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Joint Media Release

SERVICE NSW AND NSW POLICE ANNOUNCE STRIKE FORCE SAINSBERY TO INVESTIGATE GRANT FRAUD

Service NSW and NSW Police will establish Strike Force Sainsbery to investigate fraudulent applications for COVID-19 business support payments.

Service NSW CEO Damon Rees said Strike Force Sainsbery would identify individuals who had fraudulently sought payments intended to support businesses and residents through the COVID-19 restrictions.

“From 20 September businesses were required to reaffirm their eligibility each fortnight to continue to receive the 2021 COVID-19 micro-business grant payments,” Mr Rees said.

“Service NSW fraud and compliance investigators identified anomalies in some applications made for the 2021 COVID-19 micro-business grant in late October.

“We were forced to pause the 2021 COVID-19 micro-business grant payments temporarily while the anomalies in some applications were investigated.

“Recurring payments for existing applicants have now resumed with 7,500 applications processed overnight with the majority of eligible payments expected to restart in the coming week.

“It is incredibly disappointing that deliberate, coordinated fraudsters have undermined the systems put in place to support the businesses of NSW in one of the most challenging times we have faced.

“Service NSW is continually strengthening its fraud prevention and detection systems and takes action to report suspected fraudulent activity to the NSW Police and other law enforcement bodies.

“There are multiple checks and balances in place to ensure applications are properly reviewed and taxpayer funds go to those who meet the eligibility criteria and need it most.”

State Crime Commander Assistant Commissioner Stuart Smith said the NSW Police Force had a proven track record in taking down criminal syndicates involved in professionally facilitated fraud.

“In recent years, the Financial Crimes Squad has collaborated with various agencies to target groups and individuals trying to exploit schemes intended to relieve financial pressures during tough times,” Assistant Commissioner Smith said.

“We cannot have those in need miss out on crucial support while greedy fraudsters live it up on the dime of NSW taxpayers.

“State Crime Command will be using a state-of-the-art artificial intelligence system designed to mass analyse and cross-reference metadata.

“Let this be a warning to anyone who made a fraudulent application. It will not be long before we are knocking on your door.”

Service NSW has paid more than \$11 billion in support payments to customers impacted by COVID-19, bushfires and floods.

Service NSW has so far investigated suspected fraudulent 2021 COVID-19 micro-business grant applications worth \$15.9 million which equates to 2.6 per cent of all paid applications. A further \$4.6 million in suspected fraudulent micro-business grant applications has been prevented from being paid. Service NSW continues to detect and investigate suspected fraudulent applications across all its grant programs.

Service NSW will continue to work as a priority to isolate further legitimate grant applications and reinstate payments to customers.

If someone believes they may have made an error in an application and have received funds they are not entitled to, they should contact Service NSW to arrange repayment of those funds.

Customers can call the Service NSW Business Concierge team on 13 77 88 for assistance.

Anyone who has information which may assist Strike Force Sainsbery investigators or relating to fraudulent grant applications should contact Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000 or <https://nsw.crimestoppers.com.au>.