



Australian Citizens Party

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Friday, 18 November 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Members of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee,

I write on behalf of the Australian Citizens Party (ACP) in support of Martin North and Dale Webster's request for your committee to conduct a genuine inquiry into the crisis of regional bank closures, and for the terms of reference for that inquiry to include the case for establishing a new government bank through the post office network.

The ACP receives information from communities all across Australia regarding the devastating impact they are experiencing from losing their bank branches, especially when it's their last bank branch leaving them unbanked.

The anger in those communities is white-hot, as they are being forced away from the certainty of face-to-face banking and cash transactions and into the uncertainty and insecurity of digital banking, which exposes vulnerable customers to the dangers of scams and hackers, and many are in areas where digital communications and even electricity is unreliable.

The banks claim they are responding to the market's move to online banking when they close branches, but there is evidence they are closing branches and removing ATMs to force the transition, in order to boost their own profits.

We are collaborating with the Licensed Post Office Group, representing the interests of the almost 3,000 small business post office licensees, and other organisations, on a campaign to establish a government post office bank, which would guarantee face-to-face financial services for all communities, and increase competition for the Big Four banks.

The banks' strategy in closing branches, effectively endorsed by the Regional Banking Taskforce, is to sponge off the licensees who own the post offices and taxpayers who own Australia Post by palming the customers they are abandoning on to Bank@Post, which they expect to absorb up to 90 per cent of their branch transactions.

While Bank@Post is a great service, the banks are exploiting it knowing they will keep their customers; with a public post office bank, they would face losing their customers, which would force them to truly compete, including by retaining regional branches.



This accelerating closure of bank branches in regional Australia is the number one issue that is driving support for our post office bank campaign.

We have recently written to all local Councillors across Australia seeking their support, and already 11 Councils in four states have passed motions of support for a postal bank, and many more are in the process of considering it.

We agree with Mr North and Ms Webster that the Regional Banking Taskforce was a farce, for many reasons, not least being the fact that the majority of submissions to the Taskforce called for a postal bank, but the Taskforce, with eight of its eleven members representing banks, dismissed that option outright on self-serving “competition” grounds—simply, they do not want to have to compete with a public bank.

This is not an issue that should be settled by representatives of banks; rather, we believe it should be examined in-depth by a Senate committee in the context of the crisis in regional bank branch closures.

I thank you for your consideration of this serious issue.

Yours sincerely,

Australian Citizens Party

