

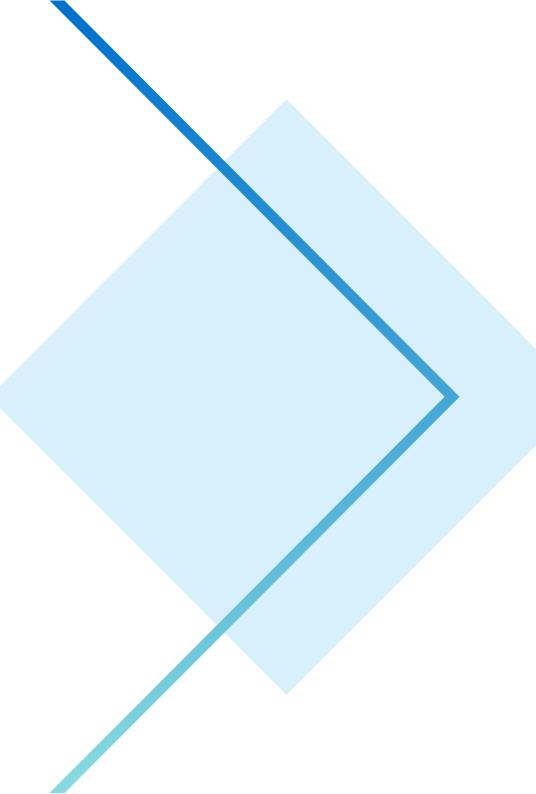
Review of simplified liquidations: 2021–2023

Report 789 | August 2024

About this report

This report outlines the findings from our review of simplified liquidations for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. It also provides ASIC's observations on simplified liquidation data.

This report will be of interest to registered liquidators, industry bodies, academics and policy makers.



Contents

Executive summary	2
Our review	4
Adoption of simplified liquidation process	4
Time taken to finalise simplified liquidations	4
Creditor profile	5
Receipts and payments	5
Remuneration	5
Dividends	5
Reports about possible offences and misconduct	6
ASIC observations on form completion	6
Reasons for low uptake of simplified process	6
ASIC's next steps	7
Index of tables and figures	8
Appendix 1: Types of director-initiated insolvent liquidations	10
Appendix 2: Review methodology	14
Appendix 3: Supporting tables and figures	17
Appendix 4: Reports about possible offences and misconduct	27
Appendix 5: ASIC observations on form completion	28
Appendix 6: Limitations on data	29
Appendix 7: Accessible versions of figures	30
Kev terms and related information	35

Executive summary

A simplified liquidation (SL) process is a streamlined, alternative process that eligible companies undertaking a creditors' voluntary liquidation (CVL) have the option of adopting. The eligibility criteria for companies include having liabilities not exceeding \$1 million (eligible CVLs).

The SL process commenced on 1 January 2021. It was introduced to reduce regulation and complexity for small business by allowing for a faster and lower-cost liquidation process that would, in turn, increase returns to creditors and employees.

Note: See paragraph 7.57, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, Corporate insolvency in Australia, July 2023 (PJC Report).

To find out about the uptake of the SL process and the associated outcomes, ASIC reviewed simplified liquidations for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023.

Despite the increase in insolvencies, we observed a very low uptake of the simplified liquidation process – liquidators of just 82 CVLs adopted the SL process during the review period.

We also observed that simplified liquidations were shorter and a higher percentage paid a dividend to creditors compared to eligible CVLs. However, the average dividend rate for unsecured creditors was lower compared to eligible CVLs that paid a dividend.

There were no material differences in the creditor profile or in remuneration paid to registered liquidators of the two populations.

We encourage registered liquidators to read this report, along with its appendices, and consider whether adopting a simplified liquidation would be appropriate where eligibility criteria are met.

UPTAKE OF SIMPLIFIED LIQUIDATIONS

COMPARISON OF LIQUIDATION PROCESSES[†]

Between January 2021 and June 2023:
10,541 creditors' voluntary liquidations commenced 82 simplified liquidations were adopted
By December 2023:
4,867 of the 10,541 creditors' voluntary liquidations had been finalised
3,978 of these were eligible* for a simplified liquidation
← 61 out of 82 simplified liquidations were finalised.^

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Fewer than 1 in 10

registered liquidators (58) adopted the simplified process.

Most adopted the simplified process for only one appointment.

Once only	34
Twice	11
Thurs ou many times	12

No. of times simplified process adopted

	Creditors' voluntary liquidation (liabilities <\$1m)	Simplified liquidation
Time taken to finalise liquidation	286 days	230 days
Total payments made	\$28,011	\$35,920
Liquidator remuneration	\$17,965	\$19,648
Remuneration as percentage of total payments	63%	58%
Percentage of CVLs/SLs that paid dividends to:		
unsecured creditors	4%	11%
all creditors (employee, secured and unsecured)	8%	13%

^{*} These CVLs appeared to be eligible based on having liabilities not exceeding \$1 million.

No. of RLs

[^] Of the remaining unfinalised SLs, 16 were ongoing as at 31 December 2023 and 5 had reverted to a CVL.

[†]Comparison figures are averages and based on data from liquidations that commenced between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2023 and were finalised by 31 December 2023 (CVL, n=3,978; SL, n=61).

Our review

We reviewed selected data for all SLs and CVLs that commenced during the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023 (review period). The purpose of our review was to:

- find out the outcomes from the 82 CVLs that had adopted the SL process
- determine whether any changes are required to ASIC's forms and the guidance on how to complete them, and
- obtain data that could inform future policy and any potential review of Australia's insolvency system (such as the comprehensive review foreshadowed in the PJC Report).

To see what might influence the adoption of the SL process, we also reviewed CVLs that commenced during the review period and were finalised by 31 December 2023.

Note: In this report, we refer to CVLs that were prima facie eligible to adopt the SL process as 'eligible CVLs' (i.e. based only on the criterion of having liabilities not exceeding \$1 million). For more information, see Appendix 2: Review methodology.

As at 30 June 2023, there were 654 registered liquidators and only 58 (8.9%) had adopted the SL process as liquidator of a CVL.

Adoption of simplified liquidation process

Between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2023, 10,541 CVLs commenced. The SL process was adopted in just 82 of these liquidations.

To determine the population of CVLs that might have been eligible to adopt the SL process (based only on having liabilities not exceeding \$1 million), we looked at the 4,867 of the 10,459 CVLs that had not adopted the SL process, which were finalised by 31 December 2023. Of these, 3,978 appeared to have been eligible CVLs.

As at 30 June 2023, there were 654 registered liquidators (RLs) and only 58 (8.9%) had adopted the SL process as liquidator of a CVL. Of those, 34 had adopted the SL process in only one appointment.

Note: For detailed data on the findings presented in this report, see Appendix 3: Supporting tables and figures.

Time taken to finalise simplified liquidations

The data suggests that SLs take less time to finalise than CVLs: 74.4% of SLs that commenced during the review period were finalised by 31 December 2023, compared to only 46.2% of eligible CVLs. This is possibly influenced by a simpler asset base that lends itself to quicker asset realisations.

Most SLs in the review period were finalised between six months and one year after commencement. The median number of days to finalise an SL, excluding ongoing liquidations and those that reverted to a CVL, was 184 days. The average was 230 days.

The median number of days taken to finalise eligible CVLs was 239; the average was 286.

Creditor profile

Only 889 (18.3%) of the 4,867 CVLs that commenced during the review period and finalised by 31 December 2023 were, based solely on having liabilities exceeding \$1 million, ineligible to adopt the SL process. This suggests there may be an opportunity for liquidators to consider adopting the SL process in more CVLs where all eligibility criteria are met.

The median estimated creditor liabilities for SLs were \$162,342. The comparative median estimated creditor liabilities for eligible CVLs were \$218,578.

The stratification of the creditor profile of SLs was not materially different from the population of eligible CVLs for the review period.

During the review period, 80.3% of SLs had liabilities between \$0 and \$400,000, compared to 73.2% for eligible CVLs.

Receipts and payments

The receipts and payments profiles for finalised SLs and finalised eligible CVLs were very similar. For the 61 finalised SLs, total receipts and payments averaged \$35,920. Remuneration made up 57.6% of total payments, followed by dividends to unsecured creditors (23.8%) and dividends to priority creditors (7.7%).

For the 3,978 eligible CVLs total receipts averaged \$27,982 and total payments averaged \$28,011.

Note: This discrepancy was due to a small number of final returns (i.e. Form 5603 End of administration return) lodged with ASIC where the summary receipts and payments did not balance. There was no discrepancy between receipts and payments for SLs.

Remuneration

The average remuneration paid in the 61 finalised SLs was \$19,648, compared to \$17,965 in eligible CVLs.

There appeared to be no material difference in remuneration paid in SLs and eligible CVLs during the review period. Of the liquidators who adopted the SL process, 78.7% were paid remuneration of between \$0 and \$20,000, compared with 75.3% of eligible CVL liquidators. No remuneration was paid in 3.3% of SLs, compared with 5.8% of eligible CVLs.

Dividends

The number of companies paying a dividend (priority, unsecured and secured) in the SL finalised population was greater than (13.1%) the number of companies paying a dividend in the eligible CVL population (7.8%). The average value of total dividends paid was also greater in the SL finalised population (\$86,197) compared to the eligible CVL population (\$60,023).

However, among the SLs that paid a dividend, the average dividend rate for unsecured creditors was lower at 14.5 cents in the dollar compared to 23.4 cents in the dollar for CVLs that paid a dividend.

Reports about possible offences and misconduct

Of the SLs that commenced during the review period, 27 SLs lodged an initial statutory report (ISR); however, only 15 of them were lodged under the correct legislative reference. There did not appear to be any misconduct that met the requirement for there to be a material adverse effect on creditors. Many indicated the SL was going to pay less than 50 cents in the dollar, which is not a requirement for an ISR in an SL. For more analysis, see Appendix 4: Reports about possible offences and misconduct.

ASIC observations on form completion

We amended the ISR form business rules to mitigate identified inconsistencies in ISRs lodged.

We wrote to RLs where we saw inconsistencies and errors as part of this review to better understand the reasons.

We will provide further information to RLs to promote consistency in the way forms referred to in this report are completed.

For more information, including recommendations on form completion, see Appendix 5: ASIC observations on form completion and Appendix 6: Limitations on data.

Reasons for low uptake of simplified process

The <u>PJC Report</u> summarised issues identified in evidence as possible reasons for the low uptake of SLs. Reasons included:

- the complexity, cost and efficiency of the SL process is not significantly different from the standard CVL process
- > tight timeframes for adoption of the SL process
- few incentives for insolvency practitioners or creditors to use the pathway (because of the two points above), and
- the rush to implement the SL reforms had contributed to ineffective policy settings.

Note: See paragraph 7.58, PJC Report.

A further reason for the low uptake may be because the decision to adopt an SL process is made by the liquidator, not the director. As noted by ASIC:

Consideration might be given to the directors electing whether the appointment should commence using the simplified liquidation process with the appointed liquidator, then converting it to a full liquidation, if the directors' judgement that the company satisfied the eligibility criteria for simplified liquidation is incorrect.

Committee Hansard, 1 March 2023, p. 32.

About the criticism for the low uptake, Treasury noted:

It's not intended to replace the insolvency system; it's meant to only cater to a very particular subset of cases. There are eligibility criteria that have been established for those two simplified systems (i.e. SBR and SL pathway), and those eligibility criteria are important because they're

trying to, first of all, enable only simple affairs to be considered because we are stripping out quite a lot of the typical regulatory processes you would go through, and you don't want to end up in a scenario where you are inviting people to misuse and abuse those simplified processes.

Committee Hansard, 13 December 2022, p. 14.

It was also noted in the PJC Report that:

... while the simplified liquidation pathway has only been in place for a short time, the early indications are that the drafting and implementation were rushed, leading to a potentially ineffective pathway. The committee acknowledges that moving quickly was important during the pandemic. However, appropriate consultation and policy designs should still be possible. The committee considers that the simplified liquidation pathway must be sufficiently simpler and cheaper than standard insolvency to incentivise its use.

Paragraph 7.104, PJC Report.

The data in this report will inform future inquiries and further reviews of the SL process. ASIC will support future reviews with additional data where possible.

We will continue to seek feedback from registered liquidators and other stakeholders about the SL process.

ASIC's next steps

To obtain a further understanding of the data and findings from this report, we will continue to seek feedback from registered liquidators and other stakeholders about the SL process.

To assist RLs, we intend to provide additional guidance on the proper recording of receipts and payments in our user guide for Form 5603 End of administration return and Form 5602 Annual administration return.

We will also continue monitoring lodgement of ISRs and continue liaising with Treasury where necessary.

Index of tables and figures

Tables

Table 1: When a company is eligible for an SL process	11
Table 2: When a liquidator may adopt or cease an SL process	12
Table 3: Similarities and differences between CVLs and SLs	13
Table 4: The appointment population (CVLs and SLs that commenced 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2023)	14
Table 5: CVLs that commenced 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2023 and were finalised by 31 December 2023 where SL not adopted	14
Table 6: CVLs prima facie ineligible for SL due to prior restructuring	15
Table 7: SL and CVL by state/territory (for appointment population)	15
Table 8: Number of SL processes adopted per registered liquidator	17
Table 9: Outcome of SLs in the appointment population	17
Table 10: Outcome of CVLs in the appointment population	
Table 11: SL and CVL finalised populations estimated liabilities	19
Table 12: Estimated creditor liabilities for SL finalised population – All creditors (priority, unsecured and secured)	
Table 13: Estimated creditor liabilities for SL finalised population – Unsecured creditors only	20
Table 14: SL finalised population – Remuneration	
Table 15: SL and CVL finalised populations – Remuneration	24
Table 16: SL and CVL finalised population – Dividends paid	25
Table 17: Receipt and payment transaction categories from final returns	26
Table 18: SL process adopted by state/territory (for appointment population)	30
Table 19: SL process adopted by industry (for appointment population)	
Table 20: Time taken to finalise liquidations for finalised SL and CVL populations	
Table 21: SL finalised population – Total receipts	
Table 22: SL finalised population – Other receipts by general ledger name	32
Table 23: SL finalised population – Total payments	
Table 24: Receipt categories as percentage of total receipts for SL and CVL finalised populations	
Table 25: Payment categories as percentage of total payments for SL and CVL finalised populations	34

Figures

Figure 1: Number of SL processes adopted by state/territory (for appointment population)	13
Figure 2: SL process adopted by industry (for appointment population)	
Figure 3: Time taken to finalise liquidations for finalised SL and CVL populations	18
Figure 4: SL finalised population – Total receipts (\$)	
Figure 5: SL finalised population – Other receipts by general ledger name (\$)	
Figure 6: SL finalised population – Total payments (\$)	
Figure 7: Receipt categories as percentage of total receipts for SL and CVL finalised populations	
Figure 8: Payment categories as percentage of total payments for SL and CVL finalised populations	

Appendix 1: Types of director-initiated insolvent liquidations

The liquidation of an insolvent company allows an independent registered liquidator to take control of a company so its affairs can be wound up in an orderly and fair way to benefit creditors.

Creditors' voluntary liquidation

Historically the most common type of liquidation process has been a CVL (approximately 67% over the period 2014–2024).

A CVL begins when:

- directors convene a meeting at which an insolvent company's shareholders (who are often also directors in a small business) resolve to wind up the company and appoint a liquidator, or
- creditors vote for liquidation following a voluntary administration or a terminated/finalised deed of company arrangement.

Simplified liquidation

In 2020, the Australian Government introduced legislation that would change Australia's insolvency framework for small business from 1 January 2021. These changes included a new SL process for eligible small business and a simplified debt restructuring process. ASIC provided a review of the small business restructuring process in Report 756 Review of small business restructuring process (REP 756).

To be eligible for an SL, companies must meet a set of criteria – see Table 1.

If the company meets the eligibility criteria, a liquidator of a CVL may adopt the SL process if certain other requirements are met – see Table 2.

In certain circumstances, a liquidator must cease to follow the SL process. These circumstances are also listed in Table 2.

The SL process shares many similarities with the CVL process, but there are also some key differences – see Table 3.

Table 1: When a company is eligible for an SL process

When is a company eligible for an SL process? (all apply)	Does ASIC hold data?
The company must be in a CVL (the triggering event must have occurred on or after 1 January 2021)	Yes
Company liabilities on the liquidators appointment must not exceed \$1 million	Yes – on finalisation of the SL process (from final returns)
The company is unable to pay its debts in full within 12 months	No – no legal requirement for lodgement of this information with ASIC
The directors must within five business days (after the day of the meeting of the company at which the resolution for the winding up was passed), have given to the liquidator: (a) a report on the company's business, property, affairs and financial circumstances, and (b) a declaration they believe, on reasonable grounds, the eligibility criteria will be met	No – no legal requirement for lodgement of this information with ASIC
No person who is a director of the company, or who has been a director within 12 months before the date the liquidator was first appointed, has been a director of another company that has been subject to the SL process within the period of the preceding seven years	Yes
The company has not undergone restructuring or been subject of an SL process in the preceding seven years	Yes
The company has given returns, notices, statements, applications and other documents required under the <i>Income Tax Assessment Act 1997</i>	No – no legal requirement for lodgement of this information with ASIC

Table 2: When a liquidator may adopt or cease an SL process

When a liquidator may adopt the SL process	When a liquidator must cease to follow the SL process
They believe on reasonable grounds the eligibility criteria are met	The eligibility criteria are no longer met
Not more than 20 business days have passed since a liquidator was first appointed in the CVL	The liquidator believes on reasonable grounds that the company, or a director of the company, has engaged in conduct involving fraud or dishonesty and that conduct has had, or is likely to have, a material adverse effect on the interests of creditors as a whole or of a class of creditors as a whole
The liquidator has given each member and creditor, at least 10 business days before adopting the SL process, written notice of:	N/A
(a) a statement they believe on reasonable grounds the eligibility criteria will be met	
(b) an outline of the SL process	
(c) a statement they will not adopt the SL process if at least 25% in value of creditors direct the liquidator in writing not to adopt the SL process, and	
(d) prescribed information, if any, on how the creditors may give a direction in writing not to adopt the SL process	
The liquidator must not adopt the SL process if, before the liquidator adopts the process, more than 25% in value of creditors provide a written statement to the liquidator requesting the liquidator not to adopt	N/A

Table 3: Similarities and differences between CVLs and SLs

Task	Creditors' voluntary liquidation	Simplified liquidation
Hold meetings of creditors	Yes – in person, virtually or hybrid (in person and virtual)	No
Pass resolutions	Yes – in person or by proxy at a creditors' meeting or where no meeting is held, by the 'proposal without a meeting process'	Yes – by 'proposal without a meeting process' only
Form a committee of inspection	Yes	No
Report to creditors within three months of the liquidator's appointment	Yes	Yes
Lodge an ISR with ASIC – offence or misconduct	Yes after forming a view that a person may have committed an offence in relation to the company or engaged in misconduct	Yes after forming an opinion that an offence has occurred that may have a material adverse effect on the interests of creditors
Lodge an ISR with ASIC – dividends less than 50 cents in the dollar	Yes after forming a view that the company may be unable to pay its unsecured creditors more than 50 cents in the dollar	No
Lodge a supplementary statutory report with ASIC – misconduct	Maybe – an external administrator or controller may lodge a supplementary statutory report about matters desirable to bring to ASIC's attention or may be directed to lodge the report by the court.	Maybe – a liquidator who has adopted the SL process may lodge a supplementary statutory report about matters desirable to bring to ASIC's attention or may be directed to lodge the report by the court
Can creditors make reasonable requests for information from the liquidator?	Yes	Yes
If funds are available, can the liquidator pay a dividend to creditors?	Yes – interim and final dividends	Yes – one dividend payment only

Appendix 2: Review methodology

Data sources

We reviewed the ASIC company register and forms lodged with ASIC for the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2023.

Our primary source of data for the analysis of the finalised population was final returns. The data included in these forms included the value of creditors so we could determine how many CVLs had liabilities not exceeding \$1 million.

We reviewed transaction categories data on receipts and payments from the final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments), including liquidator remuneration and dividends paid.

We also analysed data from ISRs lodged for SLs in the appointment population.

Note 1: Some forms contained errors, inconsistencies and misclassifications. We therefore made certain assumptions when interpreting some of the data. Where relevant, we wrote to registered liquidators to confirm or clarify certain disclosures made in those forms. We also provided information to these liquidators about how to complete forms and adhere to requirements of the *Corporations Act 2001* (Corporations Act).

Note 2: Data presented in this report will not reconcile to ASIC's published statistics (which are primarily based on data about the appointment of external administrators) or other published data unless specifically stated. This is because the data in this report is principally based on data extracted from forms lodged by external administrators at the completion of the external administration and does not include data from unfinalised liquidations.

Populations reviewed

Table 4: The appointment population (CVLs and SLs that commenced 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2023)

Description	No. of companies
CVLs commenced during the review period	10,541
SLs adopted during the review period	82
CVLs where SL not adopted	10,459

Source: ASIC Series 2 insolvency statistics.

Table 5: CVLs that commenced 1 January 2021 – 30 June 2023 and were finalised by 31 December 2023 where SL not adopted

Description	No. of companies
Finalised CVLs with liabilities >\$1 m (i.e. ineligible for SL)	889
Finalised CVLs with liabilities ≤\$1 million (i.e. prima facie eligible for SL – 'eligible CVLs')	3,978
Total finalised CVLs	4,867
CVLs ongoing at 31 December 2023	5,592
Total CVLs where SL not adopted	10,459

Source: Final returns lodged by 31 December 2023 for CVLs that commenced between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2023.

Table 6: CVLs prima facie ineligible for SL due to prior restructuring

Description	Number of companies
CVLs commenced during the review period that had previously engaged in a	
restructuring process	16
CVL finalised by 31 December 2023	5
SL finalised by 31 December 2023	1
CVL ongoing as at 31 December 2023	10

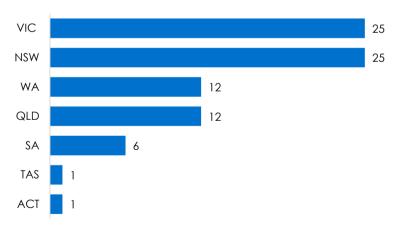
Source: ASIC Series 2 insolvency statistics and final returns. **Note 1:** Of the five CVLs that had lodged a final return by 31 December 2023, three had liabilities not exceeding \$1 million and two had liabilities exceeding \$1 million. **Note 2:** Due to the low number we have not excluded those three companies from the analysis of the 3,978 finalised CVLs.

Table 7: SL and CVL by state/territory (for appointment population)

State	SLs	CVLs
New South Wales	30.5%	41.3%
Victoria	30.5%	26.6%
Queensland	14.6%	18.7%
Western Australia	14.6%	6.8%
Other	9.8%	6.6%
Total	100%	100%

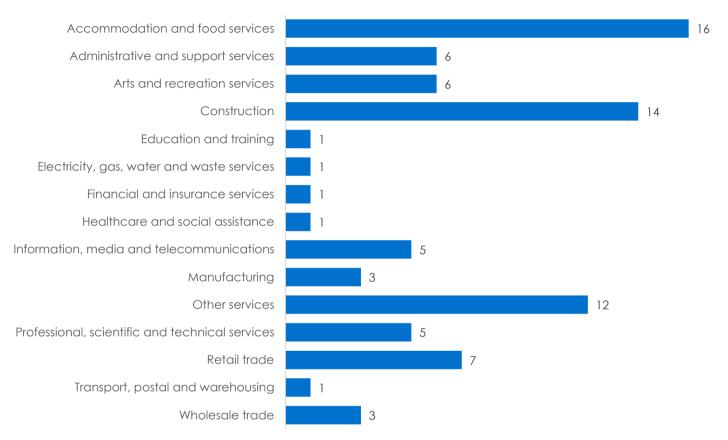
Source: ASIC Series 1 insolvency statistics for SLs for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. **Note:** This data is based on a company's principal place of business.

Figure 1: Number of SL processes adopted by state/territory (for appointment population)



Source: ASIC Series 1 insolvency statistics for SLs for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. **Note:** See Table 18 for an accessible version of this figure.





Source: ASIC Series 1A insolvency statistics for SLs for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. Note 1: See Table 19 for an accessible version of this figure. Note 2: We have relied on the industry classifications selected by the RL when lodging appointment documents. Note 3: The main industry groups for the SL appointment population were accommodation and food services (20%), construction (17%) and other services (15%). Note 4: In comparison, for the CVL appointment population, the top three industry groups were construction (30%), accommodation and food (17%) and other services (8%).

Appendix 3: Supporting tables and figures

Table 8: Number of SL processes adopted per registered liquidator

SL processes adopted per RL	Number of RLs
1	34
2	11
3	8
4	1
5	1
6	1
7	0
8	2
Total	58

Source: Form 505 Notification of appointment or cessation of an external administrator (for liquidations that commenced during the review period). **Note 1:** Of the 82 SLs, 29 had joint and several appointees (no more than 2 appointees) and 53 had a sole appointee. By 31 December 2023, 61 of these SLs were finalised. **Note 2:** As at 30 June 2023, there were 654 registered liquidators (from <u>Insolvency statistics – Series 4 Quarterly registered liquidator statistics).</u> Of these, only 58 RLs (8.9%) adopted an SL process. **Note 3:** Only five RLs had adopted an SL process in more than three CVL appointments (including on a joint and several basis).

Table 9: Outcome of SLs in the appointment population

Outcome	FY 21	FY 22	FY23	Total
SL commenced	23	29	30	82
SL finalised	18	23	20	61
SL finalised as a percentage of SLs adopted	78.3%	79.3%	66.7%	74.4%
SL reversion to CVL	4	1	0	5
Ongoing SL (unfinalised)	1	5	10	16

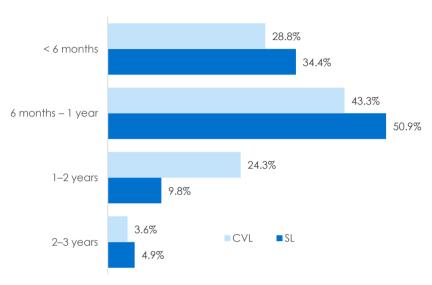
Source: Form 505 lodged with ASIC for SL processes adopted during the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023 and finalised by 31 December 2023. **Note:** 6.1% of SLs reverted to a CVL and 19.5% were ongoing. The reversion of SLs back to CVLs was concentrated early in the review period.

Table 10: Outcome of CVLs in the appointment population

Outcome	FY 21	FY 22	FY23	Total
CVLs commenced	1,681	3,572	5,288	10,541
CVLs finalised	1,132	2,083	1,652	4,867
CVLs finalised as percentage of CVLs commenced	67.3%	58.3%	31.2%	46.2%
Eligible CVLs finalised (i.e. ≤\$1 m in liabilities)	870	1,720	1,388	3,978
Eligible CVLs finalised as percentage of CVLs commenced	51.8%	48.2%	26.2%	37.7%
Ongoing CVLs (unfinalised)	549	1,489	3,636	5,674

Source: ASIC Series 2 insolvency statistics.

Figure 3: Time taken to finalise liquidations for finalised SL and CVL populations



Source: Form 505 lodged with ASIC for the finalised populations. **Note 1:** SL finalised population: Median number of days = 184; average number of days = 230 (excluding ongoing liquidations, and those that reverted to a CVL). **Note 2:** CVL finalised population: Median number of days = 239 days; average = 286. **Note 3:** For the 16 SLs ongoing at 31 December 2023, the oldest liquidation was 1,048 days (2.87 years), the median age of those liquidations was 440 days (1.20 years) and the average age of those liquidations was 486 days (1.33 days). **Note 4:** See Table 20 for an accessible version of this figure.

Table 11: SL and CVL finalised populations estimated liabilities

Total liabilities	Number of SLs	% of total SLs	Number of eligible CVLs	% of total eligible CVLs
\$0-\$100,000	19	31.1%	1,009	25.4%
\$100,001-\$200,000	15	24.6%	849	21.3%
\$200,001-\$300,000	8	13.1%	597	15.0%
\$300,001-\$400,000	7	11.5%	456	11.5%
\$400,001-\$500,000	3	4.9%	304	7.6%
\$500,001–\$600,000	2	3.3%	244	6.1%
\$600,001–\$700,000	1	1.6%	169	4.2%
\$700,001–\$800,000	1	3.3%	136	3.4%
\$800,001-\$900,000	3	3.3%	106	2.8%
\$900,001-\$1,000,000	0	0.0%	108	2.7%
>\$1,000,001	2	3.3%	0	0.0%
Total	61	100%	3,978	100%

Source: Final returns. **Note 1:** The majority (80.3%) of the 61 SLs in the SL finalised population, had total estimated liabilities of between \$0 (one company) and \$400,000. For finalised eligible CVLs, most companies (73.2%) had total estimated liabilities of between \$0 and \$400,000. There were 72 companies that had no creditors reported. **Note 2:** The final return reported total estimated liabilities exceeding the \$1 million liability eligibility threshold in two SLs. Both these SLs were subsequently deregistered and are included in the SL finalised population. We made enquiries with the relevant liquidators and they advised us that the reasons the SLs appeared to not meet the \$1 million threshold were an error in the final return duplicating creditor amounts, and inclusion of a disputed increased proof of debt lodged after payment of the first and final (only) dividend. **Note 3:** A total of 623 priority and unsecured creditors for SLs (in number) were owed \$16,387,972 over the review period – see Table 12.

Table 12: Estimated creditor liabilities for SL finalised population – All creditors (priority, unsecured and secured)

FY	No. of SLs	No. of creditors	Total value \$	Avg. value \$	Min. est. value \$	Max. est. value \$
FY21	18	215	6,500,221	361,123	90,955	1,018,267
FY22	23	151	4,631,893	201,387	2,443	874,955
FY23	20	257	5,255,858	262,793	0	1,444,268
Total for SLs	61	623	16,387,972	268,655	0	1,444,268
Total for CVLs	3,978	37,546	1,153,010,528	289,847	0	999,949

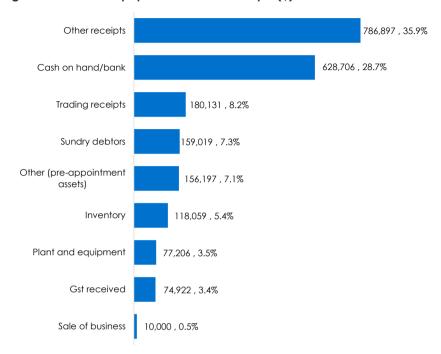
Source: Final returns. **Note 1:** The total value for SLs includes one or two 'secured creditors' for five companies, with a total value of \$741,650. **Note 2:** The row Total for SLs and Total for CVLs do not show a sum for average value, minimum or maximum estimated values, but show the average value and the minimum and maximum estimated value for all SLs or CVLs. **Note 3:** The median estimated creditor liabilities for the SL finalised population was \$162,342. The median estimated creditor liabilities for the CVL finalised population was \$218,578.

Table 13: Estimated creditor liabilities for SL finalised population – Unsecured creditors only

FY	No. of SLs	No. of creditors	Total value \$	Avg. value (per form) \$	Min. est. value \$	Max. est. value \$
FY21	18	160	5,418,226	301,013	64,711	895,072
FY22	23	136	4,539,933	197,388	2,443	874,955
FY23	20	205	4,977,917	248,896	0	1,304,459
Total for SLs	61	501	14,936,076	244,854	0	1,304,459
Total for CVLs	3,978	28,789	1,032,687,368	259,600	0	991,661

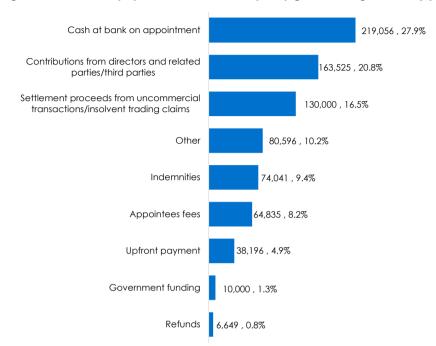
Source: Final returns. **Note 1:** Includes two companies that exceeded the maximum \$1 million threshold. **Note 2:** The row Total for SLs and Total for CVLs do not show a sum for average, minimum or maximum values, but show the average value, minimum and maximum value for all SLs or CVL.

Figure 4: SL finalised population – Total receipts (\$)



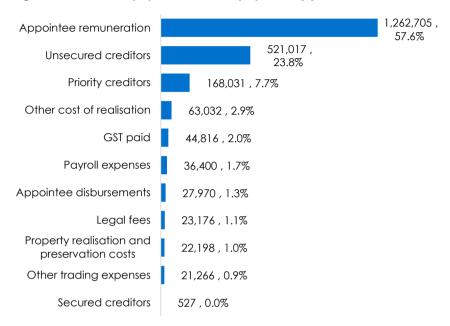
Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note 1:**The summary of final receipts and payments descriptions for 'other (pre-appointment assets)' included 'other assets', 'other current assets', 'pre-appointment debtors', 'cash at bank on appointment', 'other refunds', and 'director indemnities'. **Note 2:** See Table 21 for an accessible version of this figure.

Figure 5: SL finalised population – Other receipts by general ledger name (\$)



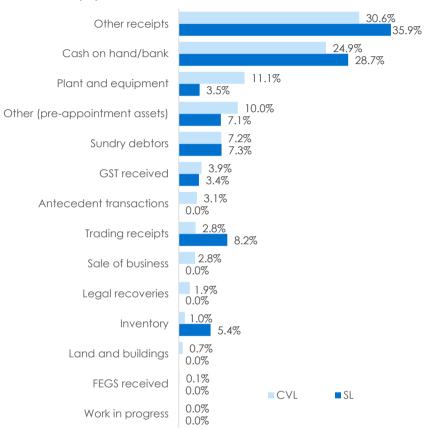
Source: Final returns (Annexure A - Summary of final receipts and payments). Note 1: Cash at bank on appointment has been misclassified in this figure and relates to one company. This misclassification should have been correctly allocated to the cash on hand/bank transaction category. If correctly classified, cash on hand/bank would increase to \$847,762 and would be 38% of total receipts, replacing 'other receipts' as the largest source of receipts. Other receipts would reduce by an equivalent amount. Note 2: Thirty-five percent of 'other receipts' comprised director and third-party contributions or indemnity funding. These were described in the final returns as 'contributions from directors', 'third-party funding', 'indemnity', 'director's indemnity', 'advance for costs', 'upfront payment', 'fee indemnity', and 'contributions'. Note 3: 'Indemnities' were described in numerous ways (such as 'fee indemnity,' 'indemnity' and 'directors indemnity'). We grouped these items together as indemnities. Several descriptions appeared to relate to director and third-party contributions, such as 'contributions', 'directors contributions' and 'third-party funding'. We grouped these as 'contributions from directors and related parties/third parties'. It is not clear whether the item 'upfront payment' is a director contribution or an indemnity or if 'appointee fees' was a payment or contribution for remuneration. Note 4: We have not restated any account balances. Note 5: See Table 22 for an accessible version of this figure.

Figure 6: SL finalised population – Total payments (\$)



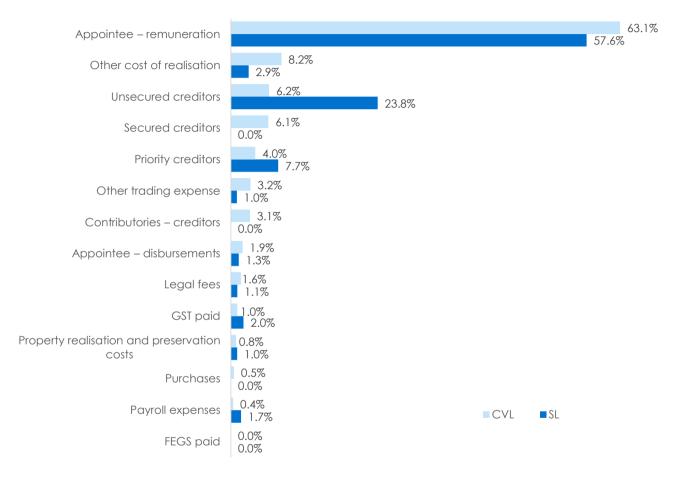
Source: Final returns (Annexure A 'Summary of final receipts and payments'). **Note 1:** SL trading receipts and payments, and payroll expenses related to four companies (most relating to one company). Trading receipts comprised sales and miscellaneous income, and trading payments comprised refunds, credit card merchant fees, stamp duty, professional fees, bank charges and advertising and insurance. **Note 2:** See Table 23 for an accessible version of this figure.

Figure 7: Receipt categories as percentage of total receipts for SL and CVL finalised populations



Source: Final returns (Annexure A 'Summary of final receipts and payments'). **Note 1:** For the CVL finalised population, total receipts were \$111,313,298 and total payments were \$111,425,815 (average total receipts: \$27,982, average total payments: \$28,011) (median: \$13,097 and \$13,113 respectively). **Note 2:** The results for receipts from plant and equipment for SLs (3.5%) and CVLs (11.1%) suggest CVLs are likely to have other asset categories available for realisation, requiring more complex work. **Note 3:** A small number of SLs (4) that 'traded' caused some divergences, with trading receipts for SLs at 8.2% compared to CVLs of 2.8% and may be a result of misclassifications. **Note 4:** See Table 24 for an accessible version of this figure.





Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note 1:** Limited payments for legal fees for SLs (1.1%) and CVLs (1.6%) indicate a lack of legal actions, which would otherwise prolong the liquidation. **Note 2:** See Table 25 for an accessible version of this figure.

Table 14: SL finalised population – Remuneration

FY	No. of SLs	Total \$	Avg. \$	Min. \$	Max. \$
FY21	18	518,599	28,811	0	172,378
FY22	23	309,697	13,465	5,382	50,206
FY23	20	370,242	18,512	0	136,231
Total for SLs	61	1,198,538	19,648	0	172,378
Total for CVLs	3,978	71,465,492	17,965	0	1,154,415

Source: Final returns (Section 5 – Details of remuneration). **Note 1:** In two SLs, no remuneration was paid. **Note 2:** The final return remuneration data from Section 5 of the final return is lower than the total from Annexure A of the final return (Summary of final receipts and payments) due to misclassification in two companies in the general ledger totalling \$64,126. **Note 3:** Total disbursements paid to liquidators in the SL finalised population was \$27,970 with an average of \$459. Disbursements included bank charges, advertising costs, printing, stationery and postage, 'liquidators expenses' and sundry expenses amongst others.

Table 15: SL and CVL finalised populations – Remuneration

Range	Total for SLs	% of total for SLs	Total for CVLs	% of total for CVLs
\$0	2	3.3%	232	5.8%
\$1-\$10,000	25	41.0%	1,181	29.7%
\$10,001-\$20,000	21	34.4%	1,582	39.8%
\$20,001-\$30,000	3	4.9%	450	11.3%
\$30,001-\$40,000	3	4.9%	207	5.2%
\$40,001-\$50,000	2	3.3%	123	3.1%
\$50,001-\$60,000	1	1.6%	60	1.5%
\$60,001-\$70,000	2	3.3%	38	1.0%
\$70,001-\$80,000	0	0.0%	29	0.7%
\$80,001-\$90,000	0	0.0%	16	0.4%
\$90,001-\$100,000	0	0.0%	18	0.5%
>\$100,001	2	3.3%	42	1.1%
Total	61	100%	3,978	100%

Source: Final returns (Section 5 – Details of remuneration). **Note:** Of the SL finalised population, 78.7% paid remuneration of between \$0 and \$20,000. The remuneration profile for the CVL finalised population was similar, with 75.3% paying remuneration of between \$0 and \$20,000 (of these, 6% paid no remuneration).

Table 16: SL and CVL finalised population – Dividends paid

Dividend category	Number of SLs	SL average rate cents/\$	SL average value \$	SL total value \$	Number of CVLs	CVL average rate cents/\$	CVL average value \$	Total value \$
Secured	1	N/A	527	527	40	N/A	67,809	2,712,345
Priority dividend – wages and super	3	72.6	10,628	31,883	158	63.4	20,520	3,242,152
Priority dividend – leave of absence	1	100	52,544	52,544	47	81.9	14,527	682,777
Priority dividend – retrenchment	1	100	83,605	83,605	19	79.8	24,165	459,138
Unsecured dividend	7	14.5	4,431	521,017	162	23.4	45,796	7,418,920
Deferred dividend	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A	Nil	N/Al	N/A	N/A
Contributories	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	N/A	N/A	4,031,717
Total that paid a dividend	8	N/A	86,197	689,574	309	N/A	60,023	18,547,049
Total finalised	61	-	-	-	3,978	-	-	-
Percentage of finalised which paid a dividend to unsecured creditors	11.5%	-	-	-	4.1%	-	-	-
Percentage of finalised which paid any dividend	13.1%	-	-	-	7.8%	-	-	-

Source: Final returns (Section 8 – Details of dividend). **Note 1:** Eight SLs and 309 CVLs paid a dividend. Number of SLs and CVLs paying any individual dividend category do not sum to the total SLs and CVLs in the table paying a dividend as there may be more than one dividend category paid for an SL or CVL in each of the finalised populations. **Note 2:** Three SLs paid a dividend to priority creditors of 100 cents in the dollar (none for CVLs) and one SL paid a dividend to priority creditors of less than 20 cents in the dollar. **Note 3:** No dividend rate cents/\$ provided for payments to secured creditors or contributories.

Table 17: Receipt and payment transaction categories from final returns

Receipts	Payments
Sale of business	Appointee – remuneration
Land and buildings	Appointee – disbursements
Plant and equipment	Legal fees
Cash on hand/bank	Property realisation and preservation costs
Work in progress	Other costs of realisation
Inventory	Payroll expenses
Sundry debtors	GST paid
Other (pre-appointment assets)	Payroll expenses
Legal recoveries	Secured creditors
Antecedent transactions	Purchases
Trading receipts	Other trading expense
Other receipts	FEGSs paid
GST received	Priority creditors
FEGS received	Unsecured creditors
	Secured creditors
	Deferred creditors
	Contributories creditors

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments list of transaction categories).

Note: These are the transaction categories available for RLs to select when completing Annexure A of the final return.

Appendix 4: Reports about possible offences and misconduct

Requirement to report possible offences and misconduct

A liquidator who has adopted the SL process is only required under regulation 5.5.05 of the *Corporations Regulations 2001* (Corporations Regulations) to report to ASIC if:

- in the opinion of the liquidator, there are reasonable grounds to believe specified persons (including past or present officers) may have engaged in conduct constituting an offence under a law of the Commonwealth or a state or territory in relation to the company, and
- that conduct has, or is likely to have, a material adverse effect on the interests of creditors or a class of creditors as a whole.

Unlike in a CVL, when the SL process is adopted there is no requirement for RLs to report to ASIC when the expected dividend to unsecured creditors is less than 50 cents in the dollar.

ISRs in relation to SL appointment population

Of the 77 SLs in the appointment population (excluding the five that reverted to a CVL), 27 (35%) lodged an ISR. There were:

- > 15 ISRs lodged under regulation 5.5.05, and
- 12 ISRs lodged under s533(1) of the Corporations Act.

Five of the 12 ISRs lodged under s533(1) incorrectly indicated on the ISR that the company was a CVL rather than an SL.

The reasons selected for lodging the ISR were:

- to report misconduct (20 ISRs) (e.g. insolvent trading (19), director duties (11), obligations to keep records (5) and other misconduct (1))
- the expected dividend to unsecured creditors was estimated to be less than 50 cents in the dollar (23 ISRs of which 6 ISRs were only for this purpose), and
- for statistical purposes only (7 ISRs).

Based on the information in the lodged ISRs, it is unclear how any of the reported misconduct meets the 'material adverse effect' test.

Note: There is no case law on this, but the <u>exposure draft explanatory statement for the Corporations Regulations</u> states, 'What amounts to a material detriment to the creditor depends on the nature and circumstances of the conduct, the company and the creditor involved.'

We found that registered liquidators of a further 45 companies lodged ISRs that incorrectly selected the appointment type as SL, when in many cases, they were actually CVLs. There were:

- 41 ISRs lodged under s533(1) of the Corporations Act, and
- 4 ISRs lodged under s438D of the Corporations Act.

ASIC released an update to the ISR transaction on 15 March 2024 to mitigate these errors in the context of forms lodged by ensuring the type of appointment selected matches the relevant section or regulation.

Appendix 5: ASIC observations on form completion

We compiled general observations about the data and lodged forms, including how those forms were completed, for SLs.

We identified one SL that did not meet the eligibility criteria as the company had undergone a restructuring in the preceding seven years – see Table 6. Therefore, this company should not have adopted the SL process. Registered liquidators should have processes and procedures in place to ensure compliance with the eligibility criteria before taking an appointment. This includes conducting current and historical company searches prior to a potential appointment.

We identified that some registered liquidators incorrectly classified the liquidation type. For instance, 18 final returns lodged at the conclusion of the SL incorrectly indicated the role was a liquidator of a CVL when they were a liquidator of an SL – see Appendix 6: Limitations on data.

Several ISRs were lodged by registered liquidators indicating they were either lodging in their capacity as a liquidator of an SL or under regulation 5.5.05, when they were not acting in the capacity as the liquidator of an SL.

There was also a lack of consistency across classifications of general ledger descriptions, and sometimes misclassifications. We dealt with this by making certain assumptions – see Note 3 of Figure 5, and Appendix 6.

When the forms are incomplete or incorrectly completed, it affects the quality of data and impacts ASIC's ability to publish meaningful and accurate statistics. Where we were able to, we reclassified the data and this is reflected in this report.

We wrote to registered liquidators regarding the inconsistencies or errors we observed. We will provide further information for registered liquidators to promote consistency in the way forms are completed.

Recommendations for registered liquidators

- Ensure appropriate care is taken when entering or exiting an SL process so that correct information is provided in final returns and ISRs
- > Ensure checklists and internal documents appropriately identify the nature of the appointment, including that the eligibility criteria have been met.
- Check that the general ledger account and transaction category selected are appropriate and applied consistently in your accounting package or Excel workbook to ensure consistency in both detailed and summary annexures in the final return and Form 5602 Annual administration return lodged – see Table 17.
- Ensure an ISR in an SL is lodged only if it meets the specific requirements of regulation 5.5.05, otherwise it may unnecessarily increase costs in the SL.

Appendix 6: Limitations on data

During the course of the review, we identified a number of qualitive issues with the data:

- One finalised SL (now deregistered) was ineligible to adopt the SL process because the company underwent a restructuring in the preceding seven years. We included this SL in our analysis even though it did not meet the eligibility criteria because the company adopted the SL process in the review period. The company did not meet the exemptions outlined in regulation 5.5.03(5) of the Corporations Regulations. We are considering the compliance implications of this matter.
- Eighteen final returns lodged at the conclusion of an SL incorrectly indicated the role was a CVL when the SL process had been adopted.
- We removed from this review a number of ISRs when the SL process had not been adopted or the winding up had reverted to a CVL (even though the ISR indicated that it was lodged in an SL or under regulation 5.5.05). ASIC has subsequently implemented business rules to the lodgement process for ISRs effective from 15 March 2024 to mitigate these inconsistencies in ISRs lodged.

Our analysis of receipts and payments, in particular 'other receipts', shows that some could have been more appropriately classified as 'cash on hand/bank'. We did not reclassify these amounts and have reported the data we received; however, we have explained in the notes (underneath tables/figures) what is a more likely classification.

Where relevant, we wrote to registered liquidators to confirm or clarify certain disclosures made in those forms, including explaining the law or what ASIC expects, where relevant.

The data limitations do not impact ASIC's conclusions in this report.

Appendix 7: Accessible versions of figures

This appendix is for people with visual or other impairments. It provides the underlying information for the figures presented in this report.

Table 18: SL process adopted by state/territory (for appointment population)

State	Number	% of total
ACT	1	1.3%
TAS	1	1.2%
SA	6	7.4%
QLD	12	14.6%
WA	12	14.6%
NSW	25	30.5%
VIC	25	30.5%
Total	82	100.0%

Source: ASIC Series 1 insolvency statistics for SLs for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 1.

Table 19: SL process adopted by industry (for appointment population)

Industry division	Number	% of total
Wholesale trade	3	3.8%
Transport, postal and warehousing	1	1.2%
Retail trade	7	8.5%
Professional, scientific and technical	5	6.1%
Other services	12	14.6%
Manufacturing	3	3.7%
Information media and telecommunications	5	6.1%
Health care and social assistance	1	1.2%
Financial and insurance services	1	1.2%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	1	1.2%
Education and training	1	1.2%
Construction	14	17.1%
Arts and recreation services	6	7.3%
Administration and support services	6	7.3%
Accommodation and food services	16	19.5%
Total	82	100.0%

Source: ASIC Series 1A insolvency statistics for SLs for the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 2.

Table 20: Time taken to finalise liquidations for finalised SL and CVL populations

Period	SLs	% of total SLs	CVLs	% of total CVLs
0 to < 6 months	21	34.4%	1,148	28.8%
6 months to < 1 year	31	50.9%	1,720	43.3%
1 year to < 2 years	6	9.8%	966	24.3%
2 years to < 3 years	3	4.9%	142	3.6%
4 years to < 5 years	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Over 5 years	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Total	61	100.0%	3,978	100.0%

Source: Form 505 lodged with ASIC for the SL finalised population and for the CVL finalised population. Note: This table shows the data contained in Figure 3.

Table 21: SL finalised population – Total receipts

Receipts category	Value \$	% of total	Receipts
Sale of business	10,000	0.5%	Other re
GST received	74,922	3.4%	Work in p
Plant and equipment	77,206	3.5%	Legal red
Inventory	118,059	5.4%	Land an
Other (pre appointment assets)	156,197	7.1%	Anteced
Sundry debtors	159,019	7.3%	FEGS rec
Trading receipts	180,131	8.2%	Total
Cash on hand/bank	628,706	28.7%	Source: Find

Receipts category	Value \$	% of total
Other receipts	786,897	35.9%
Work in progress	0	0.0%
Legal recoveries	0	0.0%
Land and buildings	0	0.0%
Antecedent transactions	0	0.0%
FEGS received	0	0.0%
Total	2,191,138	100.0%

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 4.

Table 22: SL finalised population – Other receipts by general ledger name

Other receipt category	Value \$	% of total
Refunds	6,649	0.8%
Government funding	10,000	1.3%
Upfront payment	38,196	4.9%
Appointees' fees	64,835	8.2%
Indemnities	74,041	9.4%
Other	80,596	10.2%
Settlement proceeds from uncommercial transactions/insolvent trading claims	130,000	16.5%
Contributions from directors and related parties/third parties	163,525	20.8%
Cash at bank on appointment	219,056	27.9%
Total	786,897	100.00%

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 5.

Table 23: SL finalised population – Total payments

Payment category	Value \$	% of total
Secured creditors	527	0.0%
Other trading expense	21,266	0.9%
Property finalisation and preservations costs	22,198	1.0%
Legal fees	23,176	1.1%
Appointee disbursements	27,970	1.3%
Payroll expenses	36,400	1.7%
GST paid	44,816	2.0%
Other costs of realisation	63,032	2.9%
Priority creditors	168,031	7.7%
Unsecured creditors	521,017	23.8%
Appointee remuneration	1,262,705	57.6%
FEGS paid	0	0%
Purchases	0	0%
Contributories Creditors	0	0%
Total	2,191,138	100.0%

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 6.

Table 24: Receipt categories as percentage of total receipts for SL and CVL finalised populations

Receipt category	SL Value \$	L% of total	CVL Value \$	CVL $\%$ of total
Sale of business	10,000	0.0%	3,072,789	2.8%
GST received	74,922	3.4%	4,293,114	3.9%
Plant and equipment	77,206	3.5%	12,401,542	11.1%
Inventory	118,059	5.4%	1,146,183	1.0%
Other (pre-appointment assets)	156,197	7.1%	11,112,535	10.0%
Sundry debtors	159,019	7.3%	8,008,540	7.2%
Trading receipts	180,131	8.2%	3,157,659	2.8%
Cash on hand/bank	628,706	28.7%	27,751,637	24.9%
Other receipts	786,897	35.9%	34,018,205	30.6%
Work in progress	0	0.0%	20,346	0.0%
Legal recoveries	0	0.0%	2,073,162	1.9%
Land and buildings	0	0.0%	734,687	0.7%
Antecedent transactions	0	0.0%	3,420,083	3.1%
FEGS received	0	0.0%	102,817	0.1%
Total	2,191,138	100%	111,313,298	100.0%

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 7.

Table 25: Payment categories as percentage of total payments for SL and CVL finalised populations

Payment category	Value \$	% of total	CVL Value \$	CVL $\%$ of total
Secured creditors	527	0.0%	6,768,478	6.1%
Other trading expense	21,266	1.0%	3,534,864	3.2%
Property finalisation and preservations costs	22,198	1.0%	929,586	0.8%
Legal fees	23,176	1.1%	1,815,080	1.6%
Appointee disbursements	27,970	1.3%	2,116,750	1.9%
Payroll expenses	36,400	1.7%	408,757	0.4%
GST paid	44,816	2.0%	1,160,272	1.0%
Other costs of realisation	63,032	2.9%	9,141,823	8.2%
Priority creditors	168,031	7.7%	4,406,498	4.0%
Unsecured creditors	521,017	23.8%	6,887,976	6.2%
Appointee remuneration	1,262,705	57.6%	70,256,055	63.1%
FEGS paid	0	0.0%	2,274	0.0%
Purchases	0	0.0%	550,910	0.5%
Contributories Creditors	0	0.0%	3,446,492	3.1%
Total	2,191,138	100%	111,425,815	100.0%

Source: Final returns (Annexure A – Summary of final receipts and payments). **Note:** This table shows the data contained in Figure 8.

Key terms and related information

Key terms

appointment population	CVLs, including SLs adopted, that commenced between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2023 (10,541)
Corporations Act	Corporations Act 2001, including regulations made for the purposes of that Act
creditors' voluntary liquidation (CVL)	A creditors' voluntary liquidation begins when an insolvent company's shareholders resolve to liquidate the company and appoint a liquidator, or creditors vote for liquidation following a voluntary administration or termination of a deed of company arrangement. The liquidation of an insolvent company allows an independent registered liquidator to take control of the company so its affairs can be wound up in an orderly and fair way to benefit creditors
eligible CVL	CVLs in the appointment population with liabilities not exceeding \$1 million that were finalised by 31 December 2023 (3,978). These CVLs may have been eligible for a CVL (based on the \$1 million threshold criteria only) but used a standard CVL process
external administrator	A defined term for a registered liquidator formally appointed to control the affairs of a company and its property. Includes a provisional liquidator, liquidator, voluntary administrator and an administrator of a deed of company arrangement. It also includes a registered liquidator acting as a restructuring practitioner for a company and for a restructuring plan even though they do not control the affairs of the company. It does not include receivers or controllers

finalised population	 SLs in the appointment population finalised by 31 December 2023 (61), and CVLs in the appointment population finalised by 31 December 2023 (4,867)
final return	Form 5603 End of administration return
FY	Financial year
INFO 29 (for example)	An ASIC information sheet (in this example numbered 29)
related creditor	Creditors (such as spouses, relatives and other entities controlled by the directors/shareholders of an eligible company) who are owed money by the company
restructuring process	From the commencement of the appointment of a restructuring practitioner to a company to its finalisation including the restructuring plan, if applicable
review period	1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023
simplified liquidation (SL)	A streamlined creditors' voluntary winding up for companies that have liabilities not exceeding \$1 million

Related information

Headnotes

affected creditors, ASIC lodgements, ATO, Corporations Act, creditor liabilities, creditors, directors, dividend, dividend rate, eligible small business, external administration, industries, outcome of simplified liquidation, registered liquidator, related creditors, remuneration, small business, state of incorporation, unrelated creditors.

Information sheets

INFO 29 Flowchart 2A: Liquidator in a creditors' voluntary winding up (simplified liquidation process)

INFO 80 How to interpret ASIC insolvency statistics

Reports

REP 756 Review of small business restructuring process

Consultation papers

<u>CP 377</u> Guidance for reporting by external administrators and controllers: Updates to RG 16

Legislation

Corporations Act 2001

Corporations Regulations 2001

Media releases

23-007MR ASIC reports on small business restructuring

ASIC forms

<u>Form 505</u> Notification of appointment or cessation of an external administrator

Form 5602 Annual administration return

Form 5603 End of administration return

Form 6010 Application for voluntary deregistration of a company

Other ASIC publications

FAQs: Simplified liquidation

ASIC has published articles on form lodgements for SLs in the Corporate Insolvency Update (CIU) including:

- Issue 19, March 2021: 'AAF ineligibility for simplified liquidation process'
- o Issue 25, September 2022: 'The liquidator of a company should only lodge a Form 5603 when the affairs of the company have been fully wound up', and
- Issue 31, March 2024: 'Simplified liquidations lodging initial statutory reports'.

Disclaimer

This report does not constitute legal advice. We encourage you to seek your own professional advice to find out how the Corporations Act and other applicable laws apply to you, as it is your responsibility to determine your obligations.