



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

10 November 2020

WALLSEND ELECTORATE BANKING SERVICES

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (19:21:40):

Six months ago CommBank closed the Wallsend branch temporarily for up to six months to deal with staffing needs elsewhere and a drop in patronage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it claimed. At the peak of the pandemic I know that many businesses changed and adapted. The bank said it needed to move branch staff to call centres due to the influx of pandemic phone calls from customers seeking financial assistance. Six months later the assumption we all made that "temporary" meant something completely different rings true. The branch remains closed with no sign of reopening. In May I wrote to the CEO asking him to reconsider the closure—quelle surprise, no reply. Last week I wrote to the CEO again, asking him if CommBank planned to reopen the branch as promised. Again, silence deafened.

The impact of the closure on our community is devastating. Over the last few years CommBank closed branches across the Wallsend electorate. This closure has left the biggest postcode in the whole of the Hunter Valley without a branch. The elderly and customers living with a disability have struggled to travel to Glendale, New Lambton or Hamilton branches via public transport, as the quickest round trip to Glendale is 50 minutes, to Hamilton is one hour and to New Lambton is over 90 minutes. During the peak of the pandemic my staff and community volunteers had to help customers by driving them to Glendale or New Lambton just so they could access their money to buy food and pay their bills. So far this year, many of the major banks and building societies abandoned customers in the western suburbs as branch after branch closed its doors. The Newcastle Permanent Building Society closed the Cardiff branch. The Greater Bank closed Jesmond branch. Westpac closed New Lambton branch and removed the ATM. The Maitland Mutual closed its Glendale branch.

Adding to these closures, most banks and building societies also reduced their opening hours, making it even harder for customers to get into a bank for face-to-face service. Perhaps more people are using online banking services, but there are thousands of people in the Wallsend electorate who rely on bricks-and-mortar banks. The elderly, the disabled and the socially and economically disadvantaged are all proportionately more likely to lack steady internet access or the ability to use the internet. Sue, a local resident, recently told me:

It is getting to the stage that you have to scout around to find where a branch of any bank is located. For those of us that use public transport it is very difficult to find a branch on a bus route. Not everyone can use or wants to use internet banking. People like to have face-to-face contact especially when it is matters relating to their money. For us elderly and the disabled it is so difficult.

People are just a number on a piece of paper by which the bank can enrich itself and its shareholders through dividends. It is done at the expense of too many communities. Shame on the Commonwealth Bank for its treatment of the people of the Wallsend electorate. How many services have used the COVID excuse to close their doors? We all knew that a temporary bank closure would mean something worse down the track—and it has.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (19:26:15):

I thank the member for Wallsend for speaking up in Parliament—as she does so often, vigorously and with conviction—on behalf of her community. She quite rightly condemns the actions of the Commonwealth Bank, just as many members of this House have spoken in the past condemning the big four banks that have unscrupulously used the cloak of COVID-19 not only to reduce services to regional communities but also to deny them and remove them altogether. Shame on them. They should be doing better while they are posting record profits for their shareholders. The very people who helped build those profits for those companies are the ones who suffer. It should cause us all to reflect on what it means to serve in terms of being a good corporate citizen. If we have alternative options in our communities, we should all vote with our feet.