



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**Private Members' Statements**

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2 June 2020

**WALLSEND ELECTORATE BANK BRANCH CLOSURES**

**Ms SONIA HORNER ( Wallsend ) ( 16:47 ):**

Banks are retreating from the Wallsend electorate. Customers in the western suburbs are being abandoned as branch after branch is closed. I understand that some people prefer to use online banking services, but there are thousands of people in the Wallsend electorate who rely on brick and mortar banks. Mostly it is the elderly, the disabled, and the socially and economically disadvantaged—all of whom are proportionally more likely to lack steady internet access or to not have digital skills. Another barrier for them is the poor local public transport access. They rely on their local bank to do their transactions and to get money.

In the last few months more banks have closed branches in the western suburbs of New Castle—Newcastle Permanent closed its branch in Cardiff and the Greater Bank closed its branch in Jesmond. The closure of the Jesmond branch was particularly problematic because Jesmond is a transport hub. Since Keolis Downer took over the private bus services, many of the buses stop at the interchange. People shop at the big Jesmond centre and do their banking as well. They are no longer able to do that. The next branch is some distance away and inconvenient because it is not accessible on public transport.

The Greater Bank has done a great disservice to its loyal customers in the Jesmond area. The Commonwealth Bank was temporarily closed in the main shopping centre of Wallsend for six months—we know what that means. I understand that the COVID pandemic, associated closures and lockdown measures have been difficult for businesses, including banking institutions, but these closures are further blows to many in the Wallsend community. An elderly local resident who uses a walker told me, "It is no good. I cannot use the internet and I cannot get around easily at the best of times, especially with the virus going on. Now the bank is closed. The branch which is easiest for me to get to is no longer there. What am I meant to do?" This resident speaks for many Wallsend locals. She feels like she is being ignored by the banks. It is a fair question that she asks.

In areas without accessible banking services, people are forced to turn to unscrupulous services like cash loan machines and payday lenders in order to meet their financial needs. Cash loan machines and payday lenders are predatory. They trap desperate people into a cycle of debt, which we do not want to see. But wholesale bank closures that are not limited to the Wallsend electorate. The Newcastle Permanent has also closed its branches at Nelson Bay, Mayfield and Maitland. The Commonwealth Bank has shut down its branches at The Junction and at Maitland for six months. I first raised this issue in Parliament more than two years ago when the Newcastle Permanent announced the closure of its Lambton branch. That came quickly on the heels of the closure of branches at the University of Newcastle and the John Hunter Hospital.

In 2017 I informed this House that the National Australia Bank was going to close its branch at Jesmond that July. I implored the Treasurer to meet with banks and building societies and urge them to put people ahead of their profits. Then, as now, people shifting their banking transactions to online was blamed. However, in pivoting to meet an increasing demand in online services, they have failed to account for all the needs of people who cannot use those services. Finally, I implore the banks to get back to Wallsend and start looking after their customers. Building societies are also spending a lot of time advertising how wonderful they are with their charities, but they have closed their branches.