

Rural Resource Consultants

Enga Lokey

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senators:

First, may I thank you for looking into the matters associated with the Green Loans program and I look forward to a positive outcome for homeowners, assessors and taxpayers. The program in principle is a fantastic one and could have brought about amazing results. In practice it seems, the program was initiated without forethought into the details of the most basic components (like a well tested assessment tool) and safeguards against shifty operators (unfortunately a necessary part of any funding plan as there is always someone waiting to take advantage of the system if the system is left without safeguards). My comments below address directly the issues noted in the outline for inquiry of which I have first hand information or knowledge, others are left unaddressed:

(B) regulation of Home Sustainability Assessment practices, including the promotion of assessments,

As the program was out of control by the time it was initiated, there has been no promotion of the program or regulation of practices, even though promised, Additionally, there has been no support for assessors genuinely trying to do a good job who have questions as to the proper operating procedures and use of the assessment tool (which is a disaster in and of itself)

(C) accreditation of Home Sustainability Assessors,

Although I participated in a training course early last year that as far as I can tell did follow the curriculum and not take any shortcuts, I still feel the training was very inadequate. Probably not inadequate to allow someone to input information into the assessment tool (which is in itself a problem) but inadequate in producing a knowledgeable professional to interact with the public. Although there was suppose to be prerequisite skills and knowledge to enter this course, that was not upheld to even the most basic level. Therefore the course by necessity had to be kept at a very basic level. Additionally, there was no exam or other exit criteria to separate those who had a grasp of this much-too-basic information from those who didn't. Basically, 'pay your money, show up for the course, become an assessor' was the model. Quality control was given away from the very start.

(D) ensuring value for money for taxpayers,

With the lack of a sufficiently meaningful, standardized and assessed criteria for assessor qualification, the ability to ensure value for money was compromised right from the start. Additionally, the assessment tool has so many flaws as to make any resultant information supplied to the homeowner worthless. The only

way that the taxpayer gets value for money and the homeowner gets value for the time they dedicated to the assessment is if they happen to get a conscientious assessor who takes it upon themselves to provide appropriate verbal feedback at the time of the assessment as well as an explanation that the official feedback the homeowner may eventually receive (or not) will be potentially spurious.

(E) waste, inefficiency and mismanagement within the program,

The list is too long and I am sure has been documented better by others than I could do here.

(F) ensuring the program achieves its stated aims of improving water and energy efficiency,

This is not even possible to document at the present time as I don't know what sort of followup is planned if any. However, given that the assessment tool is so poor and therefore advice/suggestions for efficiency potentially inaccurate, if efficiency changes happen it is due primarily to the on the spot feedback from the assessor and greater awareness that going through the audit process produces in the consumer than to any specific recommendation from the tool.

(G) the consultation and advice received from financial institutions regarding their participation,

The financial institutions that my clients and I interacted with seemed to be doing their best and providing reasonable information in a timely fashion. However, their hands were tied by the lack of reports being received by clients. As such, even though many of my clients were anxious to get a loan and implement changes (particularly PV systems, solar hot water, insulation and water tanks) the loans ended before they received their report or loan. Several had approved loans waiting for reports and still did not make the deadline.

(ii) an examination of:

(A) employment and investment in Home Sustainability Assessments resulting from the program, including that resulting from Government statements regarding the number of accredited assessors,

Obviously, more assessors entering the market than that proposed when the program was initiated hindered the ability for each assessor to earn a living. Oversight from the beginning to limit this and to help disperse assessors proportionally around the country would seem like an obvious idea. More importantly, the exploitation of assessors and overloading of the system that resulted from big companies monopolizing the market and possibly having preferential booking procedures sent the entire program over the edge.

(B) the effectiveness of the booking system,

The booking system as proposed seemed like a workable one. We may never know as it never came on-line. The booking system as it existed prior to Feb changes was completely unworkable. Who can spend all day just trying to make 5 bookings and then potentially find themselves at the end of the day still unable to get through to the booking office? Presently, the booking system seems to be working for an initial booking but I am still uncertain as to how to accommodate my clients need for last minute changes and the limitations of a 48hr pre-assessment registration or change.

(C) the effectiveness and timeliness of Home Sustainability Assessment reports being provided,

You have to be kidding me. I have been doing assessments since Jan and not a single report has arrived to a single client. Ditto for my pay!!!!

(D) the early reduction by the Government in the number of Green Loans to be offered, and subsequent discontinuation of the loans, including by financial institutions in advance of the Government's announced date of discontinuation,

There was not a reduction in the number of Green Loans offered, there was a discontinuation of the loans as of March 22nd. Those are two very different things as many homeowners were pulled up short as they were already in the process of trying to get a loan, but were denied because reports did not arrive in time for this cut-off. This is having a direct impact on the ability of homeowners to uptake more costly efficiency measures and to a lesser extent making it harder to market the free assessments.

(E) homeowner actions for which Green Loans have been sought and approved,

Loans sought and approved by the bank, but not able to be completed because of a lack of reports issued.

(F) the level of evaluation of homeowner action following any Home Sustainability Assessment,

As far as I know there is none.

FINALLY, One of the greatest problems with the system and any changes to it that might come of this inquiry is the assessment tool itself. Unless that is addressed, nothing that an assessor does on the ground is going to make the program reasonable. There is no reason that the tool can not work effectively as there are many similar tools that do just that. Additionally, with 5000 trained assessor potentially able to give input into difficulties and flaws (even if only 20% know what they are doing), the evolution to a functional tool should be quick and easy. As an assessor, I am still uncertain as to how this process is actually taking place although I do send regular emails into the blackhole that is the feedback address for the tool. Where this goes, what happens to it, and how updates/changes come about eludes me.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to the results of this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Enga Lokey