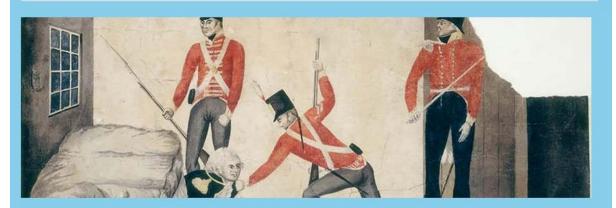
# Minns Ministry - Service NSW Grant Clawback Extortion - NSW Parliament Questions on Notice

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# Minns Ministry — Service NSW Grant Clawback Extortion — NSW Parliament Questions on Notice

🛅 October 25, 2024 🛛 🝃



The NSW LNP Berejiklian Government's '2021 COVID-19 Micro Business Grant' ('this Grant') was a governmental compensatory grant offered by the NSW Government (via Service NSW) specifically to NSW small business owners suffering a significant decline on turnover as a direct consequential result of the unprecedented global pandemic socio-economic lockdown imposed by then NSW LNP Berejiklian Government. It was a reaction [...]

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# PREAMBLE

The NSW LNP Berejiklian Government's '2021 COVID-19 Micro Business Grant' ('this Grant') was a governmental compensatory grant offered by the NSW Government (via Service NSW) specifically to NSW small business owners suffering a significant decline on turnover as a direct consequential result of the unprecedented global pandemic socio-economic lockdown imposed by then NSW LNP Berejiklian Government.

It was a reaction to the devastating pandemic outbreak escalation of the coronavirus from the Delta' virus strain 18 months into this pandemic.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian with Deputy Premier John Barilaro announcing this Grant on 17th August 2021 [SOURCE: AAP/Joel Carrett] [READ MORE]

This Grant was then offered via Service NSW on its website portal to eligible small businesses. As many as 82,497 applications were received and assessed by Service NSW up until 18th October 2021. Of those, a total of 63009 were approved and paid after all.

It was never a debt, nor a loan!

Yet retrospectively and unconscionably, Service NSW under the current Minns NSW Labor Ministry, claiming it's broke, is hell-bent on clawing back the grant payments of up to the \$15,214 it paid out to each of 63,000 'mum and dad' micro business owners across New South Wales who were suffering imposed lockdown at this desperate time.

The grant payments totalled some \$781.1 million!

What few are aware of is that this was funded not out of the LNP Berejiklian Government's Treasury nor from any borrowings. Such a budget was well beyond that of the NSW Government. Rather, the funding came from Gladys's Liberal colleague in Canberra at the time - Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison MP (his federal electoral seat also being in New South Wales - the Division of Cook mostly Sydney's Sutherland Shire).

The entire funding of the '2021 COVID-19 Micro Business Grant' of \$781.1 million came from Australian taxpayer-funding as a guilt-infused gift authorised by Scomo.

Minns NSW Minister for Digital Government Jihad Dib MP continues to be responsible and accountable for the unconscionable clawback culture of Service NSW under the bullying authority of electrical engineer CEO Greg Wells and his ring-in hoard of contracted debt collectors all working from home and charged to intimidate the approved grant recipients.

A number of them in stress and desperation have reached out online and found our website campaign blog posts on this matter. Some have communicated to us their seriously anxiety about Service NSW's intimidating and threatening behaviour of its grant clawback scheme.

We posit the following pertinent questions to the Minns Ministry that frankly deserved to be asked in the NSW Parliament as 'Questions on Notice' by the Liberal National Party (LNP) in coalition currently in opposition

This is that notice, not to useless puppet of Greg Wells, Minister Jihad Dib, MP but to the boss, Chris Minns, who promised New South Wales voters real change.

# **10 QUESTION-SETS ON NOTICE**

### [for Parliament of NSW to ask the Minns Labor Government in 2024]

[RE: SERVICE NSW '2021 COVID-19 MICRO BUSINESS GRANT' CLAWBACK SCANDAL [ROBODEBT MK 2.0]

## **QUESTION SET 1:**

# Has Premier Minns made himself aware of the Service NSW ongoing grant clawback issue since 2022?

On 15th August 2024, TV Channel Nine's A Current Affair programme interviewed NSW Premier Chris Minns asking him why micro-business owners had to return their \$15,000 compensation grant money to the NSW Government?

However, at the time, Premier Minns stated to the reporter that he had no knowledge about this grant claw-back scheme being undertaken by Service NSW within his ministry, stating on air in reply:

"I think it's reasonable for me to say I'd like to know the circumstances before I make a definitive answer in relation to it."

**Question 1.1:** So two months hence, has Premier Chris Minns familiarised himself with what his Minister for Service NSW ("Digital Government") Jihad Dib MP is actually doing about this ongoing grant clawback scheme?

**Question 1.2:** So what does Premier Chris Minns know about the circumstances of Service NSW's clawback scheme being rigorously pursued by dozens of unqualified contracted debt collectors, instructed to anonymously use only their first name and all oddly working from home? Two months since the TV interview does Premier Minns have a definitive answer?

**Question 1.3:** On 15th August 2024, Premier Minns during the TV Channel Nine's A Current Affair interview requested the reporter provide him with the names of the affected businesses that A Current Affair is aware of. A Current Affair has done this. What then has Premier Chris Minns done about addressing these affected businesses?

**Question 1.4:** Is Premier Chris Minns aware that Service NSW has escalated its clawback to have Revenue NSW now starting to mass invoice grant recipients without explanation on behalf of Service NSW – so doing Service NSW dirt work yet having no knowledge of the individual cases of Service NSW's grant approval process?

**Question 1.5:** What is Premier Chris Minns proposing to do about Service NSW's ongoing grant clawback scheme? Continue it? End it? When will it end?

**Question 1.6:** How can the Minns Government ethically stand by and allow its Service NSW department under CEO Greg Wells and Minister Dib to automatically transfer is spurious retrospective claim that this Grant has out of thin air be deemed to be fabricated debt, then transfer the debt recovery to a sister agency Revenue NSW under Minister Courtney Houssos MLC?

**Question 1.7:** Why does not Premier Minns recognise that what is going on with Service NSW grant clawback scandal is contrived, fabricated, immoral and criminal extortion and corrupt?

**Question 1.8:** The grant had been paid out and Service NSW operational framework of clawback seemed to replant the original compensation payment to a quite different debt collecting culture under the incoming CEO Greg Wells from 30th November 2022. Can Premier Minns explain Service NSW stark change of culture going from being 'compensator' to becoming a threatening 'debt collector' to all those 63000 odd it so generously compensated?

**Question 1.9:** How many grant recipients has Service NSW contacted to try to claw back this Grant?

**Question 1.10:** What is the current total value of these Grant monies that Service NSW debt collectors have claws back from grant recipients it originally approved as eligible back in 2021?

Question 1.11: Is Premier Minns supporting Service NSW going after all 63009 grant recipients?

**Question 1.12:** How many contracted debt collectors are currently working for Service NSW Business Bureau involved in this threatening communications behaviour and grant clawback scheme?

**Question 1.13:** What is Premier Minns doing about these small business owners who have done nothing wrong but being harassed and intimidated as default "fraudsters" by Service NSW debt collectors?

**Question 1.14:** Three questions as previously asked of the Minns Ministry back on 1st August 2023 by NSW Parliamentary member for Port Macquarie, Leslie William MLC: How many people in the Port Macquarie electorate are being audited for receiving a COVID-19 Micro Business Grant?

As follows:

**Question 1.15:** Why is the Minns Government conducting the so-called 'audit' even in cases where applicants met all of the application criteria?

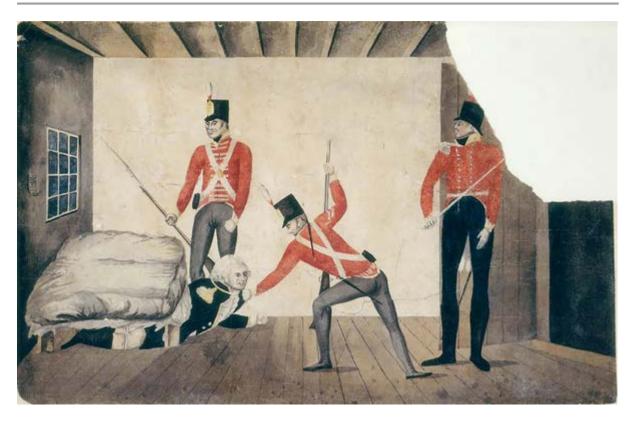
Question 1.16: Why is the Government undertaking audits two years after the grants ended?

**Question 1.17:** Three questions as previously asked of the Minns Ministry in the NSW Legislative Council (upper house) during Budget Estimates 2024-2025, by 'Opposition Whip' Chris Rath MLC, what action has the Government taken to ensure fairness in determining fraudulent activity with regard to the COVID-19 grant?

**Question 1.18:** How many small businesses have been asked to pay back the micro business loan?

**Question 1.19:** Of those businesses that received the Grant, how many have paid the money back?"

**Question 1.20:** Why is Premier Minns deliberately avoiding this important issue and being so vague about this extortion racket continue going on under his watch as NSW Premier?



Doing a NSW Governor Bligh of 26 January 1808 ? NSW Premier Minns hiding from his ministry's responsibilities to the people of NSW - feigning ignorance of Service NSW grant clawback since 2022

### **QUESTION SET 2:**

# How can Service NSW Clawback for 63000 small business owners of NSW being targeted since 2022 be considered consistent with the Minns promised "fresh start" election promise?

**Question 2.1** In Chris Minns' election victory speech of March 2023, as incoming Premier, you acknowledged that quote "the people of New South Wales have voted for a fresh start".. "to put in a government that would put people, people, at the heart of all decision making" and he promised "we will not let them down". Minns undertook to "govern for everyone in New South Wales".

How can such promises be consistent with the Minns Ministry's ongoing reassessment and extortionate clawback of COVID-19 grant funding as fabricated debt from thousands of NSW small business owners by its contracted debt collectors at Service NSW?

## **QUESTION SET 3:**

# Why has Premier Minns delegated 4 ministerial portfolios to Jihad Dib MP?

In your Chris Minns election victory speech of March 2023, Premier you acknowledged that quote the people of New South Wales have "voted for our nurses, our teachers, they voted for our paramedics and police."

Premier Minns has delegated The Hon. Jihad Dib with the burden of four ministerial responsibilities:

- 1. Minister for Emergency Services
- 2. Minister for Customer Service
- 3. Minister for Digital Government
- 4. Minister for Youth

**Question 3.1** How can The Hon. Jihad Dib MP adequately oversee four ministerial portfolios including Emergency Services which you promised to dedicate such resources to in your election speech?

## **QUESTION SET 4:**

# Is Premier Minns aware that that COVID-19 Micro Business Grant 'approvals' were NOT automated?

**Question 4.1:** How many micro businesses were so-called "automatically" assessed based on self-declaration?

**Question 4.2:** Is Premier Minns aware that according to Service NSW's own statistics on its website, there have been a total of 82497 applicants and that 63009 were approved so the difference of 19488 were rejected by Service NSW?

This therefore confirms that the Service NSW original approval process through late 2021 was in no way automated for at least 19488 small business applicants.

Instead, only the payment process was supposed to be automated, NOT the approval process.

We can find no reference in this Grant's Terms and Conditions that prescribes the original approval process through 2021 for some/any business applicants was to be an "automatic" assessment. Nor that any approved applications would be paid and then subsequently re-assessed.

#### Jihad Dib's stated excuses for Retrospective 'Audit':

(A). The original applications in 2021 were "automatically assessed" by Service NSW?

(B). Self-Declarations originally allowed "some grant applications based on customer declarations of eligibility"

(C). The so-called 'audits' are subsequent "reassessments"

(D). The so-called 'audits' are (retrospective) "eligibility checks" (but more than 2 years after approval, more than 2 years after payments made?)

(E). "The current compliance audits are designed to confirm the correct funds were released to customers based on meeting the grant."

## **Minister Dib's Letter Extracts:**

(see next page)

# EXAMPLE 1: Minister Dib's letter extract to Member for Blue Mountains Trish Doyle MP dated 23 July 2023:



#### EXAMPLE 2: Minister Dib's letter extract to Member for Blue Mountains Trish Doyle MP dated 9 March 2024:



# EXAMPLE 3: Minister Dib's letter extract to Member for Sydney Alex Greenwich MP dated 28 Aug 2024:



**Question 4.3:** Is Premier Minns therefore aware that Minister Dib has his facts wrong in this matter?

## **QUESTION SET 5:**

# Is Premier Minns Aware that Service NSW is retrospectively changing its 2021 Grant Terms and Conditions?

**Question 5.1:** Is Premier Minns aware that Service NSW has been altering the wording of this Grant's terms and conditions since as far back as 2021 and in fact just a few months after this Grant was first offered by the then Berejiklian NSW Government?

**Question 5.2:** How many times has Service NSW changed the wording of its grant terms and conditions since the original in July 2021 and why?

**Question 5.3:** We understand that the audit is not a true audit as per the Grants original Terms and Conditions, but as you have stated in your letters to NSW Members of Parliament in your reply letters, is instead an "Internal Review" and indeed a "Reassessment" of the original grant application more than 2 years later.

**Question 5.4:** We have received copies of email sent by Service NSW to originally approved grant recipients with language accusing them of being grant fraudsters and retrospectively being deemed ineligible for this Grant. How can you justify this given that an 'Internal Review' is outside the Grant's Terms and Conditions?

**Question 5.5:** How is it good government to oversee Service NSW knowingly undertaking this grant clawback and invoicing extortion racket outside its legal terms and conditions?

### **QUESTION SET 6:**

# Is Premier Minns Aware of Service NSW/Revenue NSW deployment of Robodebt style AI computer programme in its fabricated Internal Review processing?

**Question 6.1:** Is Premier Minns aware that Service NSW has been using AI (artificial intelligence) data matching software and computer code programming to undertake its Internal Reviews of its reassessments of the grant approvals? How is this not a repeat of the Robodebt scandal by Centrelink's flawed data matching between 2016-2019?

**Question 6.2:** How can Premier Minns not recognise a comparison between Service NSW's grant clawback scheme and Centrelink's AI Robodebt scandal of (2016-2019) in regards to its unfairness, threatening use of invoicing being of an extortionate nature and of the mental health issues this grant clawback is causing to many small business owners?

**Question 6.3:** In the experience of our client Steve Ridd of Nature Trail (himself a targeted victim of this grant clawback scandal by Service NSW), many micro business owners (currently numbering 32) have expressed their individual stresses about this and also of their financial hardship from both the pandemic denial of trade and then Service NSW debt collectors attempting to fabric this approved and paid grant into being some debt. This Grant's Terms and Conditions provide for such hardship, yet under CEO Wells and Minister Dib, such compassion is clearly being ignored.

Question 6.4: What is Premier Minns justification for ignoring such financial hardship?

**Question 6.5:** Can Premier Minns not recognise that this claw back scheme by Service NSW debt collectors is morally wrong, unconscionable and is could be judged to be criminal extortion?

### **QUESTION SET 7:**

Is Premier Minns Aware that Service NSW/Revenue NSW grant clawback causing mental anguish to many people?

**Question 7.1:** Is it not unreasonable for Premier Minns to exonerate the many innocent 'mum and dad' micro businesses still being clawed back this Grant. This unconscionable behaviour driven by the senior bureaucrats of Service NSW runs contrary to the spirit in which the previous NSW government offered, assessed, approved and paid it.

**Question 7.2:** What will it take the Minns Government to recognise that nearly all the 'mum and dad' micro businesses that Service NSW is imposing its unfair grant clawback scheme upon, needs to be wound up A.S.A.P. and these pandemic victims finally exonerated by the Minns Government for good?

### **QUESTION SET 8:**

# Why has the NSW Police 'Strike Force Sainsbery' investigation report into Service NSW \$20M fraud not been made public?

During the time that Service NSW paid out this Grant during the second half of 2021, by November 2021 it become public knowledge that Service NSW had discovered that certain organised cybercriminal syndicates had infiltrated its online application process and had defrauded Service NSW of about \$20 million.

Service NSW at the time called in the NSW Police Crime Commander Assistant Commissioner Stuart Smith publicly announced 'Strike Force Sainsbery' to the investigate the grant fraud.

Yet Service NSW has subsequently tar-brushed thousands of genuine 'mum and dad' micro businesses and accused them of default fraud.

**Question 8.1:** What is Service NSW justification for this approach? These mums and dads are hardly cyber-criminal syndicates nor fraudulent! [REFER: ^https://www.castletons.com.au/latest-news/service-nsw-scrutinising-micro-business-grants ]

**Question 8.2:** Does Premier Minns have a copy of the official police report of this investigation and why has it not been made public, given that the fraud involved more than \$20 million of public money?

**Question 8.3:** How many cyber-criminal fraudsters were actually detected and charges with fraud of this Grant?

**Question 8.4:** How can Service NSW so retrospectively justify tar-brushing so many 'mom and dad' legitimate micro business owners who applied for this Grant using the Service NSW secure online portal and were approved by Service NSW with such organised crime?

## **QUESTION SET 9:**

# Is Premier Minns Aware that Service NSW Operating Outside its Terms and Conditions?

Under this Grant's original Terms and Conditions clause 4.8.

"A business or not-for-profit organisation consents to being contacted by DCS, Service NSW and/or NSW Treasury for a period of 24 months after receiving a payment under the Program for the purposes of reporting on and evaluating the Program. A business or notfor-profit organisation agrees to provide any information that is reasonably required under this clause."

**Question 9.1:** So, then given that the final payments were made in December 2021, why is Service NSW acting contrary to this clause by contacting grant recipient businesses well beyond the maximum 24-month time limit?

#### **QUESTION SET 10:**

Is Premier Minns Aware prepared to end this extortionate Robodebtstyle scheme by his ministry else risk a Class Action and/or Royal Commission? **Question 10.1:** Does Premier Minns not recognise a comparison between Service NSW's grant clawback scheme and Centrelink's AI Robodebt scandal of (2016-2019) in regards to its unfair, threatening use of invoicing is of an extortionate nature and of the mental health issues this grant clawback is causing to many small business owners?

**Question 10.2:** Can Premier Minns not recognise that this claw back scheme by Service NSW debt collectors is morally wrong, unconscionable and is could be judged to be criminal extortion?

**Question 10.3:** Why can't Premier Minns act judiciously over the head of the incompetence of Minister Dib and so put an immediate end all this unconscionable conduct Wells by passing an executive order as Premier of NSW directing this grant clawback scam be immediately terminated permanently?

**Question 10.4:** What is Premier Minns proposed resolution to this ongoing grant clawback scandal by Service NSW?

**Question 10.5:** Is it not unreasonable to ask Premier Minns to exonerate the many innocent 'mum and dad' micro businesses still being clawed back this Grant. This unconscionable behaviour driven by the senior bureaucrats of Service NSW runs contrary to the spirit in which the previous NSW government offered, assessed, approved and paid it.

What will it take the Minns Government to recognise that nearly all the 'mum and dad' micro businesses that Service NSW is imposing its unfair grant clawback scheme upon, needs to be wound up A.S.A.P. and these pandemic victims finally exonerated by the Minns Government for good?

The above questions should be asked of Premier Chris Minns by the LNP Shadow Minister for Small Business – Tim James MP and indeed by the LNP Opposition Leader Mark Speakman MP.

Pertinent Parliamentary questions into exposing this ongoing extortionate clawback scheme at the hands of Minns NSW Minister for Digital Government Jihad Dib MP, in cahoots with his Labor colleague NSW Minister for Finance Courtney Houssos MLC (aka Revenue NSW debt collectors).

Indeed, we call on all opposition members of the Assembly and the Council to ask such pertinent questions of why and what is going on in Services NSW's fabricated and secretive debt collection scheme?

# It is Robodebt Mark 2.0!

We call on those members of the NSW Parliament in opposition to the incumbent one term Minns Ministry to ask these above questions on notice. This includes The Nationals, The Greens, the Liberal Democrats, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party and Independents like Alex Greenwich MP.

Do they represent their electorate constituents or what?

# **References:**

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[2] 'Supporting NSW businesses through to reopening', Joint media release with

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[3] 'Increased COVID-19 relief and grants announced for NSW businesses', 13 July 2021, by William Buck Australia, <u>https://williambuck.com/news/business/general/increased-covid-19-relief-grants-announced-for-nsw-businesses/</u>

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