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Tokomaru store is to close soon

TOKOMARU Bay's Crown Farmers store, the township's centrepiece and a Coast landmark, closes its doors next week.

But apart from confirming the closure, Crown Farmers will make no comment on the move except to say no decision has been made on disposal of assets. The firm also owns houses in the town.

It is a significant moment for the Bay — the big green store has been trading post to Tokomaru for decades.

"Sale" signs in the window and a small notice to customers tell the story. The store will close on May 31.

Two staff members will be affected by losing their jobs of many years. Miss Bernice Boyce and Mr Jess White have been with the company, formerly Gisborne Sheepfarmers, for most of their working lives.

The firm also has a stock agent resident in Tokomaru Bay and the Herald has been told, although this is not confirmed, that he is leaving

the district.

The store has been the base for stock and station trading, hardware, groceries — a true general store. In recent years it has traded mostly in hardware and working clothes lines, with petrol pumps and a corner wine store. The town's TAB has also been based there.

The closure severs a long link between Gisborne Sheepfarmers and Tokomaru Bay. The company had a woolstore at Waima during the port's heyday. The brick building still stands, used in recent years as a fertiliser store, then for concrete tank manufacture.

The loss of the store has come as a blow to the town, a sign of the economic times just as the Coast is experiencing a new growth.

Waiapu County Council chairman and Tokomaru Bay resident Mr Charles Rau sums it up when he says it is a tremendous loss to the township and the large farming area it has served.

"It is a great shame that just at a time of

uplift in the township's economy, this sort of thing happens.

"It illustrates the trend of the region as forestry takes up land being farmed and the slender services of the farming community recede. One of the arguments put forward in the county scheme is that if we don't control the advance of forestry on some lands and preserve farming services, it will be much harder to keep a viable farming sector".

RURAL NEEDS

Mr Rau says the closure has concerned both the council and the community. The store has supplied just about all the rural needs of the area for many years, although scaling down its operation in recent times and dropping its grocery department.

"It has provided the farming and hardware needs of Tokomaru Bay. If they did not have it they could quickly get it."

The nearest source of goods handled by Crown Farmers is now the stock

and station firms at Ruatoria or the Crown Farmers branch at Tolaga Bay. To a small community like Tokomaru Bay, the end of the Sheepfarmers' era is the end of a long, important involvement with the district.

Mr Rau's comments are echoed by Tokomaru Bay Business Association chairman Mr Mark Johnston. It is sad, he says, to see a landmark like this building being closed and possibly lying empty.

BAD NEWS

An unused building of such a size would give a poor impression of the town.

"From a business point of view it is bad news. It can only be described as a major blow to the morale of the people.

"The range of stock the firm has held cannot be handled by other businessmen.

"It is sad, too, that two people will lose their jobs. There is little chance of further employment for them in Tokomaru Bay."



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