

Walsall retailer banned from running companies

Rebecca Simmons was a director of Tia-Bella Limited, trading from premises in Queen Street, Wolverhampton.

The company, a specialty balloon and gifts retailer, was incorporated in March 2019 but just over 2 years later in July 2021, Tia-Bella entered into creditors voluntary liquidation. Tia-Bella's insolvency, however, triggered further enquiries from the Insolvency Service.

Investigators discovered that Rebecca Simmons had applied for a bounce back loan in May 2020, a loan from the government to support viable businesses during the pandemic, but received funds far greater than what Tia-Bella was entitled to.

Rebecca Simmons had exaggerated the company's turnover claiming it to be £180,000 and received a £45,000 loan.

But investigators uncovered that based on available records, Tia-Bella's annual turnover was a maximum of £1,300. This meant Tia-Bella was not entitled to even the minimum bounce back loan of £2,000.

Further enquiries uncovered that in the space of 2 months, Rebecca Simmons caused the company to make payments worth just over £31,000, including a £10,000 directors' loans, £10,000 towards a company car, and £10,000 worth of repayments of deposits incurred before the pandemic.

Rebecca Simmons was unable to provide supporting documents, which left investigators unable to confirm whether the £45,000 bounce back loan benefited the business or not.

On 4 August 2022, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy accepted a 9-year disqualification undertaking from Rebecca Simmons after she did not dispute that she caused Tia-Bella Limited to apply for a government-backed Bounce Back Loan the company was not entitled to.

Effective from 25 August, Rebecca Simmons is banned from directly, or indirectly, becoming involved in the promotion, formation or management of a company, without the permission of the court.

Tia-Bella's Liquidator is considering the bounce back loan and recovery of funds.

Lawrence Zussman, Deputy Head of Insolvent Investigations, said:

Bounce back loans were issued by the government to help viable businesses during the pandemic. Not only did Rebecca Simmons grossly exaggerate the company's turnover to secure a loan she

shouldn't have got a single penny of, Rebecca Simmons went onto use the funds on activities she couldn't even justify as benefitting Tia-Bella.

Rebecca Simmons conduct fell extremely short of the standards required of a company director and has been removed from the corporate arena for a significant amount of time. Her 9-year ban should serve as a clear warning that if you abuse government support, we will use our full powers to bring you to account.

Rebecca Simmons is from Walsall and her date of birth is May 1990.

Tia-Bella Limited (Company Reg no. 11914869).

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of other restrictions](#)

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is available.](#)

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

Infected Blood victims to receive £100,000 interim compensation payment

Thousands of victims of the infected blood scandal will each receive an interim compensation payment of £100,000, the Government has announced today (17 August).

The Government intends to make payments to those who have been infected and bereaved partners in England by the end of October. The same payments will be made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The commitment to pay interim compensation meets, in full, the recommendations set out by inquiry chairman Sir Brian Langstaff in his interim report last month. That report built on the study by Sir Robert Francis QC in his detailed consideration of the issues. Details were announced by Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse today.

The intention is that payments will be tax-free and will not affect any financial benefits support an individual is receiving. Infected individuals and bereaved partners who are registered with any of the four UK infected blood support schemes will receive payment. Advice to those people on how exactly the interim payment will be made will be outlined to them shortly.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

While nothing can make up for the pain and suffering endured by those affected by this tragic injustice, we are taking action to do right by victims and those who have tragically lost their partners by making sure they receive these interim payments as quickly as possible.

We will continue to stand by all those impacted by this horrific tragedy, and I want to personally pay tribute to all those who have so determinedly fought for justice.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse said:

Those affected by the infected blood scandal have suffered terribly over many years and that heart-breaking and unimaginable pain has been compounded by the financial uncertainty many have faced.

These interim payments will start the process of securing that certainty. My priority is to get the money to those people as quickly as possible.

I am grateful to Sir Brian Langstaff for the work he has done to date on the inquiry, and Sir Robert Francis, for his work on compensation. Of course, no amount of money will compensate for the turmoil victims and their loved ones have faced, but I hope these payments help to show that we are on their side and will do everything in our power to support them.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Steve Barclay, said:

The infected blood scandal should never have happened. In accepting Sir Brian Langstaff's recommendations, today we are taking an important step in righting this historic wrong for the thousands of people infected and bereaved partners left behind.

Building on the ongoing support we are providing through the England Infected Blood Scheme, these new interim payments of £100,000 will ensure those impacted across the whole country by this injustice can access the compensation they need, right now.

I'm grateful to those who have campaigned extensively in support of these changes – we have listened and work is underway to ensure those impacted by this tragedy receive the support they rightly deserve.

In England, the intention is to make payments by the end of October.

The Government has updated Sir Brian Langstaff that his recommendations have been accepted.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The administration of the schemes in the Devolved Administrations is for the relevant devolved administration. These interim compensation payments for current beneficiaries are estimated to cost c.£400 million for the whole UK.

[UK launches formal consultations with EU over access to scientific programmes](#)

The Government has launched formal consultations with the EU, in an effort to end persistent delays to the UK's access to EU scientific research programmes, including Horizon Europe. Formal consultations is a mechanism set out in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) to resolve disputes between the UK and EU.

The UK negotiated access to a range of EU science and innovation programmes as part of the TCA in 2020. However, more than 18 months later, the EU has still refused to finalise UK access, causing serious damage to research and development in both the UK and EU Member States.

The delays have prevented the UK from accessing Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, as well as Copernicus, the earth observation programme, which provides data on climate change. Other affected schemes include Euratom – the nuclear research programme – and access to programme services including Space Surveillance and Tracking.

Now the Government has written to the European Commission to launch dispute resolution proceedings and to encourage the EU to abide by their obligations in the deal.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The EU is in clear breach of our agreement, repeatedly seeking to politicise vital scientific cooperation by refusing to finalise access to these important programmes. We cannot allow this to continue. That is why the UK has now launched formal consultations

and will do everything necessary to protect the scientific community.

Minister for Europe Graham Stuart said:

It is disappointing that the EU has not facilitated UK participation in the agreed scientific programmes, despite extensive UK engagement on the issue. Now more than ever the UK and the EU should be working together to tackle our shared challenges from net zero to global health and energy security. We look forward to constructive engagement through the formal consultations.

UK membership of Horizon Europe would be a win-win for both the UK and EU. The UK is a world leader in science and technology, houses some of the most research intensive universities in the world and led the global effort to combat Covid-19. The UK has set aside around £15bn for Horizon Europe alone.

The EU's research and innovation community has been calling on the European Commission to associate the UK to these programmes. The UK Government also continues to seek association so that collective work to solve the greatest economic and societal challenges can continue.

In the event that association is not formalised, the government has prepared an alternative set of programmes to support UK scientists and researchers: [Supporting UK R&D and collaborative research beyond European programmes](#).

The UK Government is ready to work together with the European Commission to resolve this issue and looks forward to constructive engagement during consultations.

Two men given suspended prison sentences after social media posts brag about illegal salmon and sea trout fishing

Two men have been prosecuted at South Tyneside Magistrates Court today (Tuesday 16th August) after photographs and videos found both on a mobile and posted to a social media account highlighted illegal fishing activity

Connor Bell (30), of Bexhill Road, Sunderland appeared at South Tyneside Magistrates Court Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 26th July, where he pleaded guilty to using unlicensed gill nets to catch salmon and sea trout on the

River Wear, including at a location near Fatfield, in the county of Tyne and Wear. At a hearing on Tuesday 16th August, he was sentenced to 5 months imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to do 200 hours of unpaid work.

In addition, Mr Bell was ordered to pay £1,000 costs and a victim surcharge of £128.

Michael Hutchinson (39) of Cranberry Road, Sunderland also appeared for similar offences and one other offence of handling the illegally caught fish. Hutchinson was sentenced to 2 months imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and ordered to undertake 200 hours of unpaid work. Mr Hutchinson was also ordered to pay £1,000 costs and a victim surcharge of £128.

Gill nets are designed to catch fish by their gills and are rarely licensed in rivers, due to their ability to catch large numbers of migratory fish in a short period of time, as well as their potential for catching and killing fish indiscriminately. Gill nets are also capable of causing injury or indeed killing sea birds and mammals.

Representing the Environment Agency, lawyer Matthew Treece told the court that files on Bell's mobile phone and Hutchinson's social media pages had highlighted multiple weekends of illegal netting during the summers of 2020 and 2021, along with photographs of both men posing with catches of up to 14 fish at a time. Images from Hutchinson's Facebook profile also showed a relative, with the captured fish, along with comments from Hutchinson encouraging them to become a "fine young poacher."

On sentencing, District Judge Garland told the defendants: "You don't know how lucky you are to avoid going on a trip to Durham this morning. I view and the law views the things you were up to as extremely serious. These weren't boyish pranks. You were out there putting a large net across a confined space of river where it was highly likely you were going to catch fish of one sort or another. And you did. If you hadn't gone around bragging on Facebook about what fish you were catching, you wouldn't have been in as much trouble as you are."

Following the case David Shears, Senior Fisheries Enforcement Officer for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

With salmon stocks reaching crisis in many of England's rivers, this level of illegal activity could have a serious impact on the sustainability of future stocks in the River Wear. That's why we take reports of suspected poaching seriously and work closely with the police to take action where appropriate.

We're committed to tackling illegal fishing of all kinds whether online or off and as this case clearly demonstrates, we will take action, especially where potentially damaging methods are used.

PC Peter Baker, Wildlife Officer at Northumbria Police, said:

We are really pleased to have been able to deliver effective justice and show the impact of illegal fishing and poaching. We are privileged to see a varied amount of marine wildlife around our area, and we should all play a part in protecting and supporting the environment. As a Force, we take all reports of this nature seriously and are committed to taking appropriate and robust action against the minority found to have been involved in such offences in the region's waterways.

Through our co-ordinated efforts with partners, we will continue to educate the public to prevent further offences from taking place.

The latest stock assessment report, from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales, shows that 37 of the 42 salmon rivers (88%) in England now categorised as being 'at risk' or 'probably at risk'. In 2020, 20 salmon rivers (48%) were thought to be 'at risk' – meaning salmon stock are no longer at sustainable levels – but in the latest report this has now risen to 31 (74%) with rivers in the South West, North West and Wales considered to be the most affected.

A licensed, strictly regulated and managed sea trout fishery operates off the North East coast and local byelaws apply to ensure sea trout may only be taken by a limited number of licenced netsmen, during the approved season (26th March to 31st May). It is also illegal to use nets to catch salmon in the North East.

Those who operate unlicensed nets risk prosecution, with unlimited fines and possible prison sentences available to the courts, and Environment Agency officers can seize equipment and vehicles.

Information about illegal fishing can be reported to the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Minister announces new measures to bolster UK's resilience

Lead Minister for Resilience and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Kit Malthouse MP, announced new measures to bolster the UK's resilience on a visit to the Met Office yesterday (Monday 15 August).

Minister Malthouse visited the Met Office, based in Exeter, to see how their

forecasting expertise feeds into government planning to tackle severe weather and how the agency worked closely with Government and other partners to give people plenty of warning and advice about staying safe in the recent extreme heat.

The Minister announced the launch of a new public emergency text alert system for the UK, as well as changes to the Civil Contingencies Secretariat – the Cabinet Office’s emergency planning and response team.

Speaking in the Operations Centre of the Met Office, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Kit Malthouse MP, said:

“To make sure that government continues to offer the best possible prevention and protection against threats, we are shaking up how we prepare for and respond to emergencies, strengthening the effective resilience capability we already have in place.

“We will launch a new public emergency alerts system in the Autumn which will focus on extreme weather, revolutionising our ability to ‘warn and inform’ people who are in significant and immediate danger. These alerts will be sent direct to people’s mobiles giving details of the emergency – such as local flooding – explaining what to do and how to seek help.

“Our vital COBR unit – which leads the government’s response to acute domestic and international emergencies – will be bolstered by a dedicated team helping to future-proof us from harm. This National Resilience Framework Team will take a deeper look at our approach to risk and how we mitigate it and help us take huge leaps forward in terms of collecting, analysing and using live data.”

Ian Cameron, Director of Markets at the Met Office, commented:

“The right messaging helps people take action to stay safe. It is clear that we are seeing an increase in the number of extreme weather events in the UK and overseas. Just this summer we have seen temperatures in the UK exceed 40C for the first time on record, followed closely by the heatwave which ended earlier this week. Communicating effectively is imperative so we can warn and alert people, ensuring they are aware and have more time to take action and look after themselves, their friends and family.”

Minister Malthouse spoke with a range of staff in the Met Office to learn more about their work, from the Meteorologists who lead on weather forecasts, to the Space Weather Operations team who are part of just one of three space weather prediction centres in the world, monitoring potentially disruptive solar activity for government and industry.

The [emergency alerts system](#), which will focus on events like extreme weather and warning the public where there is a risk to life, will be launched in the autumn following a public awareness campaign. The free message will give details of the emergency – local flooding or wildfires, for example – what to do and how to seek help, and will relay urgent messages to over 85% of mobile phones in areas affected.

Changes to the Civil Contingencies Secretariat – the Cabinet Office’s emergency planning and response team – will see a COBR Unit continuing to lead the government’s response to acute emergencies, and work on longer term planning being driven forward by a separate team dedicated to strengthening the UK’s underlying resilience. This National Resilience Framework Team in the Planning and Analysis Secretariat will take a deeper look at the government’s approach to risk and how it is mitigated as well as collecting and analysing live data to improve future responses to emergencies.