

SUBMISSION TO THE ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS REFERENCES COMMITTEE ON THE GREEN LOANS PROGRAM

Background

I am a registered Home Sustainability Assessor under the Green Loans Program and my ABSA Registration Number is HO52913.

Between 27th December 2009 and 7th April 2010 I have undertaken 47 Assessments under this program.

Up until Jul 2009 I was Manager of Employment Services for UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide which had the largest Work for the Dole (WfD) contract in South Australia. Unfortunately, Wesley Uniting did not get a contract in Metropolitan Adelaide so I and my 27 staff were made redundant.

In that role I had worked with many sponsors that provided work experience for the unemployed under the WfD program. One of our sponsors worked with the Council of the Aged (COTA) in South Australia with a view to providing assistance to older Australians in order for them to remain in their homes for as long as they were able. This involved assistance with the provision of low maintenance gardens; assistance in minor maintenance and provision of energy saving devices (globes, shower heads etc) which would be done under the South Australian Government's Residential Energy Efficiency Scheme, "Energy Friends" program. I and some of my staff underwent training in the Energy Friends program. At about the same time the Green Loans program was being established and I could see that there was an opportunity for training suitable unemployed in becoming Green Loan Assessors which would provide them with sustainable employment.

As I myself became redundant in July 2009 I decided to take up training as an Assessor in the Green Loans program. Because of my interest in assisting older Australians, recognising that many of them could be assisted in reducing energy costs but that they were very cautious about whom they let into their homes, I worked with COTA to provide the Home Sustainability Assessments to their members. (I am a 65yr old grey haired Welshman who relates well to most people.)

It is in the context of working with older and often disadvantaged members of the community that I wish to make comment on the Green Loans Program.

In respect of the Terms of Reference (a) (i):

- It is my opinion that the Government was concentrating on obtaining their objective of providing 360,000 households with an assessment without much planning on how this would be achieved. Given that the program was to have an end date of December 2013 it would take just fewer than 300 assessments per day for 42 months to reach that figure. It would have been patently obvious on 20 November 2009 that the objective would take less than 12 months to reach as by their figures an average of 400 per day had been completed and the call centre was taking an average of over 800 bookings per day. (ABSA Workshop 27 Nov 2009 presented by _____, Acting Director, Green Loans)
- By retaining control of the program which quickly moved at a rate they could not cope with they tried to take pressure off the call centre by requiring bookings be made by email. All this succeeded in doing was creating a pile up of emails within the department which they have not yet cleared – I am waiting for Assessment Numbers for seven assessment booked by email and told I could do for which I cannot claim without the Assessment Number – that is \$1400.00 worth of work (see attached list). I have had no response to emails or requests made via the Feedback on the Assessor Portal.
- Green Loans, we were told, is part of a national framework coordinating energy efficiency actions to 2020. If it was intended to obtain a cross section of the population so that national statistics could be extrapolated why was there no allocation by State?

In respect of the Terms of Reference (a) (ii):

- (A) I needed to undertake 20 Assessments to recoup my investment in training, insurance, registration costs etc before receiving any income. As at 10 April 2010 I have completed 47 Assessments (only 40 of which I can claim at present) and I have so far received payment for 12. None of the assessments I have done were referred to me by the department. I have casual employment which enables me to continue to work but I still have some entitlement to the Age Pension. Clearly this is not a viable option of employment for people trying to earn a reasonable salary.
- (B) Up until the 19th February 2010 the booking system was a farce. In November the call centre was taking over 800 bookings per day when there were some 45 staff looking after three incoming lines (for Householders; for assessors and one for financial queries) and only 2019 assessors contracted

to DEWHA. The delays in getting through to the call centre were causing concern then but nothing compared to what happened in January. The Assessors Portal – where assessors could book their own assessments was to come into use from 16 December did not eventuate and assessors were to book via email. This ended on 25th Jan 2010 when bookings were to be made through the call centre. I have spent up to three hours trying to get through to the Call Centre and then at least 90 minutes on “Hold” on a few occasions the 90 minutes went past 5:00pm EST and the line was disconnected. I am sure that is a story many will tell.

- (C) I was shocked to find that householders were not receiving the reports they were promised “within 10 working days” (Householder Declaration Form). I have printed off the report and provided it as a “Draft” to the householders whose home I have assessed. This should have been an assessor’s responsibility as it would take pressure off the department and provide timely information to householders. Some process of enabling assessors to provide householders with the \$50.00 voucher at the time of the assessment would also be a sensible improvement.
- (D) Because the majority of the households I have assessed have been for older Australians they have not been interested in taking up a Green Loan. However basing the decision on the fact that there had been a low take up is a bit weak when only 40% of reports had been issued to householders as at 28 Feb 10.
- (E) No comment.
- (F) Even though none of the households I have assessed would take up a loan they have found the assessments positive and I think that is an important benefit of the program as in nearly every case some energy saving opportunity was provided. I am not aware of any householder being contacted by the department but I have had an independent feedback survey done on all households as a quality control of my assessment process.

Summary

I believe that Home Sustainability Assessments are a positive contribution to engaging householders to reduce their environmental impact providing they are done properly. My experience is that it is impossible to do even a small unit with one adult in under 90 minutes and a medium sized house in 2 to 2.5 hours. It also takes about 1 hour to encode into the DEWHA system. No more than three assessments could be done satisfactorily per day when one includes travelling time and two would be comfortable.

I believe considerable savings could be made if the requirement to supply householders with the report and any energy vouchers was made a responsibility of the assessor. Some compensation for printing costs would be required.

There needs to be some method of assessing the effectiveness of assessors.

The name should be changed.

The program should be promoted in a positive way.

The department should answer e-mails and other communications promptly.

Anthony Collins