

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS

REVIEW OF THE FOUR MAJOR BANKS

Westpac

WBC70QON:

Mr SIMMONDS: ...What about during COVID? Have you seen an uptick in the number of customers who have been victims of financial scams?

Mr King: Certainly that has been an area where we are seeing more people tested. Fraud's been an ongoing focus for this bank for some years, so it's something that we do monitor proactively.

Mr SIMMONDS: Do you think there's a particular COVID aspect to it with, in particular, elderly and more vulnerable Australians being stuck at home and therefore answering the landline to some of these scammers or perhaps chatting online to them?

Mr Vance: Yes, I think we have seen that certain types of scams have changed in their emphasis and it certainly does skew towards more elderly customers. Unfortunately, scammers will move their behaviours according to the circumstances and where they see potential targets. There have definitely been shifts in patterns during COVID. We do adjust our algorithms to try to adapt to those situations as well.

Mr SIMMONDS: Okay. They are bloody sophisticated, and you're not going to erase them; it's their full-time gig. So you've adjusted your algorithms; that's good to know. What about in terms of resourcing? Have you upped your resourcing or anything to help Australians, from the bank's point of view, fight back?

Mr Vance: Our resourcing in this area has increased significantly over recent years, both in terms of the people who are developing and refining the algorithms and in terms of the people who are able to deal with the customers and try to track down and prevent money lost to them. It is something we do regard as very important. We have lots of really heart-wrenching stories that come through from this, particularly in the context of this COVID environment. For some vulnerable customers isolated in their house, getting that money back for them is really important.

Mr SIMMONDS: Yes. That would be my next question: are you able to give us some numbers around quantity that the bank has seen come through or even a percentage increase during COVID?

Mr Vance: Can we come back to you on notice with that one?

Mr SIMMONDS: You can absolutely take that on notice.

Answer: In the three months from June-August 2020, Westpac customers have reported to us at least a 33% increase in the number of scams compared to the same period last year.