank at the PO due to the amount so to save on fuel carry more cash on the premises and drive to Jamestown to do banking, this then costs them time, fuel, and staffing. They have to carry more change. We in the branch are so much busier due to servicing extra customers. Even though the numbers don't show it we are actually busier because of the extra problems people have. The ATM is always empty and costs to use it not in my town but in other people have left the industry or moved away. Businesses have been left to deal with call centres in capital cities, most dislike this.*
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