



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Will the final report of the regional bank closures inquiry match the power of the hearings?

NEW: Sign the new Change.org petition to "[Save Cheques](#)". Last year Treasurer Jim Chalmers announced cheques would be phased out by 2030, but he based his decision on false data from Anna Bligh's Australian Banking Association that claimed cheque use had plummeted. Except it hasn't—the number of cheques written has held steady at around 2 million per month for the last two decades; it has only fallen as a percentage of total transactions, which have skyrocketed. The people who need cheques really need them, but it's another example of the banks not caring about who they inconvenience.

For 12 hearings over 12 months, Senators on the inquiry into bank closures in regional Australia have lashed the banks on behalf of abandoned communities.

The Senators' questions, which sharpened over the course of the hearings, exposed:

- Banks are closing profitable branches;
- They don't consult with communities before closing;
- Closures throw communities into economic chaos;
- Closures don't stop customers from needing branches, just force customers to drive vast distances to access them;
- Banks don't care about the impact on communities finding it hard to access cash and having to drive vast distances;
- Despite record profits, arrogant banks feel entitled to dump the expense of serving customers onto the taxpayer-owned Australia Post;
- Despite telling customers to use Bank@Post, callous bankers can't be bothered making simple changes like enabling customers to update signatures at post offices, instead forcing them to travel vast distances to actual branches;
- And much more, proving the self-regulated, entitled, and privileged banks treat communities with contempt.

The 12th hearing last Wednesday, at Tom Price in the Pilbara region of WA, was as dramatic as the first hearing in Victoria in March 2023 and every hearing in between.

Ashburton Shire, which is half the size of the state of Victoria, is probably the richest local government area in the world, being the source of WA's iron ore exports which earn Australia over \$200 billion per year.

The Shire President and CEO testified to the hearing that this shire which contributes so much wealth to Australia now has zero bank branches—zero! Out of desperation, and from a quality of leadership not yet shown by the two tiers of government above them, Ashburton Shire proposed local governments combine to start a public bank to serve communities the private banks have abandoned.

A volunteer at the local softball club testified in excruciating detail about the torturous hoops volunteers are forced to jump through just to do something as simple as change signatures on an account, because the same banks that tell customers to bank at the post office refuse to allow post office to do simple identity checks—even though the government authorises post offices to do far more significant identify checks for passports. The volunteer ended up having to pay \$300 out of his own pocket for the fuel to drive five hours to the next bank to update the signature.

The local post office licensee told the inquiry how much his business has increased since the bank closed, from people needing Bank@Post, which Senator Slade Brockman shrewdly observed proved that people used bank branches!

A local Aboriginal representative testified to the extreme destabilisation of the local indigenous communities from losing face-to-face banking services. For some reason the richest, most privileged businesses in Australia are exempt from the national effort to "close the gap" between indigenous living standards and the rest of Australia.

The hearing was especially charged because Bankwest had announced a week earlier it is going fully digital by October, closing 45 of its 60 branches and rebadging the remainder as CBA.

Inquiry chair Senator Matt Canavan demanded Bankwest participate in the hearing, and, like a prosecutor in a criminal trial, ripped apart Bankwest's testimony to show the representatives were empty suits, paying lip service to serving customers while pursuing their digital agenda.

Australian Citizens Party research Director Robert Barwick asked: "Will Canavan's report, due in May, match the power of these hearings?"

"The inquiry proves the only way to reform banks is to re-establish a government bank to impose real competition on service standards.

"But that requires going to war on the banks—is Canavan game?"

On the day of the hearing, ABC 7.30 interviewed Robert Barwick in Perth in front of the Wembley branch of Bankwest, where he explained that re-establishing a government bank, a People's Bank that could operate in post offices, is the only solution to the bank closures crisis, because it will guarantee banking services to all communities and force the Big Four banks to compete on service.

Click here to watch [ABC 7.30 Bank branches and ATMs keep closing](#).

Click here to sign the Change.org petition to "[Save Cheques](#)".