

From: Rachel Bills [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 24 January 2017 2:15 PM
To: Laybutt, Mark
Subject: Dairy Inquiry

Hello,

I recently submitted this piece to the "round table" discussions regarding the Farm Household Allowance process. If you would like to use it for the inquiry, feel free.

Yours sincerely,
Rachel Bills
Willow Grove, Vic

Done

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 7 December 2016 12:11 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Round table discussion with Federal Govt in Morwell 15/12/16

Hi [REDACTED]

Here is my submission for the FHA feedback meeting:

Hello,

After the 'dairy crisis crash' I applied for the FHA. I knew the application process would be challenging as I have applied for other payments in the past (drought assistance, Youth allowance for my son, etc).

My paperwork was filled in (about 5 different forms) and taken to Warragul Centrelink. Being a rural/ farming area I was surprised to find none of the staff were overly familiar with the FHA. They were helpful but perhaps should have had a specific person who was trained in that area present. I submitted all documents but still had a few questions and was directed to ring the FHA hotline while I was there. I sat on hold for at least an hour but had to leave, and said I would ring from home.

The first time I rang the hotline I think I was on hold for 2 hours. The dairy crisis was all over the media and news. It appeared as though this issue had landed in Centrelink's lap all of a sudden and they were struggling. I rang the hotline many, many times over the next few months. Financially we were ok, but the payments would have definitely helped. Each time I rang up I felt like I had to tell my whole story all over to a new person. I could hear the frustration in their voice at times.

They couldn't give me any information except that there was IT issues in the system, or a glitch which had affected many applicants apparently. I rang every second day getting little bits of info. Very frustrating. I was very patient on the phone as I knew it wasn't the other person's fault. One lady suggested I ring the complaints line, which I did. They couldn't really help me either so my case was passed onto a ministerial department, where I spoke to Mark. He eventually sorted things out and there was progress. He even rang me a 9pm one night with an update.

I went to my accountants (half an hour away) twice to attempt to do the FFA. On two occasions my accountant was unable to enter the Centrelink FHA website using the codes I had, we'd tried everything. We both gave up, a bit embarrassing and a waste of his and my time. It was Wendy from Centrelink that worked out that the number 1 was actually the letter 'I' (or vice versa) in the code we were using. It was a petty thing like the wrong number in a code that caused all that trouble.

So currently my husband and I are both successfully receiving our fortnightly payments. The money is very helpful and taking the pressure off. We also found the \$3000 voucher useful and used it to get financial advice and get our wills updated.

We both don't like taking the FHA payments, we would SO much rather be getting a fair and reasonable payment for our valuable product of milk and not be receiving welfare.

Overall, the process was complicated and tedious but worth the trouble.

Thank you,
Rachel Bills