

RESPONSE TO MAJOR FLOODING ACROSS NEW SOUTH WALES IN 2022

Hearing date, Wednesday 15 June 2022

Responses to Questions Taken on Notice

Question	Agency
<p>1. The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Okay. So they're there. They talk to a Service NSW person. They've got no paperwork. Let's just say they meet that. What happens with the information that they provide? Are they approved on the spot or is there a process that they have to go through? Does this information have to go back to Sydney to get approval?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: For a customer in that situation, there are a couple of things. There are collocated services there in the disaster centre. For example, the council is there. Services Australia is there—</p> <p>The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Sorry, Ms Ellis. I'm really asking for a very specific answer here, which is directly the role of Service NSW, who are responsible for assessing and getting this money into the hands of people who are in desperate situations. What I'm trying to understand is how many people you have in Lismore at the moment that someone can go to, tell their story to, and provide with—if they're lucky—the information that they need to get the tick to get that money in their bank account. Because, as I've said, just over 15 per cent of people have been able to achieve that. I'm just trying to understand how many people you've got and whether the assessment is taking too long because it's going backwards and forwards between Sydney and Lismore—we had people crying in front of us about being asked to provide the same documentation five times that either they don't have or is incomplete because their house and business has washed away. Can you tell me how many assessors you've got on the ground in Lismore who can approve a grant so that it goes into someone's bank account within two or three days?</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: With the blitz forums that Ms Ellis is talking about, there's a combination of teams and they're looking at a variety of grants. Some can be confirmed and ratified in—</p> <p>The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Can you take on notice which ones those are?</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Well, no. It depends on the person's circumstances. It's about appointments and people coming in to work through grants and materials. Then some of those grants are processed and resolved in situ and others are followed up to be progressed further and resolved on behalf of the customer thereafter—is my understanding of how they're working, particularly in these targeted centres right now.</p> <p>The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Do you have a flowchart or anything in terms of the decision-making process? I'm just talking about this grant. We can get into the whole grants but I'm going to run out of time. But just this grant—is there a flowchart that shows the decision-making in relation to what people</p>	<p>Service NSW page 42</p>

<p>need to provide, working through the eligibility, and that also demonstrates who does the final sign-off?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: I don't have that information in front of me.</p> <p>The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I'm happy for you to take it on notice.</p>	
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>Please refer to the attached document titled 'Service NSW - Rental Support Payment Process Maps 29062022'. This set of flow charts documents the steps taken to assess a Rental Support Payment application submitted digitally through the MyService NSW Account. Customers may also receive support with grant applications from Service NSW through Disaster Recovery Centres, Service NSW Centres or Mobile Service Centres or by attending a Flood Support Session in the Northern Rivers.</p>	
<p>2. The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Does the New South Wales Government support the Commonwealth definition of a farmer satisfying the ATO's definition? This is causing a lot of problems in the Northern Rivers.</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I don't know the answer to your question off the top of my head.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If you could take that on notice, because there's a lot of complaints about it. I think people would love to know—</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Do they recognise a farmer as per the ATO's definition?</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes, which means that a majority of their income is coming from the property, not off-farm. So anybody whose wife is working as a teacher because the farm is losing money, their property won't qualify and they're not qualifying for these grants. The community would love to have some awareness of this amongst Resilience, and for some effort to be made to assist them with that problem.</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I think with the Feds—and Mr O'Connell will confirm this—their definition in relation to primary producer grants is you've got to demonstrate more than 50 per cent.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Correct. That's known as the ATO definition.</p> <p>SHANE FITZSIMMONS: That's the Commonwealth criteria definition.</p> <p>SEAN O'CONNELL: That's correct.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Correct. My question relates to whether the New South Wales Government is trying to assist our community by seeking to make that definition more flexible.</p> <p>SEAN O'CONNELL: Commissioner, I can assist Ms Cusack there.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Thank you for taking that on notice.</p>	<p>Resilience NSW</p>
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>N/A</p>	
<p>3. The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: My next question relates to an email that the Committee received—that I've tabled and I think you've got a copy—from Chinderah Village Tourist Park, which is a holiday and permanent caravan park. It concerns the case of a young man, his wife and one-year-old baby, who lost everything in the flood and applied for a \$5,000</p>	<p>Service NSW page 46</p>

<p>grant to return home. I understand that you can't comment on the actual details of the case, but do you think that this family would have been offered a customer feedback opportunity on the management of this issue?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: All customers who complete the application have that opportunity to provide feedback.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In the reply that they've been sent, which is an automated reply and doesn't really offer them the opportunity to contact anybody, there isn't a customer feedback opportunity provided to them.</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: I'm very happy to have a closer look at this application and to reach out to this customer.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes, thank you very much.</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: I won't comment on the specifics, but I do know that in relation to this application it was approved on 31 May.</p> <p>The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: After we visited, would that be right?</p> <p>The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Pure coincidence.</p> <p>The CHAIR: That would be after our conversation with her.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I'm sorry, was this referred to you by our Committee? How did you come to revisit it?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: I think the email that you've provided to us here is—I'm just looking at it now for the first time. It looks like it was received 18 May and, without looking into it further, I suspect that there has been a reapplication or some sort of assistance provided to the customer and that we've approved that subsequently.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That email is dated 18 May and the subject is "Your Flood Individuals Support Package application has not been approved". Could you let us know, on notice, what actually occurred that resulted in that change in position?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: Certainly.</p>	
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>The customer in question applied twice for the Back Home Grant as a tenant.</p> <p>The first Back Home Grant application was made on 27 April 2022 and was declined on 18 May 2022 as Service NSW was unable to verify details contained in the application. Service NSW contacted the customer by email on 29 April 2022, 12 May 2022 and 16 May 2022 and by telephone on 13 May 2022 and 16 May 2022.</p> <p>The second Back Home Grant application was made on 29 May 2022, and it was approved on 29 May 2022. To make this approval, Service NSW referred to supporting information provided in the first application together with additional information provided by the customer with their second application.</p> <p>On 15 June 2022 Service NSW also approved a Rental Support Payment of \$9,200 for this customer.</p>	
<p>4. The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How many have been terminated after 28 days where they didn't provide that additional information?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: Excuse me and I will get that information for you. In relation to the storm and flood business grant, which is the \$50,000 grant, we have a range of circumstances. In roughly a third of cases, customers</p>	<p>Service NSW Page 47 (not highlighted)</p>

<p>will withdraw the application themselves. That will typically be after we have had a conversation with them following up on information, and they might decide that they are not wanting to continue their application and they will withdraw it.</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Do you know the timeout ones?</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: I would have to come back to you on the ones where we have actually—</p> <p>The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Sure.</p> <p>The CHAIR: Your time has expired, Catherine. Thank you.</p>	<p>in transcript)</p>																
<p>ANSWER</p> <p>Any customer who requires additional time beyond the standard 28 days to provide the required supporting documentation is provided with additional time upon request. Service NSW holds data on the reasons for grant applications being declined where eligibility is not met. For the \$50,000 February and March 2022 Storm and Flood Disaster Recovery Small Business Grant, the table below sets out the reasons for declined applications and their occurrence as a percentage of total declined applications, as at 20 June 2022.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="209 958 1203 1731"> <tr> <td>No photographic or video evidence of the impact of the flood provided for the impacted address or duplicate photos used across multiple applications</td><td>43%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Customer is sole trader and the requirement for the majority of their income to be derived from the business is not met</td><td>17%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Inactive or cancelled ABN and/or ineligible entity type</td><td>2%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Applicant is applying for loss of income (not within scope)</td><td>< 0%</td></tr> <tr> <td>ANZSIC code is a linked primary production (customer may be eligible for a Rural Assistance Authority grant)</td><td>< 0%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Incomplete supporting evidence (other)</td><td>3%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Application withdrawn by customer</td><td>34%</td></tr> <tr> <td>The customer has successfully applied for funding on the \$10,000 Northern Small Business Flood Grant (customers are unable under the Guidelines to claim both grants)</td><td>0%</td></tr> </table>	No photographic or video evidence of the impact of the flood provided for the impacted address or duplicate photos used across multiple applications	43%	Customer is sole trader and the requirement for the majority of their income to be derived from the business is not met	17%	Inactive or cancelled ABN and/or ineligible entity type	2%	Applicant is applying for loss of income (not within scope)	< 0%	ANZSIC code is a linked primary production (customer may be eligible for a Rural Assistance Authority grant)	< 0%	Incomplete supporting evidence (other)	3%	Application withdrawn by customer	34%	The customer has successfully applied for funding on the \$10,000 Northern Small Business Flood Grant (customers are unable under the Guidelines to claim both grants)	0%	
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<p>5. The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Ellis, can you provide a copy of the customer survey questions? I'm not asking for the individual responses, just a blank set of survey questions, so we can gauge what exactly people were asked.</p> <p>CATHERINE ELLIS: Yes.</p>	<p>Service NSW Page 47 (not highlighted in transcript)</p>																

ANSWER

At the completion of a grant application, on the submission confirmation page, customers are directed to a 'Thumbs Up Thumbs Down' prompt to rate their satisfaction with the application process, and to provide written feedback should they wish.

Apply for a flood individuals support package

Your application has been submitted



Your application has been submitted for assessment

We have sent a confirmation email to testnsw2+6nfg@gmail.com

Application details

Reference number: COL-118fc6f-IFR

Application: Apply for a flood individuals support package

Lodgement date: 27 June 2022

What happens next?

1. We'll process your application against the grant guidelines. We process all applications as quickly as possible.
2. If your application is approved, we'll transfer funds up to 5 business days from the approval date.
3. We'll contact you if we need more information. If this happens, we may need to carry out further assessment. This may take up to 5 additional business days.

How was your experience?



6. The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will be quick. I would ask that if you don't have the answer to hand to just take it on notice. The special disaster grants, Mr O'Connell, you didn't say how many people have received the further \$65,000. Do you have that figure?

SEAN O'CONNELL: I will come back to you, Mr Banasiak.

Rural Assistance Authority

ANSWER

N/A

7. The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Ms Ellis, would I be safe in assuming that the 91 per cent satisfaction rate in the survey is only those who have bothered to reply to the survey? So if I don't reply to the survey, I don't get captured, do I?

CATHERINE ELLIS: I would need to take on notice whether it is actually a requirement to respond to it. I'm not sure that it is, but I'm not sure either way. I will need to take that on notice.

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ANSWER

It is not a requirement for customers to complete the 'Thumbs Up Thumbs Down' survey.

<p>8. SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'm trying to answer. About 50 per cent of those grants relate to seeking support for structural assistance—repair assistance—and we've paid out around about 470, 480 amounts at the moment, remembering this is a particular program that is without precedent across the country. The repairs and the rebuilding aspect is being closely aligned with public works and our property assessment program. We're looking at a way of getting repairs and making good on properties, particularly in flood-impacted areas, and we're looking at thresholds above one in 100. We're also very mindful of the longer term viability, of what is the best arrangement when it comes to rebuilding and those options around relocation. So it's a very complex grant area. It's a very significant grant area. But it's got to be absolutely targeted and delivered to yield the desired benefit in terms of repair. You don't want to put a whole bunch of repairs in if they go back under water in a matter of weeks. It's a bit like some of the pod program.</p> <p>The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Further to that, on notice, can you break this down. These are the figures provided by the Minister in a question on notice in the <i>Notice Paper</i> to me. As of 20 May, of those 215 payments that had been made, how many were then for the essential household contents grants?</p>	Resilience NSW
<p>ANSWER N/A</p>	
<p>9. Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you, but I mean specifically in terms of the difficulties that we've heard about—we'll stick just with primary producers—the application process. Were there difficulties post-Black Summer bushfires—or, actually, the floods last year, I think you mentioned—when they came into force, that have been learning experiences to change the way in which they are applied for, to make it easier? Or has that just started now?</p> <p>SEAN O'CONNELL: We're committed to continuous improvements, so every individual program we review that. We talk about quality with Resilience and they in turn talk to their counterparts at the NRRRA. The short answer to your question is yes. I can provide information and specific examples of how that has manifested itself, if that would help. I could do that on notice, Ms Faehrmann.</p>	Rural Assistance Authority
<p>ANSWER N/A</p>	

Final

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Email

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Login

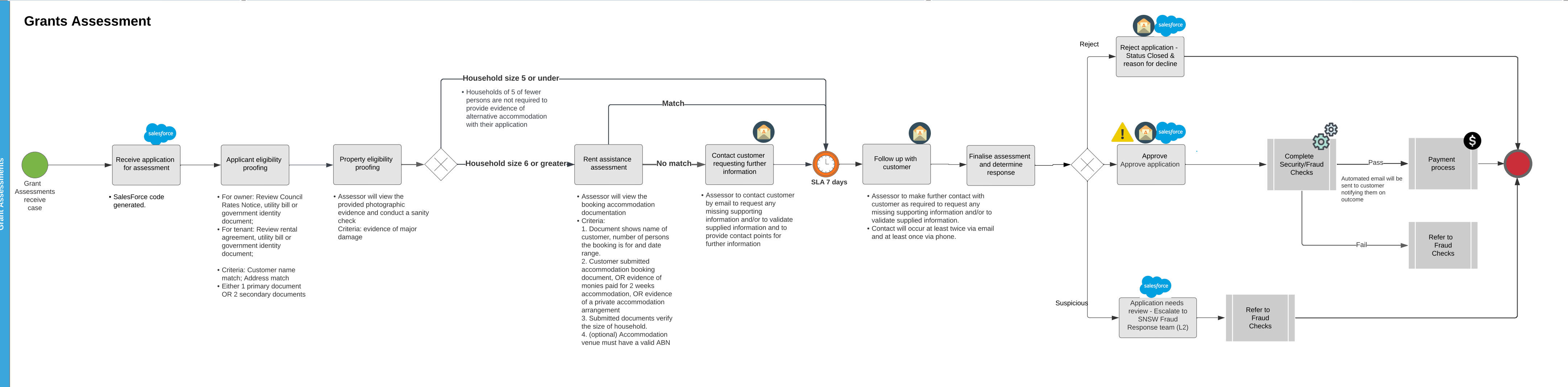
Salesforce

Phone

Time delay

Evidence, receipts

Grants Assessment



Final

Key

Email

Control

Login

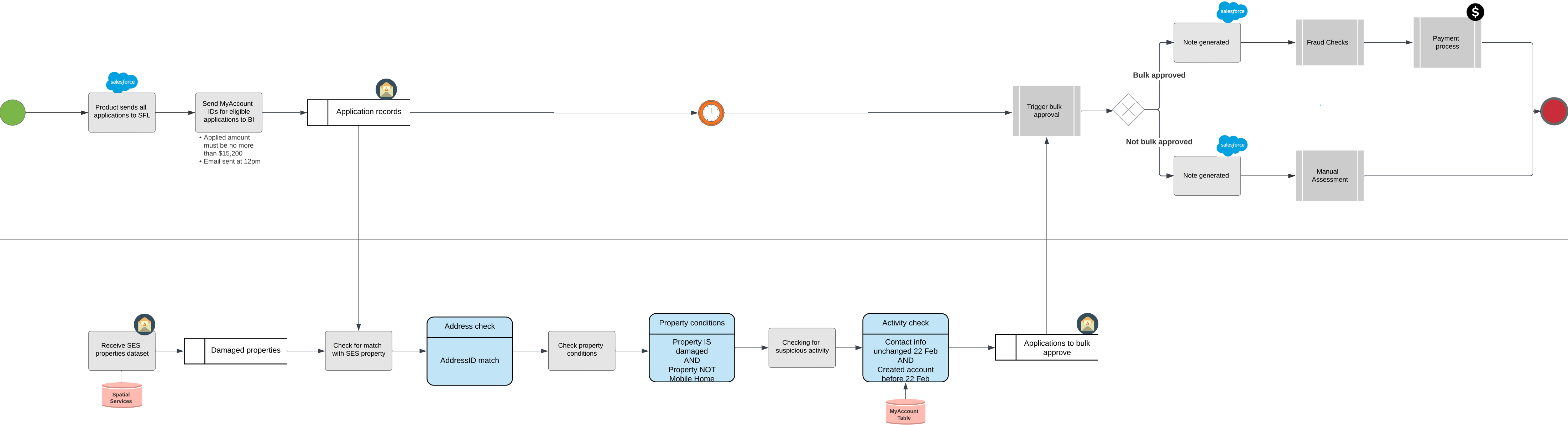
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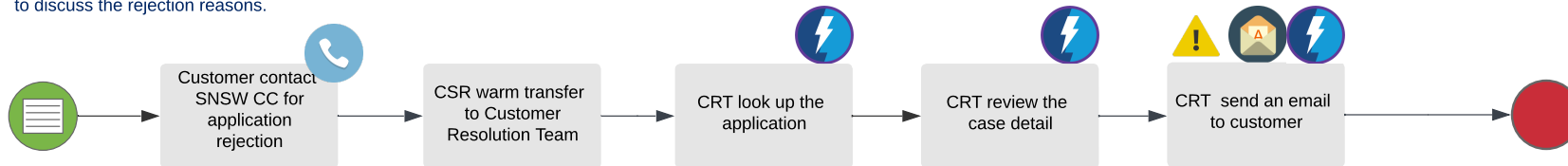
Evidence, receipts

Bulk approval process





Customer Enquiry about their application rejection

Trigger:
Customer had their application rejected and they contact SNSW to discuss the rejection reasons.



Note:

- 
 - Email is the system generated and a generic rejection email
 - It refers the customer to SNSW page on eligibility criteria
 - It does not detail the specific case information and reasons of application rejection
- 
 - Team should not discuss the detail of the rejection specific to the application