



Teller closed: Waverley's only bank will shut for good today at 4.30pm. Photo: LAIRD HARPER/FAIRFAX NZ

War of words as ANZ shuts town's only bank

On shaky ground

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A war of words has broken out between South Taranaki's mayor and ANZ management over the reasons why Waverley's only bank is closing for good.

Mayor Ross Dunlop has called the decision to close the branch, because of its earthquake risk, "dubious".

ANZ retail regional general manager Lynne Sutherland said the bank put the safety of customers and staff first, and Mr Dunlop should know better.

Earlier this week the company said it would shut the branch's doors for the last time today after the branch failed a nationwide seismic review of all ANZ and National Bank buildings. The review was sparked by the Christchurch earthquake.

Mr Dunlop expressed his frustration and dis-

may at its sudden closure and failed to see how the building could be an earthquake risk.

"It's a single-storey wooden building, for goodness sake.

"It doesn't feature on the council's list of earthquake-prone buildings.

"To me it looks like ANZ are prepared to cause considerable harm to Waverley over, to me, such illogical thinking. I'm very annoyed about this."

Ms Sutherland fired back, saying ANZ's response to the risk was just.

"There are cracks in the strongroom and there's a hole out back you can pass a handbag through.

"Despite the fact Ross can't understand why a single-storey wooden building is at risk, the independent seismic assessment - which the landlord has - has highlighted the low standard.

"I find it perplexing that someone who is responsible for his own property assets dismisses seismic assessments and the safety of customers and staff."

Mr Dunlop said he approached ANZ manage-



Ross Dunlop: "It's a single-storey wooden building."



Lynne Sutherland: "There are cracks in the strongroom."

ment directly for some "frank discussions" but couldn't sway them.

"The sole reason does appear to be this ridiculous idea that it is an earthquake risk."

He said candid discussions with some management had revealed the bank hosted

a function just weeks earlier in which they trumpeted their services.

"They were business as usual up to a few weeks ago, so it's quite bizarre."

Ms Sutherland said customers won't be left out in the cold as the company is working on installing an ATM that won't have fees attached for their clients.

Fifteen years ago, ANZ closed its Patea branch, the last bank to pull out of the town, forcing residents to travel to Hawera or Whanganui to access ATM services.

That closure sparked years of campaigning from its residents who eventually convinced Credit Union to set up an ATM.

That service was pulled earlier this year because of vandalism concerns.

And there doesn't appear to be a white knight waiting in the wings for Waverley either.

TSB bank deputy chief executive Charles Duke said yesterday that it had not yet discussed the matter.

TSB would wait for the dust to settle before looking at Waverley.

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