

Senate submission regarding the Green Loans Program

As a 72 year old pensioner who had spent 30 years of his working career involved with water conservation products, this seemed like an opportunity to assist people in this area whilst helping to improve my financial position. I responded to an ad which offered training in what I hoped would be a return to the workforce and a new career.

The trainer advised that this would be the final course as a time cap had been established for training new assessors, but the limited information available to him indicated that there would be assessments available for at least 3 months. They estimated that accreditation would take 3 weeks, and payment would normally be two weeks from invoice. They said that they had experienced some delays, but they had been told that the booking service would all be available online soon.

A police check was also required despite the fact that I have a current "Blue Card for working with children" which had previously necessitated a police check.

To do the course I had to borrow the money, and that money has now been totally wasted. Subsequent to this our little dog was hit by a speeding car, and the money wasted on training would have paid the vet bill!

At completion of the course the next step was to apply to ABSA for membership and an assessor number, and then finally to establish a contract with DEWHA. Before this could be done Insurance certificates had to be obtained and paid for, further depleting my savings.

After 4 weeks ABSA contacted me and advised that it would be some time before they would process my application. They offered to cancel my application and refund my money if I desired as it was likely that there would be no funds left in the program by the time they allocated an assessor number. Not wishing to send good money after bad I took up this option.

My next step was the cancellation of the specified insurance policy (suitable only for this occupation) which incurred a fee of nearly \$200.00. The net result is that I have not returned to the workplace and I have depleted my savings by several thousand dollars. Not having retired with a parliamentary pension like Minister Garrett will, this is a substantial amount to me!

This government has talked a lot about assisting older Australians to return to the workforce, but as this was not a course approved by centrelink no help was available. The taxation department also does not regard it as a business expense because no income was generated.

From the start the program had merit, but was poorly constructed and administered, with inadequate performance evaluation or supervision.

I would like to ask the following questions,

1. Why was a time cap put on training programs rather than a ceiling on the number of assessors to be trained?
2. Why were the training providers not kept fully informed regarding the number of assessors trained and bookings in the system?
3. Why were companies such as Field Force given the opportunity to train employees themselves?
4. Why was Field Force given a dedicated booking line to permit mass book of assessments, whilst individuals would often have to wait all day to place a booking?
5. Why was the online booking service not instituted?

6. As the Government has offered \$40m compensation to insulation installers who have been affected, will there be any redress for those similarly disadvantaged by the Green Loans scheme? Expenses re-imburements would cost \$1m at most.
7. Will those people who are waiting on Green Loans be able to complete their improvements as the loans are no longer available?
8. Why was there no mechanism in the design of the program to evaluate performance of both the government and the assessors.
9. Why has it now reached April, yet nothing has has been resolved from a debacle that commenced in 2009? The last people who trained have now been waiting 4 months without any income and are no further forward towards a solution.

Suggestions for improvement

1. **Compensation for those financially affected by the scheme**
2. Introduce a redesigned scheme with sufficient bookings available to allow those individuals accredited to recoup their losses
3. Fulfilment of all those loans requested, following assessments that were delayed by the inability of the system to cope with them in a timely manner.
4. Thorough examination of all approved training courses, providers and practices.
5. De registering companies such as Field Force from the scheme as I believe that use of the Green Loans to solicit business constitutes a breach of the ABSA Code of Ethics.
6. All preferential arrangements should cease and only individual assessors be accredited.
7. Extend training for those accredited assessors to allow them to upgrade their qualifications and participate in future areas where their existing skills would be recognised.
8. As the aim of the scheme was twofold, i.e. educational as well as providing financial incentives to allow people to make changes, re-evaluation of the goals could still provide a satisfactory outcome to those consumers who no longer have access to loans. Tying in with programs such as the Smart Choices Program in Queensland could provide a cost effective measure to show energy savings with minimal capital cost.

In summary, whilst the aim of the program is admirable; the design, control measures & execution has been highly unsatisfactory. With proper construction the program could be beneficial towards achieving a satisfactory result for both the environment and those people adversely affected by the current arrangements.