

11th April, 2010

I wish to make comment on the Governments Green Loan Programme which is currently subject to a senate inquiry.

I would firstly like to state that primarily I believe this to be a very positive program with potential to achieve many positive outcomes. It has not been without its problems however and certainly requires some direct measures to be taken to improve its long term success.

To give a brief snapshot of my personal situation, I am a single mother of two children who received training at Deakin University in October last year so as to pursue a career in Home Sustainability Assessing. Due to the overload the booking centre had started to experience from January onwards, it took a lot longer than I expected to become an active assessor, which ultimately has caused me severe financial hardship. **I have now been an active assessor since the first week in February and have still not received any payment from DEWHA for any work completed.** I injected all my funds into setting myself up to conduct these assessments and have been forced to claim a portion of superannuation funds to keep bills paid in addition to increasing my credit card debt. **It is also completely unsatisfactory that I can only email DEWHA in concern with unpaid invoices and cannot ring the invoice department directly to chase up moneys owing.**

I am deeply committed to grass roots level empowerment to lessen our environmental footprint and Household assessments potentially can be a wonderful tool in achieving this outcome.

Initially they were able to approach this by:

- 1/ providing the householder with information that enabled them to make informed decisions regarding their energy & water use and promote wiser consumption habits of these two resources.
- 2/ offering potential financial support to ensure that major changes households wanted to enact from the HS assessment recommendations were able to be funded from an interest free green loan.

I think it very unfortunate that there is no longer opportunity for the latter to be sought after and this will ultimately reduce the interest in this program. Many people are very keen to lessen their dependency on electricity and gas and support renewable options but cannot stretch their finances to accommodate such big ticket items as solar hot water and solar electricity in their home, or upgrade to modern, efficient appliances. Rebates are helping, but they are not always enough to ensure ALL people can afford to choose these options.

Obviously there are some very affordable measures & habitual lifestyle changes that one can take to reduce power and water consumption, which are being shared with clients receiving HS Assessments. However, I think it is fair to comment that the two most significant and RELIABLE changes a household can make to severely cut greenhouse gas emissions is to install a solar hot water service and ensure they have their house well insulated. These measures need to be accessible/affordable to ALL Australians. From my experience out in the field talking to clients so far, it is very common to have complaints that it is all well and good to recommend they replace hot water services but they cannot find the money to do so even with allowance for rebates offered. If they have only installed an inefficient storage Hot Water system in the last couple of years, they are particularly resistant to spend any more money in this area. It is my belief that more funds need to be injected into subsidising this to occur. I think these funds need to be non discerning and apply to new home owners also as it is paramount that homes are set up with energy efficiency right from establishment. Highest rebates should not only apply to electric storage heaters but rather support anyone who is concerned enough about GHG reduction. It is fair to expect an annual income over a certain amount would dictate whether a household qualified for the maximum subsidisation. As an example in my own personal situation, earlier last year I built my family home only to discover it

was just not possible for finances to extend to afford either solar hot water or solar electricity. Considering my personal commitment to lowering my GHG production, it was most disappointing not to have enough government financial support to enable this to happen. Meanwhile, by government standards I have installed the next best thing to solar or heat pumps, with an Instantaneous gas hot water system, but it is costing me a small fortune to run as I do not have Natural Gas, only bottled gas at my disposal.

In direct relation to long term management and solutions to the Green Loans Program I would like to point out several important factors I believe need to be considered.

1/ A new program name is necessary to reflect the true intent behind the Assessments. This could be changed to the **Greener Homes program**.

2/ New Contracts should only be offered directly to Individuals, or to small scale companies that employ a maximum number of ten Assessors who are currently actively involved in assessing. I believe work ethic and consistent quality of assessment is paramount to this programs success. Careful area distribution of assessors over various postcode regions should be addressed so as to not have excessive competition and ensure adequate full time work for all those actively involved in providing assessments.

3/ I think the maximum no.of assessments allowed per week should be raised to at least 6, as it is not uncommon to receive a cancellation late in the week and based on the 2 working days lead in time to make appointments, it can make it impossible to make another appointment to cover your loss of income for the cancellation.

4/ A fresh new intent, motivation & work ethic behind the program needs to be conveyed to Assessors to ensure all those involved are clearly aware of its parameters, guidelines and code of work practice. This would directly respond to the lack of present quality assurance of HS Assessments and ensure that each assessment took no less than a minimum time – I have personally found that majority of homes take at least 1 ½ hours to be satisfactorily assessed as allowance needs to be made for detailed discussion with householders to establish current performance and comfort of their home. .

5/ Further to this, I think it is important that each assessment should require some literature such as a brochure, to be left with the recipient so as to affirm many of the energy and water saving hints and tips that are discussed during the Assessment as well as listing any relevant websites, rebates, books or other free services/publications that assist householders gather further information that will assist them in reducing energy and water usage. This would give many householders more lasting benefit from Assessments, as the written word can then ensure important facts are not forgotten.

6/ Consistent national standards of training need to be enforced if the public is to have faith in this program and the assessors they accept into their home. The expectation upon assessors to pursue further education and skilling needs to be balanced by several factors:

-Further accumulation of knowledge must be allowed to be acquired over a realistic time frame & should be funded by the government to upgrade all assessors knowledge base to a consistent level.

-The Certificate IV that is currently proposed should be offered via Off Campus studies to ensure all assessors easy access to further education in and around work and family commitments.

-It should be taken into consideration that not all assessors are close to capital centres to be able to attend professional development seminars and meetings, so regional assessors need catering for also.

7/ HS Assessments should become mandatory as the first step to access government rebates or subsidies.

This ensures that householders become involved in the whole process of conscientious consumerism and develop a base level of awareness as to how they can play their part in reducing GHG emissions, rather than just taking advantage of “government handouts” for the sake of it.

8/ Further to this last suggestion, therein lies an opportunity to a sharing of cost between homeowners and Government for HS Assessments on a graduating % scale based on a households annual income. It is reasonable to expect people on a medium income should be prepared to pay for half the cost and invest up to \$100 to pay for an assessment so as they can access other government funding or interest free loans. For those on a deemed higher income they could possibly pay 100% but have tax deduction incentive to help offset cost. This potentially would free up further government funds to be spent towards higher rebates for solar hot water and the like. I personally think interest free green loans were an absolutely great concept and placed a certain level of responsibility and commitment back on the householder to pursue active measures of reducing their footprint. The main negative was that not all householders successfully qualified for a green loan due to lenders criteria relating to income levels etc.& ultimately felt duped. This issue MUST be addressed- as no one would pay towards having an HS assessment done if they ultimately are unsuccessful in securing finance. Perhaps it is fair to suggest that the interest free loans could still be offered with a lowered cap of \$5,000 and also stipulate the first item that must be installed in the home is a solar hot water system, any money left can then be spent towards curtains, external shades, or upgrade of a refridgerator or washing machine etc.

I hope some of my suggestions and criticisms can be used in a positive way to contribute to overall improvement and longevity of this program.