



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Motion

15 October 2020

Bank Closures

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:32:54):

I support this very sensible motion. It is all about customer loyalty, particularly in the bush. Like other electorates, Wallsend is suffering from bank closures in areas with poor public transport. In fact, the closure of the Westpac branch was considered so important that it made the front page of the Lambton Local community newspaper. A few years ago when another bank branch closed in New Lambton Westpac promised it would never close its branch because it was there for the community. Guess what? This month it will close its New Lambton branch as well as its ATM. We in Wallsend feel Uralla's pain.

We all know that people shop online. But statistics I acquired accidentally from Westpac show that people like a bricks-and-mortar bank—especially the elderly, the disabled and people who do not have access to good public transport. As the member for Upper Hunter said, sometimes people do not have transport services to get them to a bank. Walgett, where I lived for a long time, only had a NAB branch. It was open for just a few hours. Walgett is 103 kilometres from Coonamble. Imagine how difficult it was for workers to get to a branch that was open for only a short time. They could not get there. I fear for people in the bush more than any of us.

In the Wallsend electorate the Newcastle Permanent closed its Cardiff branch. The Greater Bank closed its branch in Jesmond, which is a central hub for buses. The Westpac branch in New Lambton is closing, together with its ATM. The Commonwealth Bank has temporarily closed its Wallsend branch—just like it is temporarily closing branches everywhere. It seems to me that "temporarily" is a euphemism for "We are using COVID to retreat from our loyal customers". It is very

sad that banks are doing that. We understand COVID makes a difference, but that is more reason for the banks to remain open than to close. Across the electorate, 28 per cent of my constituents—or more than one in four—are not registered for online or phone banking. The figure increases to 45 per cent for people over the age of 70 years. So one could say that half the people in Wallsend who are aged over 70 do not use online services, yet more bank and building society branches are closing.

When building societies first opened they talked about providing a service for customers in their community. The Newcastle Permanent Building Society is closing all branches but at the same time it has fabulous television advertisements promoting itself for donating to Surfest in Newcastle—almost every event is held on the beach in Newcastle because it sounds glamorous. It does not donate to Dungog or Wallsend because they are not glamorous. The Newcastle Permanent is not showing any loyalty to our community. I ask the banks, particularly Westpac at New Lambton, to reopen their branches. The building in New Lambton is vacant and has space for the branch. On behalf of all members who have spoken in this debate, I say we care about our communities and it is time the banks started caring about them too.