

**Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Environment,
Communications and the Arts inquiry into the Green Loans Program**

By: Heather Bailey

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Dear Committee

I became contracted to the Program to deliver home sustainability assessments at the end of August 2009. I work for myself.

I would like to concentrate my submission on facts associated with the assessments I have completed. I focus on the following two issues: the popularity of the green loan, and the Green Loans assessment report that householders receive as part of the assessment.

Popularity of the Green Loan

It was with surprise, and some concern, that I read in Senator Penny Wong's statement to the Senate on 10 March 2010 that there had been 210 864 assessments completed and only 1705 loans approved. These statistics justify the Government's view of the green loan component as 'unpopular' and to discontinue it. However, my experience has been very different.

I follow up with every client between one and two months after their assessment has been completed to check whether they have received their reports and to get feedback about their assessment or the Program in general. By 28 February 2010, 10% of my clients had secured the green loan (clients who had assessments completed between late October and mid November 2009). Of my clients up to this date, 60% intended to take up the loan (this includes the 10% confirmed successful), 5% had been unsuccessful in securing a loan and the remaining 35% did not wish to take up the loan or were undecided.

Whilst I may concede that my statistics are based on a small sample size (20 households assessed by 28 February 2010), I find the magnitude of difference – a factor of ten - between the Program figures and my figures to be very discrepant and gravely concerning. I hope the enquiry will be looking into the validity as well as the quality of the assessments done.

Green Loans assessment report

The Green Loans assessment report provides the foundation of the relationship between the householder and the Government, and the householder and the loan providers. It also provides the documentary evidence of the assessment, and is an invaluable awareness raising and motivational vehicle. In my experience when clients don't receive their reports they become wary and cynical about the Program (and by default other 'green' initiatives). Much goodwill is lost, and understandably so – they have allowed someone to enter into the privacy of their home and have given detailed information about their personal habits (e.g. how many showers they take a week) and have received nothing in return.

As mentioned previously, I follow up with every client between one and two months after their assessment has been completed to check whether they have received their reports. Of the assessments I completed in 2009, at the time of follow up, 36% of householders confirmed receiving their reports from the Green Loans Program, 29% confirmed they had not and 35% could not be confirmed¹. Of the assessments I have completed in 2010 I can confirm that none of the householders have received their reports from the Program. All the 2009 clients, once I notified the Program by e-mail, received their reports. I have done the same with some of my 2010 clients and the Program has given no response.

The sudden decision to remove the loan component, and the subsequent lack of information about a cut-off dates for loan applications and approvals, the non-appearance of reports and non-response by the Green Loan Program, has - in effect – cheated some of my clients of the deal they reasonably expected. Some of them are quite angry.

This experience has been very discouraging.

Sadly, in my view, an excellent initiative that I was keen to be part of has been grossly mismanaged. I hope, as a committed environmental professional, Australian citizen and taxpayer, this enquiry is thorough in identifying the mistakes made and makes firm recommendations for the management of future initiatives.

¹ I left a phone/e-mail message with these clients and did not get a reply.