

Green Loans Program

Preamble:

I am an Environmental and Sustainability Consultant and have been involved in the Green Loans program since December 2009 and have observed some excellent potential in this initiative. Unfortunately the lack of controls, and short-falls in process, applied at the onset of this program have resulted in some of those involved acting outside of the interests and objectives of this program. The resulting poor publicity has affected the confidence of the public and measures need to be urgently put into place to resolve this. Some of these measures have already been taken.

Prior to joining this program I was working within the environmental, gardening and horticultural arenas and prior to that within Corporate Consulting. I have extensive Business Consultancy, and Project and Change Management experience as well as a long involvement with environmental and sustainability issues.

Most of the existing issues within the program have been clearly identified and the address by Senator Wong to the Senate on 10th March, 2010 showed some clear intent at resolving these in an ordered and controlled manner.

There are, however, a number of possible expansions and changes to the current program which I believe will greatly enhance its usefulness and value to the public.

Submissions:

Training:

The need for a higher level of training and greater control over the standard of training has been clearly identified. Certificate IV should become the minimum level and there should be a single, Australia wide, training program that has been fully ratified by the Department and a small number of RTOs should be accredited to deliver this course. This course should be available as distance education to make it available to rural sector assessors. The course should include post-assessment assistance information such as:

How to advise on the number of solar panels a particular house may require

Water collection systems and usage of collected water

External shading. Particularly of north-facing walls and large areas of concrete

Usage of vegetation controlling building temperature. This has an added advantage in the control of Greenhouse Gases.

Extended awareness of the external environment

Project managing the selection and installation of products

Working with Federal, State and Local authorities

Post Assessment Assistance:

The current program involves assessing homes and identifying potential areas in which improvements may be made. At this point home owners are left on their own in an area where few of them have any knowledge. There is a requirement for these owners to be given assistance.

Such assistance would greatly enhance the Department's ability to control the quality of goods and services supplied as a result of assessments and grants. A list of approved suppliers and a blacklist of those who have abused the system would also help in this area.

Such assistance should take the form of advice on quantities and types of materials with the home owner being given a choice of a number of solutions and suppliers. This could also be followed by project management of the installation ensuring a quality result is

achieved.

This post-assessment assistance should be subsidized by the Government, not fully funded, as this would ensure that home owners who took up this service were serious in their commitment.

Extended Information Gathering:

There are a number of areas where the current information gathering could be extended. These include:

Height of ceiling. This has a major effect on the heat management of a room

Assessor comment. There are many anomalies that occur within a room or within a house. The addition of a comments field for each room and for the whole house would enable the recording of observations that may assist at a later stage. This information could be of importance to an assessor conducting post-assessment assistance.

A more extended gathering of external information, in particular that pertaining to the north and west facing walls of the house and concrete and paved areas.

Contract Arrangements:

The current two-tier contracting system should be abolished and all Assessors should be contracted directly to the Department. The Department needs to take full control of, and responsibility for, this program. The two-tier system results in a loss of productive use of funds due to multiple layers of management and repeated processes.

Assessors should not be permitted to take commissions or any other form of payment from organisations or persons who supply materials such as batts, solar panels and water tanks.

Assessor Numbers:

The current capping of Assessor numbers at 5000 could possibly be revised downward but availability of assessors to remote areas must be addressed. Natural attrition due to the changes to the program and the requirement for a higher standard of training should contribute significantly to reducing numbers. Limiting Assessors to Individual Contracts only will also contribute to reducing numbers. A limit of 3000 would ensure this became an ongoing career.

Assessment Numbers:

The current restriction on the number of assessments each assessor can undertake in a week will certainly limit the attraction to the “get-rich-quick” sector that has plagued this program. It will also enhance the chances of this becoming an ongoing profession. However the limit of five per week makes this a part-time job or a subsidy to other activities.

Allowing a number of Assessors, who wish to make this a full-time occupation, the ability to increase weekly assessments to eight or ten, with the addition of post-assessment assistance fees, would allow them to make this a worthwhile career option. In this way high quality, professional assessors will be developed.

Rick Hammond

T/A Earth Connections

Environmental and Sustainability Consultant