

# Pressure mounts on banks to cough up

By ALEX SINNOTT

AUSTRALIA Post's call to the Big Four banks to compensate for the mass closure of rural bank branches has been backed by a major regional advocacy group.

Champions of the Bush has supported Australia Post's request to the banks to contribute to the cost of delivering banking services via post offices in rural and regional areas.

Australia Post chief executive Christine Holgate last week called for the Big Four to fork out \$100 million by the end of the year to meet the cost of its loss-making regional banking service.

Champions of the Bush chairman Greg Walsh said Australian banks were among the most profitable in the world.

"They have both a corporate and community service obligation to ensure that the rural customers have access to adequate face-to-face services when they are needed," he said.

"I am concerned that if Australia Post's request is refused, the availability of these services will be lost to country towns.

"Ideally, Champions of the Bush would like to see Australia Post and the Big Four banks facilitate and fund the establishment of a financial service hub in those small towns that have lost banking services."

Dr Walsh said such a hub would combine face-to-face and electronic banking services with base-level tax accounting, financial planning and lending services.

Harrow, Berrigan, Terang, Casterton, Murchison, Koroit, Mooroopna and Red Cliffs have all lost bank branches in recent years with more expected to follow.