

17 March 2010

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

RE: Green Loans Program

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Green Loans Program Senate Inquiry.

My interest is that I undertook training in January 2009 in Melbourne, costing \$1,900 and one week's annual leave, but did not register with ABSA, having decided to "cut my losses" mid 2009, rather than invest another \$2,000 in accreditation, insurance and costs in a flawed scheme. I am a professional engineer with post-graduate qualifications and an interest in sustainability, with prior experience in building services and the construction industry, and undertook training with the view to "make a difference" in a part-time capacity through the Green Loans program. Like many, I have been very disappointed with the program implementation, but the purpose of this submission is to highlight the representations made of the program before and during training, and the degree to which DEWHA, through the training providers, acted in bad faith. I undertook training in the expectation that DEWHA would implement the program in the way it had been represented. Many issues have already been raised publicly, and no doubt will be raised in other submissions, and I will avoid repeating them all, but some of my expectations are listed in point form below:

- It was indicated that there would be around 1000 assessors trained nationally. A selection criteria would apply for potential trainees, and numbers were being restricted, and this was made very clear by Ecomaster and Archicentre. When I applied for training, the clear message was that some applicants were being turned down. Only people with appropriate experience would be admitted, including, for example, prior experience in the building industry as a builder or assessor, or some area of sustainability. This reinforced my view that the program was a serious home sustainability assessment program. I was initially surprised when I found out later that people without any prior relevant experience were being accepted for training. I would not have undertaken training had I known that no selection criteria existed and that unqualified and uncommitted people were being trained *en masse*. It has become clear that many of the "high value" trainees have been displaced by thousands of "lower value" assessors who don't have a long term commitment to sustainability.
- When I indicated that I only wanted to pursue assessments part-time with training organisations, it was confirmed that undertaking assessments as a full-time activity was actively discouraged in the early stages. This was reiterated during training and it was apparent that the program was being sold primarily as a part-time activity, possibly as an adjunct to other professional

activities. Even before the beginning of the program, it was apparent that the decision to pursue the program in a full-time capacity was risky given the fact that the scheme was new. I believed, along with many others, that the prudent course was to start slowly, and not give up worthwhile employment for an initially speculative venture. However, the program has been largely dominated by companies and individuals forming new businesses, thereby reducing the available work for part-timers. I had no intention of undertaking assessments full-time and had I known that the program would be dominated by companies aggressively marketing the program, I would not have undertaken training.

- The initial Ecomaster training was based on householder engagement and a genuine sustainability assessment. By the end, the program had been dumbed-down to a "light switch counting" exercise. Had I been informed prior to training that possessing a legitimate interest, or prior experience, in building and sustainability was of little value to completing assessments, and that "having a clipboard while counting light switches" was the *modus operandi*, I would not have undertaken training.
- The training cost was \$1,900. We were informed that there would be some costs for accreditation and insurance, with a group insurance policy likely. But at no stage were we informed that we would need to spend another \$2,000 to undertake assessments. For me, as for many, the \$1,900 was a substantial cost for a start-up program, particularly given that assessments would be conducted part-time. I would likely not have undertaken the training had I known that the real cost was closer to \$4,000. I believe DEWHA clearly acted in bad faith in failing to inform prospective trainees that substantially more funding than the initial training fee was going to be required, and would be ongoing annually.

Yours sincerely

Graham Palmer