

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 #07]

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:** Tuesday, 17 September 2024 7:43 PM

**To:** [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)

**Cc:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Subject:** Re: Service NSW Micro Business Grant clawback battle 'Chat Group' - Campaign Update #8  
THIS IS AN IMPORTANT UPDATE

Hi Steve,

Thank you for all your tireless work in supporting everyone affected by this ruthless and in a vast majority of cases, unwarranted, cash grab by Service NSW

As you know, I am one of the few who have had a successful outcome, whereby my alleged 'fraud and non-compliance' was found not to be fraud but a legitimate application complying with the 'Grant' guidelines and after a long hard battle have received an email from Service NSW.....quote "withdrawn from any pending compliance review, with no further action required". I have also received an email from my local state MP(Mark Speakman) with an attached letter to him from Mr Jihad Dib quoting the same statement above.

Below is my story as it may help others:-

- I have owned a small business for the past 24-years, unfortunately I ceased trading for part of the **previous financial year prior** to COVID due to lack of work and recommenced trading about 6-months prior to COVID hitting our shores. Due to not operating for the whole financial year required by the 'Eligibility Criteria' for the COVID19 Micro Business Grant, I therefore had to qualify via Attachment C of the guidelines.
- Even though I knew I met all the requirements of Attachment C of the guidelines I was still concerned my application would be denied. I phoned Service NSW on two(2) occasions prior to submitting my application and told on both occasions my application would be reviewed as a 'special circumstance'. My application was approved about seven(7) days later and I started receiving payments.
- Fast-forward to early April 2023 and I get a call from some random lady named Veena from Service NSW. I did not take the call, as like you thought it a scammer. Then an email arrives from her under the Service NSW banner stating that I did not qualify for the grant, I had possibly defrauded the government and I will have to pay it back unless I could substantiate my application. I then booked a phone appointment with 'Veena' to discuss the matter further and was told by her that I had defrauded Service NSW and that my credit rating would be severely affected if I did not repay the grant.
- I then submitted all required documents (and more) to substantiate my application within five(5) days of our phone correspondence, so about mid April 2023.
- After 4-months of hearing nothing from Service NSW I began sending numerous emails and phoning different parts of Service NSW requesting a determination of the audit review. Again I heard nothing.
- After 8-months (December) of repeatedly sending emails and phone calls to Service NSW with no response, I found your website and contacted you. You gave some great encouragement and advice.
- After 9-months I contacted my local state member (Mark Speakman) to request a determination of my audit review from Service NSW via NSW Parliament.

- After 13-months and a further 21-emails to Service NSW I received an email.....quote "withdrawn from any pending compliance review, with no further action required".
- In late August and 17-months after the audit review commenced I received an email from my local state MP(Mark Speakman) with an attached letter to him from Mr Jihad Dib quoting the same Service NSW statement above... "withdrawn from any pending compliance review, with no further action required".
- I and my business suffered greatly during this 17-month period of indecision, inaction, slander, accusation and threats and have lost much both personally and financially even though I was finally vindicated. Unfortunately I do not feel comfortable discussing this with others, it was a very tough time.

I hope this shows others there is light at the end of the tunnel and you have to hang in and keep hounding and harassing. Its frustrating and time consuming but well worth it.

Thanks Steve, your a legend.

Regards,

Matt [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

\*

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, 18 March 2024 9:59 AM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

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

Hi Steve,

Thank you for the update of your journey dealing with Service NSW in regard to the NSW Micro Business Grant audit.

I too have contacted my local member who happens to be the leader of the opposition Mark Speakman, who in turn passed my concerns & complaint in writing to Mr Dibb who in turn just passed it on the the Service NSW Complaints Dept. I now get fortnightly updates saying the audits have been paused. Absolutely useless government bureaucracy.

There should be compensation for the wasted hours and days spent dealing with these people, absolutely atrocious. I am closing my business down in a few months as I can no longer absorb the stress and strain.

Good luck with the future of your business, I hope all goes well.

Regards,

Matt [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

\*

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Thursday, 14 December 2023 3:08 PM  
To: steve@naturetrail.com.au  
Subject: NSW Government Micro Business Audit

Hi Steve,

I read your blog and story on the dealings with NSW Government in relation to the audit of your application for the COVID19 Micro Business Grant. Just wondering if you have had a resolution to the audit?

I am in the same boat and was rudely threatened by Service NSW staff beforehaving to submit documents to prove my application was correct and legitimate. Unfortunately 9-months later and I have no result, no contact or update from Service NSW. I lodged a complaint with Service NSW, however, this ended going nowhere.

I hope you received the result you expecting and an apology from Service NSW.

Regards,

Matt [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[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)



INDEPENDENT COMMISSION  
AGAINST CORRUPTION

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