

27/03/2010

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

Dear Committee Secretary

Re Green Loans Program

Please let me start by telling you a bit about myself and my experiences so far with the Federal Government Green Loans Program.

I am 52 years old, live in southern Lake Macquarie NSW and have tertiary qualifications. I worked for BHP in both NSW and Queensland for 12 years. Following this I spent the next 15 years working as a franchisee and franchise area manager for two well known franchises – Muffin Break and Bakers Delight before buying into a Real Estate business in Lake Macquarie. This business has now been sold after 5 years and I have been semi retired working in the hospitality industry 3 or 4 days a week for the last year.

In October 2009 I first heard about the Green Loans program and thought this would definitely be worth investigating. After spending some time looking at this program as a possible business venture I took the next step to organize and pay for training.

The Green Loans Program interested me because I wanted to run it as my own business as a sole trader – not working for someone else and not employing anyone else.

My idea was to complete the training, join ABSA, and register a contract with the Government and then commence my business – Newcastle Home Sustainability Services.

I aimed only to work 4 days a week and complete 8 – 10 assessments per week to ensure that assessments were thorough, informative and useful to the clients. I never intended to work for a company whose assessors were undertaking 5 assessments per day, 7 days a week.

On 12/12/09 my training was completed and I immediately applied to ABSA to become a member. At this stage I began hearing that there may be problems with the scheme but I was committed due to my training costs and membership to ABSA – like many others in my position.

I received from ABSA my Green Loans Assessor Number on 01/02/2010 – six weeks after I had lodged by application. On the same day 01/02/2010, I sent my completed contract to DEWHA hoping for a quick return so I could start my new business.

3 weeks later on 24/02/2010 I received an email from ABSA telling me that there had been changes to the Green Loans Program and no further contracts were to be issued by the Government until further notice. My contract had not been signed and I was told that everything had been put on hold.

I would like to outline to the committee what this has cost me so far.

\$1,450	for training
\$745	indemnity and liability insurances
\$152	office of fair trading – business name
\$990	laptop computer
\$120	printer
\$150	quick books software
\$660	membership of ABSA
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\$4,267	total of expenses
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I am still very keen to receive a Government contract and commence the next stage of my business life as a Home Sustainability Assessor. When I was investigating this scheme last year, I was convinced that this was the perfect program for individuals to run a successful small business working for themselves, while still doing something to help our environment.

My belief was that this was a business for individuals. I believe that many of the problems associated with the Green Loans Program have been bought about by companies employing a large number of assessors and sending them out to complete 35 assessments per week.

Many problems such as

- the oversupply of assessors
- the inability of the Government web site to cope with large volumes
- the time taken to submit a report
- the time taken to send the report to the consumer
- the poor quality of assessments

may have been caused by companies more interested in the volume of assessments completed and not the quality.

Having recently come from a Real Estate background (I have a NSW Real Estate License) I believe that qualified Home Sustainability Assessors have a future beyond the Green Loans Program.

It is already compulsory in Queensland and the ACT (I think) for people selling their properties to supply a completed Sustainability Declaration. I believe this will eventually be compulsory in NSW and other Australian States therefore ensuring somewhat the continuation of this business.

In conclusion, I believe the Senate Committee should be looking to re-commence the program as an Energy Efficient Program / Energy Saver Program and should be looking to sign contracts with more individuals to complete these assessments and therefore limiting the large number of companies who are in it for a quick kill and only interested in the completion of a high volume of assessments.

I urge you to expedite your decision making on how the new scheme will operate and who will be given a new Government contract. Many people, including myself, are presently at a standstill and would really like to know if and when we can start or recommence our home sustainability businesses.

Thanking you for your time.

Regards

William Brecht