

# Claimants risk missing Stolen Wages payment

## Deadline to supply details is August 28

By CHRISTINE HOWES



THEY're not budging and they won't put a figure on it – but if Stolen Wages claimants registered to the

Federal Court's *Pearson v State of Queensland* don't get their details to appointed distribution agents Grant Thornton by August 28 they won't be paid.

As of last week that could mean as many as 7,219 registered claimants won't get their money, out of a possible 12-15,000 people, because they haven't provided sufficient identification Grant Thornton partner Anthony Beven said.

There were also 1,815 claimants missing address details, 2,820 missing bank account details and at the end of May there were more than 900 claimants who hadn't provided their date of birth.

"The Stolen Wages class action has been going since 2016 and, as part of the class action, people have only been required to register some basic information since 2019," Mr Beven said.

He said the cut-off date for providing information is August 28 and the Court had ordered people be paid by December 6.

"If you haven't received a claim statement yet, or haven't updated your details, please don't leave it until August, please contact us straight away," Mr Beven said.

"All the post offices are still open, we've been here every day during COVID, our office has been open every day during COVID, we've just reopened our office in Townsville today. We're reopening our Brisbane office on July 8, and we'll be back into Yarrabah the minute we're permitted to by the government and by the Aboriginal Shire Council.

"So our focus is helping people as much as possible, but that timeframe will not change, people will get their money in December."

Lockhart River Mayor Wayne Butcher, who is not a claimant, said several people in his community, including his mother, were concerned, particularly because of COVID-19.

"I think it's important, that there needs to be an extension of time simply because of the current COVID-19 situation," he said.

"To say you need a birth certificate and even some of the

**"It would break my heart to think some of those who fought for so many years may miss out now because they were unaware of the documents they need to prove they are rightful claimants."**

– Dr Ros Kidd



Claimant Joanne Willmot, who grew up in the Cherbourg dormitories, speaking with former-ANTaR SA President Glenn Giles and UTLC SA President Janet Giles speaking to a public meeting in Adelaide in November 2003.



Grant Thornton team stolen wages team members: Left to right: Shavi Kanagaratnam, Jonathon Kawa, Halejah Wacando, Malia Nai (seated), Samantha Mailman, Alana Murphy (seated), Sana Dorante, Halley Murphy & Anthony Beven.

(other) ID is very challenging, even without COVID-19.

"And you're talking to the older generation here. They're not IT savvy either.

"All that has to be taken into consideration."

Academic Dr Ros Kidd, who has spent years researching the Stolen Wages, said it was heartbreaking.

"To think that after all these decades of struggling for justice, large numbers of claimants may

yet miss out on their payment because they might not have provided all the essential documents to the administrator," she said.

"It seems that several thousand claimants have not yet sent in this information.

"It is likely that many people in remote areas do not have access to the internet to download instructions and documents.

"Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers

have won the biggest human rights class action in Australia's history.

"It would break my heart to think some of those who fought for so many years may miss out now because they were unaware of the documents they need to prove they are rightful claimants."

Claimant Joanne Willmot, who grew up in the Cherbourg dormitories, appealed to younger family members to help.

"Sit with the Elders. They do

need access to the internet for their identification and a whole lot of other things. If they can't get that in they won't be able to make a claim," she said.

"So I really would ask that people in the community support those Elders for them to be able to at least get a little bit of what they have been owed through this whole reparation process."

Mr Beven said they felt they had done, and were doing everything they could to get information to people and help them as much as possible.

"We need to have a deadline and August 28, this is the timeframe the court has set for us," he said.

"So after the 28th, the distribution statements will be issued and there's an appeal process that's built into the scheme, where people can appeal in relation.

"So if someone hasn't provided a bank account, which means they're ineligible, they'll receive a letter saying they're ineligible and they can then use the appeal process that the Courts established under the Stolen Wages settlement scheme."

But, he said, that appeals process would cost.

"It's going to be harder for them and the Court has, in the scheme, imposed quite a significant fee," he said.

"If there's incorrect or missing information, we just implore people to get in touch with us.

"We have people passing away every week and my priority is the money will go out to people quickly and that's all I'm focused on.

"And the quicker we do it, the more money goes out to people because there's less costs in doing all of this.

"So my focus is not about tracking down every single person that could be eligible and working through all of those issues, that will cost millions of dollars and take a lot of time and delay payments.

"My focus is getting this money to people and the old people I talk to, they come into our office every day and when I talked to Mr (Hans) Pearson (who led the class action), he says, 'give us the money now. This has been going on for too long'.

"And that's my priority, to get the money to people as quickly as possible."