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PNG to gain from ANZ's rural push

By Eric Tapakau

PAPUA New Guinea is among several Pacific Island countries selected by ANZ Banking Group to establish a rural banking scheme.

The bank has started feasibility studies to make the "**un-banked**" population in the rural areas have access to banking services and the products offered by the bank.

ANZ recently appointed Carolyn Blacklock as regional executive in banking the **un-banked** and part of her task will be to oversee and implement the scheme in the Pacific Island countries.

She said yesterday that the scheme had been successfully implemented in Fiji where it made it possible for 20,000 Fijians who never had bank accounts to open accounts with the bank.

Bank managing director responsible for the Pacific Bob Lyon said the new service has had an overwhelming response in the rural and **un-banked** communities in Fiji.

"Customers want banks with a human face. We recognise this and believe that this face to face banking service will continue to help build their confidence in ANZ and further develop the **un-banked** communities in the Pacific region," Mr Lyon said.

"Rural banking is about focusing on people who are currently excluded from everyday banking services and impacting them as individuals, families and communities.

"The cash economy that exists in these countries has not allowed much room for saving. Therefore, many see rural banking as an opportunity for a better life."

He said their partner, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), were preparing to offer financial literacy to the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea later this year with the support of the bank.

"Financial literacy is a cornerstone of the innovative rural banking initiative,

providing basic skills on budgeting and saving," Mr Lyon said.

"This is a vital component as rural and **un-banked** communities will be empowered with the financial skills and knowledge to make better informed choices for themselves."

Ms Blacklock said the rural banking scheme would not bother villagers and **un-banked** communities with proof of identification cards but would rely on the village head men, church leaders, provincial officers and other community leaders to verify customers who had insufficient or who completely lacked normal forms of ID such as birth certificates, passports and drivers' licences.

"We are currently working with the central bank authorities, as we have successfully done in Fiji to alleviate the situation surrounding identification," she said from Fiji yesterday.

"This system works very well here in Fiji."