

Quake risk? Yeah right, say residents

Waverley up in arms at shock bank closure

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Waverley residents have used a colloquialism for cow manure in response to the rationale for the shock closure of the town's only bank.

ANZ representatives phoned customers last week and followed up with a formal letter yesterday announcing that the single-storey wooden branch would close this Friday afternoon after failing an earthquake assessment.

Lynne Sutherland, regional general manager for ANZ retail, said the decision came after a seismic review of all ANZ and National Bank buildings after the Christchurch earthquake.

Waverley's building did not meet safety standards, she said.

"There's not a whole lot of options that we have there to move into another building.

"It came to us completely out of the blue.

"Recently we had just expanded our services to the National Bank customers who lived in the area too so it was something we hadn't foreseen and are quite disappointed about."

Mrs Sutherland said ANZ knew residents would be upset because of the sudden announcement, but customer and staff safety came first.

The closure affects three jobs – two staff who live in Waverley and a third who commutes from Whanganui – and they will have the option to work there or at ANZ Hawera.

Residents spoken to yesterday were not buying ANZ's assessment.

"What a load of cobblers," beneficiary Stu Buckman said.

"They've been wanting to close Waver-



Final withdrawal: Waverley's Stu Buckman outside the ANZ Branch which will close on Friday.

Photo: JARED SMITH/FAIRFAX NZ

ley for years. This is just the biggest excuse I've ever heard."

As treasurer of the indoor bowling club and Waverley Community Patrol, he was responsible for multiple accounts at the bank, including his own.

"It's a hell of an inconvenience because I also audit a few other organisations which means making sure I've got all the right amounts.

"I'm sure as hell not going to jump in the car and shoot up to Hawera a couple of times a week."

Mr Buckman said he had spoken to several farmers who were "just completely up in arms".

After hearing rumours about the closure, farmer Cedric Aiken got the bad news phone call yesterday.

He also believed the earthquake report was only being used as an excuse, as once again a small South Taranaki town got smaller.

"As one [person] said on Saturday – 'it won't be long until there's tumbleweed blowing down the main street'."

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Garage owner Chris Loubaridis said the earthquake assessment "coincides neatly" with the fact the bank was often quiet.

His wife went in as a sole customer one day last week.

The addition of an ATM machine at the neighbouring petrol station had probably also taken away some of ANZ's business, he said.

ANZ said it would have management staff in Waverley during the week for customers to discuss options.

The bank was negotiating with a supplier to arrange cash pick-ups and change requests for business operators in Waverley.