
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 #28e ‘Steve Ridd’, Nature Trail]

The following written evidence received from Steven Ridd by email to steve@naturetrail.com.au .

START OF EVIDENCE

MY FORMAL COMPLAINT AGAINST SERVICE NSW

Note: This letter was sent back marked Returned to Sender, so it was resent by post via Registered Mail to the official postal address of Service NSW head office being:

**Service NSW
GPO Box 7057
SYDNEY NSW 2001**

Sunday 16th April 2023

Mr Greg Wells
Chief Executive Officer
Service NSW
Level 2, 66 Harrington Street
THE ROCKS NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

MY FORMAL COMPLAINT AGAINST SERVICE NSW

RE: Service NSW 2022 COVID-19 Micro-Business Grant \$15,214 - 'an indian giving scam' [ref: 00D4a8aWL. 5008v2oqsi:ref]

SERVICE NSW REFS: Re-Assessor Reference SBRD2AGBE (contact is 'Angela' with no surname provided)

Complaint Case #: 03731143

Customer Service Representative reference number: 03868560

(contact is 'Sam' with no surname provided)

Grant Title: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-Business Grant

Reference number: COL-8718f31-MBS

Lodgement date: 2021-08-01

Grant Approval date: 2021-08-11

Grant Payment period: 2021-08-11 to 2021-12-10 (by total of 12 instalments)

CC: Ms Trish Doyle MP, NSW Member for Blue Mountains

CC: my solicitor

1. As Managing Director, I hereby lodge my formal complaint against Service NSW for unconscionable conduct in relation to the following actions by its employee going by the name of 'Angela' (no surname) this week:

- A. Service NSW's attempt to claim a refund of grant moneys (as a fee) after the fact that my eligibility criteria had been assessed by Service NSW and deemed to be met and then paid to me as compensation for the COVID-19 lockdown impact to my business;
- B. Services NSW's unfounded claim that I am subsequently now "***not eligible for the funding you received under this grant***" being 1 year and 8 months after it was assessed and approved by Service NSW 11-Aug-2021) based on the factual information I provided

- on 1-Aug-2021. Accusing me of being guilty before even proven is contrary to natural justice. Service NSW wrongly thinks it can play judge, jury and executioner;
- C. Service NSW's insecure communication methods to me out-of-the-blue in this matter, (mobile phone and email) including the inappropriate insistence that I provide my personal information to an anonymous 'Angela' person who phones me claiming to represent Service NSW;
- D. Service NSW's wrong interpretation of my 2020 manual tax return to the ATO as copied and supplied to Service NSW in my 2021 grant application (now somehow not being "**a real tax return**")? - reflecting incompetence and ignorance by the Service NSW employee calling herself 'Angela' (read email 11-Apr-2023 copy below). I provide a link to the Australia Tax Office website which confirms that manual trust tax returns remain a legitimate and authorised means of submitting to the ATO <https://www.ato.gov.au/forms/trust-tax-return-2022/>
- E. Service NSW's false presumption that I made "**an incorrect, misleading or fraudulent claim**" for the grant funding (read email 11-Apr-2023 copy below). This contradicts Services NSW approval of the application on 11-August 2021, irrespective of any one-sided terms and conditions clause; I made no false claim in my application.
- F. Service NSW's implied threat by Service NSW to refer me to NSW Police for further action (read email 11-Apr-2023 copy below);
- G. Service NSW's implied threat to refer me "**If we do not hear from you, or if you do not provide the requested documentation by 26th April 2023 this matter will be referred to Revenue NSW to begin funds recovery**" (read email 11-Apr-2023 copy below) is in my opinion, unconscionable. A two-week deadline before Service NSW throws me to government debt collectors is unreasonable, especially given that the specific audit information requested by Angela is unclear to me.
- H. This recent correspondence from supposedly Service NSW claiming that I have been fraudulent, retrospectively and rejecting my eligibility for the 2021 pandemic grant compensation funding, and demanding that repay the \$15214 in full else be referred to the NSW Government's 'Revenue NSW department debt collector is wrong, ill-informed, and highly stressful for me since I have done nothing wrong;
- I. I consider Service NSW's employee behaviour towards me last week in its claim that retrospectively I am somehow ineligibly for the grant funding to be wrong and intimidating.

SERVICES NSW's RE-ASSESSMENT OF MY GRANT ELIGIBILITY... NEARLY 2 YEARS AFTER THE APPROVAL?

2. In reply to Service NSW's email to me Tuesday 11th April 2023, yes, I confirm the business, Nature Trail, received in its dedicated business bank account the 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant from services NSW totalling AUD\$15,214 under this grant. A total of 12 instalments were received from Services NSW with the bank reference: 'Direct Credit 624231 Service NSW MBS-08718f31-031dd';

3. I maintain that Nature Trail is a registered commercial business and was entirely eligible for this grant as a startup business catastrophically financial impacted by the COVID19 restrictions;

4. I maintain that as Proprietor and Accountant of Nature Trail as a trading entity, I supplied all to Services NSW requested factual information and actual documentation to Services NSW as part of my application for this grant dated 1st August 2021;

5. In response to my grant application, Service NSW assessed my application and assessed and approved Nature Trail's eligibility for the grant on 11th August 2021. Services NSW then subsequently made grant payment instalments into Nature Trail's business account. This included completing and submitting the online form and attaching the following documents
 - I. A copy of the FY2020 Trust Tax Return (for the business group which included Nature Trail) in full (20 pages) as lodged by me as the business accountant with the Australian Tax Office
 - II. A comparison profit and loss statement for Nature Trail FY 2020 with FY2020 (using QuickBooks accounting software and integrated with the ATO's reporting requirements)
 - III. Nature Trail bank statements for the reference periods, as requested by Service NSW in the original assessment process at the time of lodgement
 - IV. Copies of Nature Trail's invoice records prior to the restrictions
 - V. NOTE: all such documentary evidence is able to be reproduced and re-submitted to Services NSW. I have nothing to hide.

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6. Since Services NSW approved the grant application on 11th August 2021, as sole representative for Nature Trail, the email (copy below) of Tuesday 11th April 2023 is the first communication I have received from Service NSW in relation to this grant challenging Nature Trail's eligibility for this grant;

 7. My tour business Nature Trail was and remains severely adversely affected by the 2019-2020 NSW bushfire emergency lockdown and the 2020-2022 COVID-19 lockdown imposts. Both socio-economic disasters (bushfires and pandemic) were mostly attributable to gross negligence by the NSW Government. Nature Trail still has no overseas customer enquiries (Nature Trail's target market) despite a healthy booking schedule pre-restrictions upon business trading launch.

 8. **PUBLIC SERVANT REALITY CHECK NEEDED:** I point out that the actual period of restrictions (mandatory socio-economic lockdowns) imposed by the NSW Government which severely adversely impacted the Nature Trail tour business (no customers) commenced from 19 December 2019 effectively back-to-back through to 30 November 2022 when the NSW Government lifted The Public Health (COVID-19 Care Services) Order (No 3) 2022 in the state of New South Wales. This period of course included 26 June 2021. A State of Emergency was declared for NSW on 19 December 2019 by Premier Gladys Berejiklian. This was the first of three in rolling lockdowns into late February 2020. From March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was similarly imposed by the Berejiklian Government for two straight years through to March 2022 and beyond. Public servants like Angela have continued to be paid their salary throughout the restrictions, all out of taxpayer wealth. In my view, many have no grasp of the financial impact to micro businesses like mine. Nature Trail's decline in turnover was 100% from before the start of the restrictions, and since.

 9. Despite the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, Nature Trail's business continue to suffer financial hardship - no overseas customer demand. If Service NSW persists with its baseless accusations of fraud and grant recovery then since I have no spare money, I will have no options but to apply for hardship and apply to the Hardship Review Panel.

 10. I have not ignored Service NSW's supposed 'audit' inquisition. Rather, I have immediately contacted Services NSW to check the validity of this call by phoning Service NSW's public number 13 77 88 on Wednesday 12-April-2023 and lodged a formal complaint (see reference above). I then tried phoning back on Thursday 13-April-2023 only to be told by the customer service person that she could not transfer me to the disputes resolutions team. I also arranged to speak to some Assessor at Services NSW, which I engaged with yesterday (14-April-2023) at 1pm. That re-assessor who phoned me insisted I first provide her with my personal details (just like a scam caller does).

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11. I confirm that I am the Tour Director of Nature Trail tour operation based in the Blue Mountains. Nature Trail is the trading name and the business owned by Wistmans Wood Trust [ABN 51 965 308 493]. The company trustee is Wistmans Wood Holdings Pty Ltd [ACN 600 331 931] and I am the sole director of the company.
12. I confirm that as one of my skill sets is Management Accounting (following a 20-year corporate career in this specialised field). I am responsible for compiling the business bookkeeping and tax reporting for the Trust, which includes reporting the business activity of **Nature Trail** to the Australian Tax Office on a singular annual basis. Therefore, Services NSW demand that I provide ***“a letter from a qualified accountant, registered tax agent or registered BAS agent using the template provided by Service NSW”*** is unconscionable (read email 11-Apr-2023 copy below). I am not required by any law to engage the services of a registered tax agent to undertake tax reporting and related bookkeeping tasks. I am quite capable to doing these tasks myself. In fact, due to my business being under a legitimate discretionary trust structure, the tax accounting is quite complicated, and in my experience beyond the skillset of the average registered tax agent.
13. I refer to contacts to me made supposedly by Service NSW since Tuesday 11th April 2023.

The first was a call to my mobile phone by a woman saying her name was Angela and that she was from Service NSW and calling in regards to the Micro Business Grant of \$15214 paid to me by Services NSW in 2022 and that I was now deemed to be ineligible to have received the grant monies, subject to an audit and had to refund the total. She said she had to identify me and proceeded to ask me for my personal details. I said “no” and that I do not give my personal details to anyone who phones me.

I treated this call as a scam and told her so. She said she would email me the details. I told her that scammers use phone and email methods of communication and that I would ignore both. I told her that if her claim was legitimate then I would receive a notification on my online account with Service NSW and then I hung up.

14. I checked my online account with Service NSW and no such audit notice was listed on my notifications. As at today, still no such audit notice is listed on my notifications. See attached page extract. This online account facility was created by Service NSW for customers to use as a secure communications medium. Yet, if this audit is genuinely an initiative of Service NSW then why is the communication to me not reflected on Service NSW online account facility, but using the tool of scammers being by phone and email?

15. I confirm that Nature Trail met all the **Eligibility Criteria** for Service NSW Micro-Business Grant at the time of application 1-August 2021, namely:

- A. 'Nature Trail' is a commercial business and had (and retains) an active ABN as at 1 June 2021 – check with ATO;
- B. Nature Trail as a startup business from August 2019, would reasonably qualify as a 'micro-business' trading but with minimal initial revenues and then catastrophically impacted first the bushfires emergency and then COVID-19 (zero revenues), so an application for this grant was made;
- C. Wistmans Wood Trust provided a copy of the original 20-page trust tax return for FY2020 to the Australian Tax Office to Services NSW as part of its application for the grant. The manual tax return is real, and Service NSW re-assessor Angela clearly has little or no understanding of tax returns. She needs to be re-educated. None other tax return exists for Nature Trail FY2020!
- D. Nature Trail was a new startup business from August 2019 primarily operating within New South Wales from that time through to including 1 June 2021 and beyond. As such, under the guidelines clause 6.8 (alternative circumstances) Nature Trail qualifies.
- E. Bank Statements to demonstrate decline in turnover: Nature Trail has its own dedicated bank account with the Commonwealth bank (local Katoomba branch nearby). Nature Trail, a startup new business, was not trading before August 2019. So there was no revenue in the period June 2019 as one option period requested by Service NSW. Nature Trail's first customers paid into the bank account between September 2019 and December 2019.
- F. **Decline in turnover – Nature Trail's bank statements:** I herewith re-supply these for the two weeks immediately prior to any restrictions of 12–25 June 2021 (inclusive) and a statement from the 2021 COVID-19 period of restrictions (commenced 26 June 2021). (see attached)
- G. Nature Trail still being a new startup business at the time of grant application, applied for the grant under guidelines **6.8 Alternative Circumstances "businesses not operating for the full year to 30 June 2020 (e.g. new businesses)"** (also confirmed in '**Attachment C: Alternative rules for businesses that do not meet standard eligibility criteria**'). This means that the \$30,000 to \$75,000 annual aggregate annual turnover range for pre-existing businesses did not apply.
- H. Under Australian Tax Law, Nature Trail was (is) not legally required to register for GST with the Australian Tax Office since the revenue was well below the \$76,000 p.a. threshold. So Business Activity Statements (BAS) do not legally apply to Nature Trail, indeed not to any business applying for this grant since they would be earning over \$76,000 p.a. as per the GST rules - one relishes that revenue earning obligation;

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- I. Nature Trail as a tour operating business was a 'highly impacted business' as categorised under the grant Terms and Conditions Attachment A: List of highly impacted industries 'Travel Agency and Tour Arrangement Services' (ANZSIC code 7220);
 - J. Evidence of Decline in Turnover: Nature Trail experienced a total decline in turnover of 100% due to the public health order commencing 26 June 2021 (zero turnover) compared with an aggregate startup customer turnover of just \$455 between business launch August 2019 and December 2019 when the Bushfire Emergency of Dec-2019 to Feb-2020 impacted back-to-back with the Pandemic lockdown March 2020-March 2022 and beyond – which caused zero turnover to date. The lockdowns caused tour booking cancellations from clients that otherwise would have been some thousands of dollars. Public servants have no grasp of the reality of this catastrophic combined impact. Sales invoice documentary evidence is available upon request again, yet this was already supplied at the grant application time;
 - K. No other government support compensation for COVID-19 lockdown to Nature Trail's business costs was available;
 - L. As Tour Director I was the only employee (headcount) of Nature Trail at the time (from 31 July 2021) and remains so;
 - M. Nature Trail at the time of application was (and remains) located in the Blue Mountains, a recognised NSW local government area which was deemed to be an adversely impacted at the time;
 - N. Evidence of decline in turnover was duly supplied in the application. A comparative profit and loss statement comparing FY2020 to FY2021 report was supplied to service NSW at the time of the application. If you lost this then that is not my fault. I have just regenerated a copy of this from the accounting system and I attach it for your reference again. (see attached)
 - O. Nature Trail received no other income at the time;
 - P. The received grant funds of \$15214 were wholly applied to Nature Trail's tour business – specifically to repairing and equipping the dedicated tour vehicle. All expense receipts are available upon request.
 - Q. Every document and evidence I originally submitted to the Service NSW in apply for the grant was true and accurate. Everything I have done was wholly in compliance with the provided grant guidelines of the grant funding at the time of the application;
16. If Service NSW considers that after-the-fact, some almost two years after it had assessed and approved the grant application, that it subsequently considers it now fell short of fully assessing the application, well frankly that is a matter for Service NSW to deal with its internal assessors. It
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legally is not my problem. I did all that was asked at the time, and it was under extremely difficult circumstances. Service NSW 'Angela' needs to pull her head in and back off.

17. On Friday 14th April 2023 I requested the re-assessor 'Angela' provide a copy of the original terms and conditions of the grant and also clarify her specific demands after our phone conversation. She has failed to do both. So I have spent some hours this weekend to source the terms and conditions myself and reviewing them (copy attached) and preparing my herein response. I note that they have been inappropriately updated (changed) dated 7 October 2022, being nearly two months after my lodgement date. I have met the "conditions for payment under the Programme" (clause 4). Further, during the time of the grant payment process, I subsequently had to reconfirm eligibility, which I did on each required occasion. Yet such requirement was not included in the grant guidelines nor in the terms and conditions of the grant. Service NSW was making up the rules as it went along, after the approval date.

18. I request Service NSW management promptly reflects on my above responses and information duly supplied (again).

19. I insist that Service NSW immediately retracts its ridiculous baseless claims of fraud in its email to me below of 11 April 2023 (copy enclosed), and that it formally replies to me with an apology, and confirm in writing to me that Service NSW it has permanently cancelled its demand for any audit and refund from me. Angela in here email, in representing Service NSW, is abusing Service NSW unequal bargaining power against me. She needs to be appropriately disciplined by Service NSW management in relation to her ignorance, here based less accusations of fraud, and in her threatening tone towards me.

20. This response to this audit is my first. I have spent all weekend feeling that I need to justify my legitimacy and it has been somewhat stressful for me. But I am not for being a victim. I will resist any intimidation and particularly governmental abusive Service NSW unequal bargaining power against me.

21. Mr Wells being boss of Service NSW, I invite you to read and learn from the recent governmental bullying catastrophe of vulnerable citizens and seek your moral compass: <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/2030-people-have-died-after-receiving-centrelink-robodebt-notice/10821272> |

Sincerely,

Steven Ridd

Tour Director, Proprietor and Accountant for the business

*(NB. To receive the full functionality of this email and its links, you need to have your email text format set to **rich text**)*

Steve Ridd B.Bus (Mgt), Commercial Helicopter Pilot, Coxswain, Guiding Cert 4, Outdoor Rec Cert 3 + Diploma

Tour Director



www.naturetrail.com.au

Tel: **1300 355 133**

5 Kundibar Street, Katoomba NSW 2780

Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

AUSTRALIA



..stave off sedentary chronic diseases, just hike with Nature Trail J

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From: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au>

Sent: Friday, 14 April 2023 3:17 PM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: Service NSW for Business - Unable to Contact [ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v34NCF:ref]



Dear Steven

Thank you for your recent enquiry.

We have tried to contact you on the mobile phone number you provided, however we have been unable to reach you.

Is there an alternative number we should call to discuss your business needs? We understand you may be busy, so please let us know a day and time that suits you and we'll try again.

If you have any questions, please call 13 77 88 or reply to this email.

Kind regards

Sam
Service NSW for Business

T 137788



----- Original Message -----

From: [steve@naturetrail.com.au]

Sent: 14/4/2023, 1:03 pm

To: smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au

Subject: RE: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant eligibility re-audit [ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v34NCF:ref]

[CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.]

Hello Sam,

COMPLAINT CASE #: 03731143

DATE INITIATED BY ME: 13- APR-2023

My complaint is current and unresolved

I tried phoning you back on 13 77 88 and I quoted your reference number to the phone operator.

But she told me that she was unable to transfer me to your department 'Business Customer Resolutions'.

I have tried phoning twice but I was told the same thing.

Yet, Services NSW communications by phone insist on identifying me when they call me and require me to provide my personal information.

This is what scammers do, and I received a number of scam phone calls every day at present. So I do not provide my personal details to anyone who calls me.

Service NSW phone system policy is flawed and not customer friendly.

Let your boss know.

Regards,

Steven

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From: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au>

Sent: Friday, 14 April 2023 10:02 AM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application [ref:_00D4a8aWL_5008v34NCF:ref]



Dear Steven,

Thank you for your time on the phone yesterday.

As discussed, We understand that you are wary of scams and scam callers. We encourage you to call Service NSW for Business to verify this correspondence is legitimate. The phone number is 13 77 88 and can be found on our website. Please provide the Customer Service Representative reference number **03868560**

Alternatively, you can contact me directly by replying to this email and we can arrange a time for me to call you.

Kind regards,

Sam

Service NSW

T 137788



----- Original Message -----

From: Service NSW Small Business Assistance [smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au]

Sent: 13/4/2023, 4:03 pm

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: Service NSW, Business Customer Resolutions - Acknowledgement of Complaint – 2021 COVID-19 Micro-Business Support Grant [ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v34NCF:ref]

Dear Steven Ridd,

Thank you for your correspondence.

We take your concerns seriously and aim to resolve complaints within 20 business days. Your matter has been assigned to a case manager, who will be in contact in due course, to discuss the concerns you have raised. We will keep you updated on the progress of your matter and if it is taking longer than expected to resolve, you will be provided an appropriate timeframe.

If you do need to contact us, please reply to this email as this will ensure your case manager is updated.

In resolving your case, we will need to collect some personal information including your name, contact details as well as other information that may have already been provided in previous interactions with Service NSW. This information may be shared with our partner agencies to deliver the best outcome for you.

For further information on Service NSW's Privacy Policy go to <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/privacy>

Kind Regards,

Customer Resolution Team,

SNSW for Business



**Service
NSW**

ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v34NCF:ref

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From: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, 11 April 2023 2:27 PM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: Please contact us about your 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application [ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v2oqsi:ref]



Dear STEVEN,

I am writing to you about **your application for the 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant** for NATURE TRAIL Our records show that you received **\$15,214** under this grant.

We need some information from you

Based on the information you previously provided, we have determined that you are not eligible for the funding you received under this grant. The [Terms and Conditions](#) or 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.

We understand that having to repay the funds may be unexpected and have outlined some actions you can take below.

If you believe that you are eligible for this grant and you have information and/or documentation to

support your eligibility, please supply the following by responding to this email by **26th April 2023** . Please ensure to redact tax file numbers from documents where applicable.

Evidence that the business has a national aggregated annual turnover of more than \$30,000 and less than \$75,000

The tax return you sent in was written on we need the real Tax Return

Please provide evidence that the business has an aggregated annual turnover of more than \$30,000 and less than \$75,000 **for the year ended 30 June 2020** by providing one of the following documents:

- letter from a qualified accountant, registered tax agent or registered BAS agent
- Business Activity Statement (BAS)
- Australian tax return (businesses can choose to redact their tax file number)
- a profit and loss statement from an accounting software for a minimum three-month period during the 2019-20 financial year, **AND**:
 - an annotated personal bank statement for the same minimum three-month period,
OR
 - a 2019-20 personal income tax return.

Evidence of decline in turnover

Please provide evidence that the business experienced a decline in turnover of 30% or more due to the impact of the Public Health Order over a minimum two-week period within the period of restrictions (commenced 26 June 2021), compared to:

- the same period in 2019, or
- the same period in 2020, or
- the two weeks immediately prior to any restrictions of 12–25 June 2021 (inclusive).

Please do this by providing:

- a letter from a qualified accountant, registered tax agent or registered BAS agent using the template provided by Service NSW:

or

- 2 business bank account statements (separate from any personal accounts). One statement must be from the 2021 COVID-19 period of restrictions (commenced 26 June 2021). The

other statement must be from one of the periods listed above. Please highlight or annotate the statements to show the 2-week period used to demonstrate decline in turnover.

or

- profit and loss statements from an accounting software and 2 annotated personal bank statements. One statement must be from the 2021 COVID-19 period of restrictions (commenced 26 June 2021). The other statement must be from one of the periods listed above.

Our request for supporting evidence is made in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of this grant, to which you agreed when submitting your application.

Please note that it is an offence under the Crimes Act 1900 to make a false declaration when applying for grant funding. Any application deemed fraudulent will be referred to NSW Police for further action.

Next steps

If we do not hear from you, or if you do not provide the requested documentation by **26th April 2023** this matter will be referred to Revenue NSW to begin funds recovery. Revenue NSW will mail you a notice that includes information outlining 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>.

If you believe your business complied with the Terms and Conditions or if there is any additional information you would like to provide to prove your eligibility under the Terms and Conditions, please reply to this email before **26th April 2023**

If you need more than 10 business days to respond to this request, please reply to this email to request more time.

Need more information or support?

If you would like to discuss the items outlined in this email, need help understanding what you are required to do or need more time to complete this request, please reply to this email. Alternatively, you can book a call to speak with a grants assessor at <https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing>.

Kind regards

Angela
Service NSW



ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v2oqsi:ref

Letter Attachments:


 20230411 SJR Services NSW Account - notifications.jpg
95 KB

 Statement20210630.pdf
521 KB

 Nature Trail Profit and Loss Comparison FY2020 to FY2019.pdf
42 KB

 Statement20191231.pdf
251 KB

 Micro Business Grant 2021 Terms and Conditions.pdf
256 KB

 Nature Trail Bank Statement search error.jpg
58 KB

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SERVICE NSW REPLY TOP MY FORMAL COMPLAINT

From: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au>

Sent: Monday, 22 May 2023 12:36 PM

To: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Subject: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant [ref:_00D4a8aWL._5008v34NCF:ref]



Your reference: 03731143

Via email: steve@naturetrail.com.au

Dear Mr Ridd

I refer to your correspondence addressed to Mr Greg Wells, CEO of Service NSW and the Hon. Rose Jackson, MLC about your 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant review (COL-8718f31-MBS) for your business, Nature Trail. I am responding on their behalf.

I am sorry to hear you are dissatisfied with the compliance process and the customer service you have experienced in relation to the audit of your 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant. In your correspondence you also raised concerns about the duration between the Micro-business Grant program and commencement of the subsequent compliance audit program.

Service NSW acknowledges your feedback and take all feedback seriously. Upon reviewing your correspondence, I note your belief that our communication emails make accusation, appear threatening and imply guilt, I sincerely apologise for any distress this may have caused. Service NSW are reviewing all correspondence used to advise commencement of the audit and the information required to support applications.

The audit and compliance process are conducted by a dedicated team who manually reviews applications. This includes contacting businesses who have yet to provide all documents to confirm eligibility. To assure legitimacy of our contact, Service NSW have implemented a three-step process commencing with contact via telephone, followed by written contact via email, providing the Service NSW phone number of 13 77 88 for customers to authenticate staff or interactions.

I acknowledge the heightened awareness of scams and I apologise for any distress this uncertainty may have caused. I note that you called Service NSW to check the legitimacy of contact you received

from Service NSW assessors and spoke to a Business Concierge who confirmed that Service NSW were undertaking compliance audits of the Micro-business Grant.

Please see [2021 Covid 19 Micro-business Grant Guidelines](#) and [2021 Covid-19 Micro-business Grant Terms and Conditions](#).

The grants and programs administered by Service NSW include a compliance program, as per Section 4.7 of the Terms and Conditions of the Grant. Audits are undertaken to confirm monies delivered by the NSW government is done with fairness and to the highest ethical standards, ensuring equity for all NSW citizens. The compliance and audit program for the Micro-business Grant commenced late 2022.

Your audit case will be managed by Nicole, a Co-ordinator within Service NSW's Customer Payments Assessment Team. Nicole's role is to assist you with the information and documents required to complete the eligibility checks for the compliance audit for this Grant. Nicole will contact you via email detailing the documents required for these checks. You are also able to book an appointment at a convenient time to discuss these requirements with Nicole at <https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing>.

The Terms and Conditions state that a business may be eligible under the program if they had an aggregated annual turnover of more than \$30,000 and less than \$75,000 for the year ended 30 June 2020 (refer 3.3). A business is required to keep all documentation as evidence to support the application.

To ensure businesses in distress had timely access to funds, an automated approval process was implemented. As part of the application, you declared Nature Trail met the threshold criterium for the Micro-business Grant. You received total payments of \$15,214 based on your application declaration.

I note the document you submitted with your application was a file copy of the Trust Tax Return for the 2019-2020 financial year lodgement form in the name of Wistmans Wood Trust (ABN 51 965 308 493) which states a total business income of \$6,841.

An outcome of the audit will be provided via phone and email. Please note if Nature Trail is found to be ineligible for the funds received, as per Section 6 of the Terms and Conditions of the Grant, the NSW Government may recover the payment. Revenue NSW can provide assistance and further information for the recovery of funds and discuss payment and hardship options via phone on 1300 138 118 or +61 2 7808 6940 or through their website, www.revenue.nsw.gov.au.

If you remain dissatisfied with how your complaint has been managed by Service NSW, you may wish to contact the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can be contacted by telephone on 02 9286 1000, by email at nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au or website at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

Please do not hesitate to contact Sam from the Business Customer Resolution Team on 0419 959 339 if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely



Karen Ballantyne

A/ Director, Business Customer Service

19/05/2023



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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.]

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