

Submission to Green Loans Program Senate inquiry- Greg Thomas

In November 2009, I was attending the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service in Ashfield, Sydney, having been referred there by Centrelink following a period on Sickness Benefits. The CRS was to assist me in finding employment. Together with a number of other CRS clients (15 or so) we were given an interview with a company called Equiiva.com. a newly formed company trying to work within the Green Economy. We were successful in the interview and were offered employment with Equiiva as Home Sustainability Assessment Officers. Our training was to be paid for by the CRS and Equiiva would pay for our accreditation with ABSA (Association of Building Sustainability Assessors).

Training was given over two full days by an ABSA accredited trainer and was completed on 6th December, 2009. We had to supply two passport sized photos endorsed by a JP for identity tags, undergo a police check and sign an undated employment contract. We then had to wait for our accreditation to be processed by ABSA. We also undertook some in-house training with Equiiva for which we were supposed to be paid but have never received.

We were told there were some delays with the accreditation process but would be accredited within a few weeks. In early February 2010, having not received any further news re the accreditation process, I contacted Equiiva for some answers. I was told that ABSA had too many assessors and that they had offered Equiiva the option to withdraw from the process and have their money refunded. Equiiva chose this option but had failed to advise any of us or the CRA about their action.

A meeting was arranged by CRS Ashfield, chaired by the head of the service. We thought this meeting was to explain to us what had gone wrong but it turned out that CRS wanted us to tell them what we knew about the mess as they had no idea as to what was going on. We were advised that all our queries would be addressed. Several weeks passed and we were advised that CRS was still unclear as to our accreditation status and whether work with Equiiva was still possible. We are yet to be informed on these issues.

All of us involved wasted 3 months only to find that our accreditation status is still unknown. Some of the applicants had given up other jobs when we were told that we would be accredited in early 2010. I doubt that the money spent on our training will ever be refunded to the CRS.

The entire Green Loans Home Sustainability Program was botched from the very beginning as limits to the numbers of assessors being trained was not capped at two thousand.

Trying to book jobs through DEWHA was extremely difficult for individual assessors or the companies employing them. The one exception to this was a company called Fieldforce, a business unit of CRX. Fieldforce was able to set up a direct line to the DEWHA booking office and book as many as 6,000 jobs per week. There was no tender process for this option and Fieldforce was the only company given this option. Everyone else had to spend two hours plus hanging on the phone to be able to book a maximum of five jobs at any one time.

The government was to increase the number of assessments from 360,000 to 960,000. The response from DEWHA to those directly affected by this fiasco has been, to say the least, inadequate.

The staff at CRS were not to blame for any of this as they were not kept abreast of the

deteriorating processes within the program by ABSA or DEWHA. They, like us, were kept in the dark.