

8 April 2010

To the Senate Committee

RE: INQUIRY GREEN LOANS PROGRAM

I am a mother of three with one extra dependent child, my husband is a teacher and the sole income earner in our family. I am currently trying to complete a commerce degree. In October 2009 I heard about the Green Loan Home Sustainability Assessment Scheme. Living in the remote area of Broome I saw the opportunity of making a contribution to my family's income by being possibly the only assessor in the area, of making a difference by educating and assisting people to live a more sustainable lifestyle and in doing so ensuring lower living costs for them and a better future for our environment.

Below is the process I had to go through to become an assessor:

**November 2009**

I attended a Home Sustainability Assessment training course for four days Monday to Thursday 8.00am to 4.00pm in Perth. I live in Broome so had to pay for my return trip to attend the course.

Flight cost \$395.00.

Course price was \$1100.00.

**End November 2009 to end December 2009**

I then had to apply for a Federal police clearance which took until December 2009 to arrive

cost \$43.00.

**December 2009**

To apply to ABSA for my assessment number I was required to also purchase insurance before they would issue me with a number to become an assessor. I purchased the insurance and forwarded my application together with the authorised signed copies of documentation to ABSA in mid December 2009.

Cost Insurance \$876.00

**January 2010**

After repeatedly being unable to reach the contact centre to find out how my application was progressing, I was finally connected to a recorded message advising that an email would be sent on 22 January 2010 advising applicants of their assessor number. The email sent on 22 January 2010 did not reach me as they had mistyped my email address. When I did receive the email it was to advise that they had been inundated with over 5000 applicants and that they had to outsource the application processing. They also advised that, as there were so many applicants, I may not wish to pay the further \$660.00 to proceed with my application as there would not be enough work to sustain this many assessors. They apologised for any outlay that may have already been lost in order to proceed with the application. I contacted Peter

Garret's office and was told that the green loan scheme had received so much interest that it would be continuing and would probably be extended. On this advice I decided to proceed with my application to ABSA. I advised ABSA that I wished to proceed as I felt that I may at least be able to get enough work to cover my expenses.

ABSA Registration Fee \$660.00

### **February 2010**

I did not receive my assessor number until mid February 2010 and still could not start work as I had to download and post a contract to the Federal government to receive a welcome pack and software so that I could start making bookings. I also needed an Australian Business Number and to open a bank account to receive payment for work carried out to submit with my contract. I organized this and sent my contract.

National Bank Account keeping fee \$10 per month

Fees so far February, March, April = \$30

### **February and March 2010**

Contacted Green Loan Information line many times. In one instance I was assured by the Green Loan Enquiry Team that I would have a signed contract (being in a no or low service area). They sent an email for me (the only way of sending your queries) through the Green Loan contract processors (whoever they may be) and advised that as the email had been sent by the information centre it would be fast tracked to Canberra. There is no way of contacting this contract processing team. I even contacted Penny Wong's office and they advised me that they do not have contact with these people. To date I have not yet received notification if the contract has been signed or if it will not be signed.

### **March 2010**

An assessor from Perth came to Broome having contacted the Broome Shire to organize to carry out assessments for a 2 week period until 18 March 2010. I could do nothing except contact the Broome Shire and advise them that I was waiting on my contract so that I could carry out assessments. The Green Loan ceased on 22 March 2010 and all those people (among them my family and friends) who were waiting on my assessment missed out on accessing the Green Loan.

The changes to the scheme mean that it would not probably be feasible for this assessor to travel to Broome again as it would not be economically viable. Some of the people I would have carried out assessments for have now used this person because, even though I was assured by the Green Loan Enquiry Team that I would have a signed contract (being in a no or low service area) I fear I may still not get a contract as changes to the scheme have also limited assessor numbers to 5000. The government have increased the number of assessments they will pay for from 360 000 to 600 000 and they have reduced the amount of assessments to 3 per day and 5 per week so that assessors will perform assessments more thoroughly.

### **Mid March 2010**

Received my photo identification tag so that I can carry out assessments from ABSA.

### **April 2010**

No confirmation either way with regards to a contract to carry out assessments.

Total costs so far \$3100.00 this does not include postage, telephone calls, hours spent on telephone calls, accommodation and sundries whilst in Perth attending the course.

## **Questions**

Why do assessors have to go through ABSA to become assessors? Becoming a member of ABSA has only provided me with newsletters and updates from the government about the changes to a scheme that I cannot begin to work in without a signed contract.

## **Suggestions to improve the scheme**

Some suggestions to increase employment for assessors would be to include: places of business in the assessment scheme.

Reintroduce the no interest Green Loan to encourage people to implement changes suggested by the government.

Ensure those assessors waiting to be processed and those practicing completed the required training.

Allow sole traders to assess in the Green Start Scheme.

Some of the suggestions made by ABSA to improve the scheme would be:

ABSA believes that a compulsory green audit should be the first step to securing other Federal (and State) Government support measures in relation to energy efficiency, water efficiency and the installation of insulation, solar hot water and small scale renewable technology within the home.

*This would ensure:*

- Widespread energy efficiency assessments across the country;
- Assessors have an ongoing stream of work;
- Public funds are being used in the most responsible and efficient way;
- Householders are making informed choices;
- Householders are increasing their knowledge of energy use, reduction and conservation;
- Government programs are acting in unison, with the same goal;
- Additional 'checks and balances' for Government and householders;
- A sharper focus for the most cost and environmentally efficient way to assist low income earners;
- A stronger focus on power and water bills and the best way to reduce them for householders;
- The relationship between programs and savings for the consumer are strengthened.

Assessment reports would be required to accompany applications for other

Government support measures.

ABSA also believes that major renovations in households that require Local Council approval (eg \$100K +) should also require an assessment report.

Assessments should also be offered to small businesses such as cafes, small offices, hairdressers etc to assist them to offset projected rising power costs. A suggestion may be for businesses with a turnover threshold and/ or floor space (eg less than 200 sq m) to qualify.

Care must also be taken when considering an even geographical spread of assessors nationwide, equal access to those in rural and remote communities and with a strong commitment to access for those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

*New contracts would have tougher provisions including:*

- Enforceable code of practice with a one strike policy;
- Minimum time for assessments, dependent on typical dwelling;
- Assessment reports to be returned to DEWHA within 10 days;
- Restrictions on marketing claims, earnings claims by companies advertising for assessors;
- Maximum number of assessors within a catchment or geographical area- could be matched to Census data;
- Minimum standards for DEWHA re access to work allocation, call centre standards, complaints, issuing of reports to households etc;
- Maximum wait for payment by Department of assessor invoices.

I am hoping you can assist me in some way as not knowing whether I have a contract or not leaves me in limbo. I cannot even look at trying to seek reimbursement from my training group or my insurance company until I know whether I will get a contract or not. The longer I wait the less likely I am able to seek compensation from these organizations and I am left with trying to invoice the government for my losses should I not obtain a contract.

The mismanagement of this project has caused financial and emotional strain on my family. If I am unable to carry out any assessments prior to 30 June 2010, I will not be able to even claim my expenses as a tax loss. I feel I have let the people in Broome and surrounding areas down as they have been relying on me to obtain their assessment and many of them ultimately a green loan to assist them to implement the changes suggested by an assessment report.

