

Submission regarding the Green Loans Program
Submitted by: Mark Ballesteros

I am a certified Home Sustainability Assessor currently under contract to DEWHA. I have been conducting assessments under the Green Loans program since September 2009.

In general, I believe that this program is providing a valuable service for taxpayers and serves as an effective way to raise general awareness about energy use and ways that people can save energy. Unfortunately, I believe there are a number of issues with the way the program has been set up and administered that have significantly reduced the utility and credibility of The Program.

In particular, I would like to offer the following comments regarding administration of The Program;

Too many assessors were trained with the expectation of being contracted by DEWHA. This created a glut of assessors looking for work, even amongst those that did obtain contracts with DEWHA. In my view, this created a situation where organisations could successfully hire assessors at a fraction of the going rate by promising to provide a steady stream of work. The predictable outcome was that assessors minimised the amount of time on each assessment and thus compromised the objective of the Program by turning it into more of a data gathering exercise than a service providing useful advice. While the information collected may prove useful for government programs in the future, it is unlikely to result in any significant improvement of energy efficiency by householders. The booking system could be greatly improved by allowing assessors to book appointments on line. As I understand it, at least one organisation (Field Force) was allowed to do this and it is rather outrageous that the service was not extended to all assessors. Of late, it is much easier to reach the call centre to book appointments, so something is working better. I must wonder, however, if this is due in part to a reduced demand for assessments due to the changes in the program (in particular the elimination of the Green Loans.

Cancellation of the loan component of the Program due to low uptake appears, in my view, to be a complete misunderstanding of the realities of the situation. Many of the clients for whom I have done assessments were interested in the loans but could not apply until they received their reports. Many of these people are still waiting for their reports, including households where the assessments were conducted as far back as September 2009. This includes the writer, and I have inquired twice about the status of my report over the last several months and still have received nothing.

Eliminating the loan component of the package significantly reduced the incentive of businesses to promote the program, because the existence of a potential loan offered them the possibility of a benefit that justified the time and effort to offer the service. I must stress the distinction between this potential benefit (which I believe is an intended outcome of the Program) and the direct benefit some companies elected to extract by

effectively charging assessors an amount to do assessments in excess of the costs they incurred to generate those bookings.

Limiting the number of assessments to 5 per week seems very low if a person seeks to make a full time profession of sustainability assessment, although personally it has not created any hardships for me as I never intended it to be a full time occupation.

There appear to be a number of technical inaccuracies with the online calculator. I have sent multiple emails pointing out issues as they arise but have yet to receive any answer (aside from the generic auto-reply) that would suggest these issues are being investigated and/or corrected. Providing reports to people where there is clearly an error (for example, advising clients to purchase a new, high efficiency reverse cycle air conditioner when the input data clearly indicate that they have just done so, or giving a low GHG efficiency rating when the client subscribes to 100% green power) erodes the value of the whole process by reducing the credibility of the report (as well as that of the assessor!).

Respectfully yours,

Mark Ballesteros

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