**Banks won’t stop closing branches until PM Albanese brings back a public bank**

The 180 bank branches that have closed in Queensland since 2020, according to a Courier-Mail report of Finance Sector Union (FSU) figures, are a subset of close to 1000 that have closed nationwide.

Citizens Party Research Director Robert Barwick said today the banks are lying that their customers don’t want to use branches anymore, when in fact banks are closing branches to herd customers into digital banking to boost bank profits.

“The banks will continue to treat customers appallingly until Prime Minister Anthony Albanese does what he knows he should do—bring back a government-owned public bank to force the banks to compete on service.”

Barwick pointed out that PM Albanese himself argued this is the role of a public bank, in an August 2023 podcast interview with Neil Mitchell.

“I think there is a role for state-owned enterprises in competing, in keeping the private sector a bit honest”, Albanese said. “I wouldn’t have sold the Commonwealth Bank, probably, still, going back. I think that there would have been better behaviour by the big banks had there been a public instrumentality there competing with it.”

“Really?” Mitchell asked. “You reckon the banks would have been better behaved if you had a state-owned bank?”

Albanese replied: “You would have had the opportunity to use that competitive tension of a bank that had more of a social licence, if you like, to operate.”

The Citizens Party made exactly the same in testimony to the Senate inquiry into bank closures in regional Australia in Canberra in December 2020, noting that when the New Zealand government brought back a public bank in 2022, Kiwibank, the private banks—all owned by Australia’s Big Four banks—closed no more branches for the next seven years!

When the Senate Committee handed down its final report in May 2024, they recommended the Albanese government commission an expert panel to investigate the feasibility of a public bank, including a postal bank like Kiwibank.

Despite his own argument for a public bank, Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers have not responded to that report for more than a year (even though they are required to respond within 90 days).

The government’s lack of response has emboldened the banks to keep closing branches.

Bendigo Bank is the latest to jump on the branch closures bandwagon, this week announcing 10 branch closures, five of them in towns where the Bendigo Bank branch is the last bank.

Bendigo Bank is clearly trying to join the Big Four club—now pitching itself as a big bank too, supposedly “the better big bank”.

It’s certainly acting like a Big Four bank—closing branches and arrogantly dictating to politicians.

When Gippsland MP and former Cabinet Minister Darren Chester tried to attend a community meeting this week about the closure of Bendigo Bank’s Yarram branch, the Bendigo Bank executives barred him, announcing they would not attend the meeting if he was there.

“What the hell is wrong with this country when bank executives can dictate to elected representatives?”, Robert Barwick demanded.

“These banks think they are a law unto themselves.

“Is Bendigo Bank’s ticket to the big banks’ club the mass closure of branches to support the banks’ false narrative that everyone is flocking to digital banking?”

The Citizens Party’s solution to bad bank behaviour, including branch closures that devastate towns and suburbs, is to re-establish a public bank as a post office bank, giving it a retail presence in every town in Australia.

This would enable the postbank to impose real competition on the big banks that forces them to improve their customer service—as Albanese said.