

**SUPPLIED IN CONFIDENCE TO THE NSW I.C.A.C.**

# [Service NSW 2021 COVID-19 Micro Business Grant] **‘Retrospective Clawback and Extortion Scam’**

[2022 - present]



## Witness Personal Account and Victim Impact Statement [Complainant #02]

The following written evidence received from Steven Ridd by email to [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au).

[Emails (most recent at top)]

### START OF EVIDENCE

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, 20 September 2024 4:56 PM  
**To:** [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)  
**Subject:** Re: Service NSW '2012 COVID-19 Micros Business Grant' - its Guidelines 'Attachment C' alternative rules

Thanks Steve,

I can't give you a call. My phone is out of action again, hopefully it's back running again tomorrow.

this is my latest service nsw email

.....

Dear [REDACTED]

We refer to your Dispute dated 7/08/2024 of the decision made on the application for Covid19 Microbusiness Grant 21 for [REDACTED] on 07/08/2024 by Service NSW.

I have tried to contact you via phone today however was unsuccessful in doing so. We acknowledge receipt of your dispute raised in relation to the Audit outcome of your Microbusiness Grant 21.

If you would like to discuss this matter on the phone, please let me know of an appropriate time that I can call you.

As requested, we will commence an Independent Internal Review and will notify you with the outcome of that review within 28 calendar days from the date of this email. If we require any clarification from you regarding the information provided, then we will contact you within this timeframe.

All action will be suspended on your debt file relating to the above mentioned grant until this review has been completed.

Your Dispute involves conducting an Independent Internal Review which involves reviewing the information and evidence provided in your initial application and consideration of any new and additional information / evidence which you have provided with your request for an Independent Internal Review. If you have any additional information or evidence that you would like to be considered in this independent internal review, please provide via return email within 5 business days.

I can see that you have failed Audit as the evidence you have provided does not establish that your business had an aggregated annual turnover between \$30,000 and \$75,000 (inclusive) for the year ended 30 June 2021. You have also not provided evidence that your business experienced a decline in turnover (this can be completed by your tax agent using the attached template)

I have noted from the interactions you have previously had with Service NSW during the Audit process that you were trying to obtain further supporting documents from your Tax Accountant. Were you able to obtain these documents and if so can you please forward them to me for review and consideration.

Please be advised that the outcome of your Dispute will be final and there will be no further avenue for review by Service NSW.

Please wait until the 28 calendar days from the date of this email has expired before you contact us for information regarding the outcome of your review.

Sincerely  
Cindy

Customer Payments Support  
Service NSW  
T 13 77 88

.....

([REDACTED] to Steve):

This is going to be another scam email. They have not even looked into my details. if they did they would know I started the business Apr 2021 they must think a new business can make 35k turnover in 2 months.

I'm waiting on a call from my local member of parliament Mr Michael Kemp, MP I'll see what he can do.

I'll send that file you attached to service nsw to refresh their memory.

Cheers [REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 9 September 2024 8:02 PM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Re: Service NSW Extortion - Media: A Current Affair -(ACA) a proposed 2nd episode

Hi Steve,

Sorry for the late reply. My business phone has died and is out of action and I'm not going to bother getting it fixed,

I'm going to close the business, it's just not worth all the hassle.

This is my private number if you need to talk to me [REDACTED]

A follow up story would be great, and getting some answers from Chris Minns

I'd like to know what he has to say about this scam grant.

In my case I have appealed the decision on the 3-9-24.

I have not heard anything from them yet. I don't hold much hope for it.

Cheers [REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Wednesday, 7 August 2024 10:55 AM  
To: steve@naturetrail.com.au  
Subject: Re: FW: Service NSW - Micro Business Grant Debt Collection Scam - time to go to the media!

Hi Steve

Thanks for the update and its good to hear that A Current Affair is looking into it. We need out in the public so people know whats going on, and the sooner the better.

There is going to be a lot of small business going under on this and mine will be one of them.

Today I received this email

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I am writing to you about your application for the 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant.

Based on the information provided, we found that you are not eligible for the funding you received under this grant, as the evidence you provided does not establish that your business had an aggregated annual turnover between \$30,000 and \$75,000 (inclusive) for the year ended 30 June 2021.

**Your application will now be closed and referred to Revenue NSW for funds recovery.**

As outlined in our two previous emails, the Terms and Conditions for the 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant require that any payment made as a result of an incorrect, misleading or fraudulent claim, or as a result of error, will be referred to Revenue NSW for funds recovery. You can view the Terms and Conditions for this grant here: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/2021-covid-19-micro-business-grant-terms-and-conditions>.

Once referred to Revenue NSW for funds recovery, you will receive a notice that includes information on support available, this includes how to request a payment plan or apply for hardship options if you require additional support.

You can also find information on payment plans and hardship options at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/money-and-taxes/finances-and-fees/fees/difficulty-paying-your-fee>.

**Appealing the outcome of a compliance review**

If you do not agree with our decision about your compliance review, you can request an Internal Review within 28 calendar days of being notified about the outcome of your review.

Your request will be considered by the Customer Payment Support - Internal Reviews team which is separate to the team that undertakes the compliance review.

As part of the Internal Review process, you will have an opportunity to give us more information or evidence to support your appeal.

More information about how to request an Internal Review, how we handle Internal Reviews and our complaints handling policy is available at <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/request-an-internal-review-of-a-decision-about-a-grant-application> or by calling us on 13 77 88.

### **Need more information or support?**

We're here to provide you with ongoing support and guidance throughout this review.

If you have any questions, need assistance, or require translation and interpreter services, please reply to this email, or book a call with a grant assessor at

<https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing?bookingSource=sfcase&bookingSourceId=5008v000002or8Z>.

For mental health support, please see the following services and resources:

<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/business/manage-and-grow/mental-health-support>.

If you would like to check the grant Terms and Conditions, they can be found at this link:

<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/2021-covid-19-micro-business-grant-terms-and-conditions>.

If you need any other support for your business, please call a Service NSW Business Concierge on 13 77 88.

Kind regards

Paula

Service NSW

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(██████ to Steve):

I think this is their normal email they are sending everyone no matter what you give them it will never be enough, it's all about getting the dollar in their hands no matter who they screw over to get it.

I'm going to have to Appeal it because I can not pay it and if I have too, that will be the end of my small business, I'll be joining the unemployment line.

I'm lost for words

Thanks David

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 2 May 2024 5:29 PM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Re: FYI - Service NSW Micro Business Grant 'audit' - my closure approach

Hi Steve

Just an update.

Today they have been trying to ring me again, and have sent me a email this is what's in it.

Looks like it's starting again and coming from same phone number 02 38140700

Cheers [REDACTED]

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We were recently in touch to inform you that we paused compliance activities for the **2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant** to carry out an internal review of our processes, to ensure that businesses are supported throughout the compliance process.

Thank you for your patience during this time.

We want to let you know that our internal review has been completed, and the grant compliance process will recommence soon.

### **What happens next?**

Following our internal review, the decision has been made to provide businesses with up to 90 days to provide supporting documentation missing from their application.

We understand that it takes time to gather the required documents and hope the extended time will make it easier for businesses to respond.

Within the next 30 to 60 days, you will receive an email advising you of the next steps for your business.

### **What is a compliance review?**

Service NSW regularly carries out compliance activities for all NSW Government grant programs it administers to ensure that public funds have been allocated responsibly and in accordance with program guidelines.

This is not the same as a fraud review, which involves recovering funds that have been obtained through deception.

A compliance review simply seeks to ensure that grant eligibility and program guidelines have been

followed, such as ensuring that the required documents were included when applying for the grant.

### **Need more information or support?**

We understand that this has been a challenging time, and we are committed to supporting you and your business. Our team is available to provide you with ongoing support and will guide you with the documents you need to submit for this review.

If you have any questions, need assistance, or require translation and interpreter services, please reply to this email, or book a call with a grant assessor at

<https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing?bookingSource=sfcase&bookingSourceId=5008v000002or8Z>.

For mental health support, please see the following services and resources:

<https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/business/manage-and-grow/mental-health-support>.

If you need any other support for your business, please call a Service NSW Business Concierge on 13 77 88.

Kind regards

Blair

Service NSW

T: 13 77 88

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From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, 9 March 2024 5:18 PM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: Re: FYI - Service NSW Micro Business Grant 'audit' - my closure approach

Thanks for the update Steve.

I have not heard anything from Service NSW in months.

Hopefully they have come to their senses and stopped harassing small businesses.

Cheers David

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From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, 11 November 2023 10:42 PM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: Micro grant

Hi Steve

I have just been reading your website about the service NSW COVID-19 micro business grant.

I have been having the same problem with them they have been contacting me since May this year and there still going, I do find it very suspicious the things they ask for like tax returns.

it sounds like a scam.

How did you go with them?

Cheers [REDACTED]

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End of supplied evidence

This document submitted by Steven Ridd, Managing Director, Wistmans Wood Holdings Pty Limited [ACN 600 331 931] as trustee for Wistmans Wood Trust [ABN 51 965 308 493 ] trading as Nature Trail. Registered Address: 5 Kundibar Street KATOOMBA NSW 2780.]

By email [icac@icac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au)

**ICAC**

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION  
AGAINST CORRUPTION

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