

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 #30]

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: Wednesday, 2 October 2024 10:32 AM  
To: [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)  
Subject: Re: Service NSW Grant Clawback Targets Matter - Channel Nine's A Current Affair [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hi Steve,

Thanks for your email ..

. I will be off the air for a while [REDACTED]

Regards,

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 25 September 2024 5:45 PM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Fwd: Covid Micro Grants Audit - [REDACTED]

Fyi

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Officeof MLCRath <[office.rath@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:office.rath@parliament.nsw.gov.au)>  
**Date:** Wed, 25 Sep 2024 at 12:06 pm  
**Subject:** RE: Covid Micro Grants Audit - [REDACTED]  
**To:** [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you reaching out to Mr Rath.

I completely agree [REDACTED], it's frustrating to see issues like this arise, particularly when there really shouldn't be an issue in the first place; it's not helped by the fact that Service NSW doesn't leave you with any reference or accessible contact details from which to raise the problem.

Although these audits are necessary, their recent ill management (especially when targeting those that have been hit hardest by the pandemic such as [REDACTED] illustrates that they have been managed post-factum extremely poorly.

I have shared your email with Mr Rath who will continue to hold this government to account [REDACTED]. In the interim, I hope your son and his band stay safe and enjoy their adventures abroad.

Kind regards

Orlando Throsby

\*

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 19 September 2024 9:36 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Service NSW Micro Business Grant clawback battle [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hi all,

Thanks to Steve for creating a platform ....

Just sharing the pain...

We are relatively new to this circus, first contact was in June 2024..

I had a call today from "Sue" from Service NSW.

When questioned Sue confirmed she was an external contractor and was not permitted to give out her surname, employer, or contact details.

She acknowledged receiving my multiple emails requesting additional time to respond, ( the band I am doing the books for is touring overseas ), Sue advised she had not been able to respond due to backlog and understaffing. I advised I was not sympathetic.

' Sue' confirmed that she was aware of the Current affairs program and that the fairness of the audit has been questioned in NSW Parliament:

### **Challenge the government's fairness in handling COVID-19 grant repayments 2**

(4) What action has the Government taken to ensure fairness in determining fraudulent activity with regard to the COVID-19 grant?

(5) How many small businesses have been asked to pay back the micro business loan?

(a) Of those businesses how many have paid the money back?

( Supplementary questions - government response due 25/09/24)

She said she had strict protocols regarding any flexibility in her role and declined to share the protocols with me.

The call from Sue was prompted by an email from me, requesting a phone call during business hours to discuss.

I have now received a case number, been directed to provide the requested information within 14 days.

The letter of Authority provided by the band, authorising me to respond to Service NSW, has been rejected as Sue thinks "it could have been written by anyone".

The letter was written by [REDACTED], signed and a copy of his driver's licence with signature was provided.

Whilst Sue acknowledged she had received ( and rejected the letter of Authority ) , the financial information sent in the same email could not be reviewed as the letter of authority was rejected.

The anonymous accusers and the presumption of fraudulent behaviour is causing great frustration.

All the best,

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

\*

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 9 September 2024 12:26 PM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Raised in Supplementary Questions Budget estimates /NSW Parliament

Page 2/34  
Answer due 25th September

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 10 September 2024 8:48 AM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** Re: Raised in Supplementary Questions Budget estimates /NSW Parliament

All good , I have written to the member who raised the questions , he is originally from this area .

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 9 September 2024 9:16 AM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Service NSW Grant Clawback [REDACTED]

Thanks, Steve,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

There may be some common ground with others being reviewed.

I am very frustrated by the aggressive tone in all correspondence and the emails without surnames/positions held / contact numbers. I received a call from "Suzanne" no surname .. who advised they were auditing some 80,000 businesses and were very understaffed.

I would like to respond in writing / by post ... if anyone has a contact or method that has yielded results I would appreciate info.

Regards,  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

\*

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, 9 September 2024 7:26 AM  
**To:** steve@naturetrail.com.au  
**Subject:** [REDACTED] - Micro grant info

Hi Steve,

As per our phone call, I would be happy to receive any information relating to a postal address for correspondence related to the Micro grants audit .

I have been unsuccessful in obtaining a response via email.

I would also like to link up with the musician you mentioned if he is ok to take a call.

Thanks,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

\*

From: [Redacted]  
Sent: Thursday, 5 September 2024 10:10 AM  
To: [steve@naturetrail.com.au](mailto:steve@naturetrail.com.au)  
Subject: Fwd: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application - Final follow up to prove your eligibility [ ref: [Redacted]:ref ]

Hi Steve,

This is where we are up to currently, I requested additional time when I spoke to Suzanne no surname by phone, and was of the understanding the request was under consideration. It would appear not as following that call I received the email included in this chain.

I do not have a postal address to correspond with ( that I am aware of ) and feel that the clock is ticking before we receive an invoice.

[Redacted]

If you have any postal address ( that gets a response ) I would appreciate.

Note: Thanks for the email yesterday, I have had a look at the current affair report which was very informative. It would seem that Minns was on the back foot but committed to pushing through.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Regards,

[Redacted]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [Redacted]  
Date: Wed, Sep 4, 2024 at 10:21 AM  
Subject: Fwd: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application - Final follow up to prove your

eligibility [ ref: [REDACTED]:ref ]

To: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <[smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au](mailto:smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au)>

Please provide the full name, position held within Service NSW, and full contact details, including postal address.

There are numerous warnings of scams relating to your correspondence on the internet.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Wed, Sep 4, 2024 at 10:07 AM

Subject: Re: 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application - Final follow up to prove your eligibility [ ref: [REDACTED]:ref ]

To: Service NSW Small Business Assistance <[smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au](mailto:smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au)>

Thank you for your email,

I spoke to Suzanne by phone and advised that the band is currently touring in Europe, currently on stage in London earning export income for NSW. Access to information is difficult.

I requested additional time to provide further information as they are away until the end of September. and was of the understanding that the request was being considered and I would receive a response.

Please confirm if this is the case.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

On Wed, 4 Sep 2024 at 8:58 am, Service NSW Small Business Assistance <[smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au](mailto:smallbusinessassistance@service.nsw.gov.au)> wrote:



Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to you about your application for the **2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant** for [REDACTED]

We have contacted you by phone and email on **6** occasions to request more information to finalise your application. Unfortunately, we have not received a response from you.

Further to the email sent to you on 30/08/24, we requested additional information to support your application for this grant.

Based on the information you provided in your original application, we cannot determine that you were eligible for the funding you received under this grant.

### **Next steps**

If you do not provide the requested documentation within 11 calendar days, this matter will be referred to Revenue NSW to begin recovering funds. Revenue NSW will mail you 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/fines-and-fees/fees/difficulty-paying-your-fee>.

**Please provide the documents outlined below via reply email within 11 business days.**

### **Evidence of the physical location of the business**

Please provide evidence that the physical location of the business is in NSW, by providing one of the following documents dated between 21 April 2021 and 18 October 2021

- council rates notice
- lease agreement.

If you cannot supply a council rates notice or lease agreement, please provide at least two of the following documents dated between 21 April 2021 and 18 October 2021:

- utilities bill
- insurance documentation
- supply invoices
- business registration documentation
- contractor licence.



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

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)
- business bank account statement (separate from any personal accounts)
- 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. (Note: there is no requirement to disclose tax file numbers and businesses should redact their tax file number where possible.)

**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 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: (Available upon request)

**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.

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 within 90 days.

### **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 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=5008v000002owKx>.

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

Suzanne  
Service NSW  
T: 13 77 88



ref: [REDACTED]:ref

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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

Level 7, 255 Elizabeth Street  
Sydney, New South Wales  
Australia