



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
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MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

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BANKING SERVICES

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (11.55 p.m.): Tonight I will speak about the problem of banking services in very small rural communities. Although I was always proud to see the Borbidge Government working towards promoting new development across the State and creating new jobs, I was always frustrated to see simultaneously that the banking industry especially was downsizing and shedding jobs as quickly as we were creating them. I also acknowledge the efforts of the Beattie Government. It also shows a commitment to creating jobs and development across Queensland. The problem to which I refer will not necessarily be resolved by the Governments of the day. It is a very real problem for the people in those small communities. Two parts of my electorate have real problems in this regard. One whole shire, the Bendemere Shire—which has two major towns, Wallumbilla and Yuleba, both of which have only 300 or 400 people—has no banking facilities. The shire's headquarters are some 70 kilometres away from a major bank. Another town in my electorate that is also suffering badly is the town of Jandowae. That town of about 800 people is about 50 kilometres away from the nearest big centre. It has one bank and a couple of agencies.

I will go through some of the solutions offered in the dialogue between the people who run the banking facilities and their customers. Recently, a lady from Jandowae wrote to me pointing out that Suncorp-Metway is pulling out an agency that it currently runs out of the post office in Jandowae, obviously because it finds it non viable. In a letter to that customer, Suncorp-Metway in Toowoomba pointed out that it had all sorts of options. The first option discussed was that of automatic teller machines. Unless an automatic teller machine can service a sizeable population, it is not a viable proposition, so that rules out that option for Jandowae and places such as Yuleba and Wallumbilla. The next option offered was telephone banking. That is a new innovation. I believe some businesspeople in those communities, service providers in the town itself or people living on farms in the community would, to some extent, make use of telephone banking—but not all. I will speak more about that later. The next option offered by the bank—and all the banks are in the same boat because of competition—was to provide agencies. Post offices, themselves now private enterprise agencies working on behalf of AustPost, are also taking on agencies for institutions such as the Commonwealth Bank and Suncorp-Metway. To some degree, they have been working not too badly. However, Suncorp-Metway has chosen to drop that agency out of Jandowae. So anyone who has an account with that particular establishment now has to go to Dalby to do his or her banking.

Also, the Commonwealth Bank has a service fee of \$1.50 every time a person goes in to make a banking transaction at the post office. The Commonwealth Bank is quite entitled to charge that fee. However, it was pointed out to me by a pensioner—and there are many elderly pensioners living in Jandowae—that a charge of \$1.50 every time they make a transaction is quite an impost on them, particularly when people living in the larger centres can go to automatic teller machines and there is no charge. So I think that they have a cause for complaint.

The bank suggested that those people could use EFTPOS. Generally, EFTPOS is only viable for businesses that have a pretty large turnover, and there are none of those in Jandowae. There are automatic transfers, but that does not seem to suit the pensioners, and there is also Internet banking, which is something that is trying to break through. The point that I want to make is that these banking arrangements create total inconvenience for everyone. Some people can learn to live with them but some people who hold very small amounts of cash such as pensioners are finding it extremely difficult.

A solution is still being sought. The banks are trying to do certain things and credit unions are setting up operations, but still the people in these very small communities are finding it very difficult to be able to get their hands on small amounts of cash for their usual small financial transactions. I think that that is also posing many problems for retailers, because they have to hold cash on their premises until such time as they go to the nearest bank.

The solution may lie in new technology. However, we must keep in mind that those who have the most ability are making use of new technology and those who are being left behind will be left wanting. As administrators across Australia, I wonder if we should consider the community service obligations that are put into legislation corporatising bodies such as Queensland Rail and the electricity bodies across Queensland. As part and parcel of getting a banking licence or getting a credit union licence in Queensland or anywhere else across Australia, there should be a qualification in the legislation that there is a community service obligation to people in remote communities so that the people who are least able to look after themselves can overcome their problems and access the services that many of us in the larger centres take for granted.
