

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 #34]

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

[Emails (chronological order)]

START OF EVIDENCE

*

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 15 October 2024 9:56 AM
To: steve@naturetrail.com.au
Subject: Fw: Please contact us about your 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant application [ref: [REDACTED]:ref]

Hi Steve

Sorry Ive taken a while to forward this to you.

This is the same email i have been receiving every 90 days for over a year. Ill confirm the dates later for you. It's always the same. Ive gotten my accountant to send them a letter which confirms my eligibility each time I've received the letter.

I never receive a reply. I never hear back.

I was locked down in 2021 and had no income during that time as a tradesman. In that time i sent invoices and caught up with paperwork.

My accountant confirmed to me that I was eligible and he applied for me.

I went to service NSW last week to ask someone in person and they gave me contact details to Kathy Gavidia who is a "business Concierge" for Service NSW as they don't deal with this at the branches of service NSW.

I emailed her a letter from my accountant and asked her what else she needed. I have not heard anything back.

Thanks for your help.

Regards

[REDACTED]

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

Sent: Thursday, 3 October 2024 10:45 AM

To: [REDACTED]

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



Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to you about your application for the **2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant** for [REDACTED]. Our records show that you received \$10,500 under this grant.

Service NSW regularly completes compliance reviews of NSW Government grant programs. We are now carrying out compliance reviews of the 2021 COVID-19 Micro-business Grant and, together with other micro-businesses who received the Micro-business grant, your application has been selected for review.

What is a compliance review?

A compliance review seeks to ensure that grant eligibility and program Terms and Conditions and Guidelines have been followed, such as ensuring that the required documents were included when applying for the grant.

Compliance reviews also check that grant monies, which are public funds, have been allocated responsibly.

By applying for this grant, applicants agreed that they may be subject to an audit and to retain the required documentation for five years.

We understand that some time has passed since you received this grant, and that this request may be unexpected. We are here to help throughout the compliance review.

What we need from you

We have identified that we do not have some of the documents needed to support your eligibility for this grant. Please find below a listing of what we are missing.

We appreciate that it may take time to provide these supporting documents, and that you may need to seek advice from an accountant or tax agent, so we are providing you with up to **90 calendar days** to do this. To confirm your eligibility, please provide the documents outlined below **by replying to this email by 14.10.24**

Please ensure to redact tax file numbers from documents where applicable.

If you would like information on how to authorise someone to act on your behalf, including an accountant, tax agent or a bookkeeper, 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=\[REDACTED\]](https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing?bookingSource=sfcase&bookingSourceId=[REDACTED]).

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.

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.

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

- two 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 two 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.

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

Once we have received your supporting documents, we will undertake our review against the eligibility requirements for this grant, and share the outcome with you via email.

If you believe you have complied with the Terms and Conditions or can provide additional information relating to your eligibility, please reply to this email before **14.10.24**

Will I need to repay the money I received?

If we do not receive the information requested or do not hear from you by **14.10.24**, your case will be referred to Revenue NSW.

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/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 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=\[REDACTED\]](https://book.service.nsw.gov.au/services/grants-mbg/landing?bookingSource=sfcase&bookingSourceId=[REDACTED]).

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

Love

Service NSW
T: 13 77 88



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

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

Sent: 3/7/2024, 10:29 am

To: [REDACTED]

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



Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email reply.

Please see below the documents you need to supply:

1. 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:

- Business Activity Statement (BAS) for FY2019-2020, OR
- Business bank account statement (separate from any personal accounts) for a minimum of three months FY2019-2020, OR
- **Australian tax return (businesses can choose to redact their tax file number) - IN FULL - for FY201-2020, OR**
- 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.

2. 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:

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Need more information or support?

We understand that this has been a challenging time, and we are committed to supporting you and

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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

Greg
Service NSW
T 13 77 88



ref: [REDACTED]; ref:

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 20 October 2024 8:49 PM
To: steve@naturetrail.com.au
Subject: Re clawback rort

Hi Steve

Chris has been [REDACTED]. But I read your e-mails. It's so nice of you to be helping so many people. Even when you have resolved your issue. Thanks so much for your advocacy. It's so much work but we really appreciate it. You have a great way of presenting your case.

Chris was locked down and had not income. He met the criteria as he's a sole trader and had that turnover. Our accountant did the application for us. We'll do as you suggest.

We feel the same..as if we'd e-mail bank accounts and tax records to someone who never replies to our correspondence anyway. In this day and age of scams. It's outrageous to think that anyone would. We couldn't even see anyone at service NSW. It's all faceless correspondence via unsecured e-mail.

When you think of the rort of Qantas and Harvey Norman collecting federal Govt millions and then us as easy targets by NSW govt clawback of funds. Surely the point is...we were unable to work. We had no income as a result. 2 yrs later they try to recoup money. Unbelievable.

Thanks again so much for your advocacy

[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

ICAC

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION
AGAINST CORRUPTION

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