

ABC NEWS

ANZ and NAB to close their doors in eight more NSW towns in a move union says could be 'near death knell'

ABC Central West By Joanna Woodburn

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Two of Australia's biggest banks are closing eight more of their branches in western New South Wales, a union has warned.

The Finance Sector Union (FSU) said the National Australia Bank was shutting offices in Grenfell, Lockhart, Culcairn, Ardlethan and Barham.

The ANZ will close branches in Forbes, Narromine and Temora.

The Forbes office will shut on May 15, while the Temora and Narromine branches will close on May 16.

FSU national assistant secretary Nathan Rees said the towns now faced a worrying future.

"These closures can often be the near death knell of a town," Mr Rees said.

"The smaller towns, where there might be a general store, a car dealership and perhaps a supply outlet and a bank, the closure of a bank is a serious blow to the commercial reality of those towns."

The ANZ has blamed online banking for its decision to close the three branches.

It released a statement saying more of its customers in Forbes, Temora and Narromine were using online banking rather than visiting branches.

New South Wales general manager Amanda Heath-Ogden said almost two-thirds of customers in Forbes and Temora preferred online or mobile banking.

She said over-the-counter transactions had fallen by 25 per cent in Forbes and 30 per cent in Temora during the past four years.

NAB said in a statement that 80–90 per cent of its customers at Grenfell, Culcairn, Ardlethan, Barham and Lockhart did their banking at other branches.

Spokeswoman Alyssia Morison said the bank proposed to make some changes to NAB services in the Riverina and surrounding areas.

Internet banking justification 'doesn't apply'

Chris Roylance's business has been an ANZ customer in Forbes for 70 years.

He said he was scared about the town's economic prospects.

"I've watched over the last 10 to 15 years, the local branches like Forbes lost their managers, which gets decentralised into the Oranges and Bathursts," Mr Roylance said.

"One of the things I'm worried about for our community is that when big business comes to town, they haven't got a bank in town to bank [with], they're not likely to put any industrial efforts to places like Forbes."



PHOTO: ANZ has blamed online banking for its decision to close the three branches. (ABC News)

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PHOTO: Over-the-counter transactions have fallen in western NSW branches over the past four years, ANZ says. (AAP: Sergio Dionisio)

Mr Rees said the justification that internet banking had taken over did not apply in rural towns.

"In the cities that has perhaps more validity, but in the rural parts of New South Wales, if you're running a business, if you're running a hotel, given you're dealing with large sums of cash, you want to be able to put that cash in a bank.

"You don't want to have to drive 90 minutes to a branch in another town elsewhere.

"That poses a security risk for those businesses and the individuals involved."

The Association of Independent Retirees said older customers were offered no support from the banks.

"They do nothing to help those people that are then affected by that decision," Dubbo/Orana branch treasurer Graeme Knight said.

Nationals MP sick of banks closing

Nationals Member for Northern Tablelands Adam Marshall said he would raise the issue of bank closures in State Parliament.

Mr Marshall said he was sick of the number of branch closures and cutbacks in his electorate.

The ANZ has closed its branch in Glen Innes, and NAB cut back operations in Uralla and Guyra.

Moree is facing reduced hours at its bank branches.

Mr Marshall said recent news that the Commonwealth Bank would close its Guyra branch in the next few months was the final straw.

"People are just frustrated. They've had enough," Mr Marshall said.

"Of course we know a lot of people nowadays do their banking on their tablet device, on their computer, but there's still a significant number of people, particularly older people in our community, that still bank the traditional way, going in face-to-face, making a deposit, making a withdrawal."

The NAB did not respond to the ABC's direct questions about its branches at Grenfell, Culcairn, Barham, Ardlethan and Lockhart.

Topics: banking, regional, forbes-2871, narromine-2821, temora-2666, grenfell-2810, culcairn-2660, barham-2732, lockhart-2656, ardlethan-2665, moree-2400, guyra-2365, uralla-2358

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How bad are our banks?



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