

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO
REDFERN/WATERLOO**

Organisation:

Name: Mr Clive Small

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Date Received: 02/06/2004

Theme:

Summary

**\SUBMISSION TO
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES:
INQUIRIES INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO**

**BY CLIVE SMALL
30 MAY 2004**

I make this submission at the invitation of The Honourable Jan Burnswoods, MLC, Committee Chair, in her letter of 4 May 2004. It is made as a public submission.

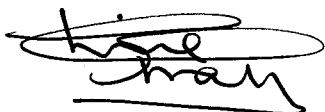
From 1963 until September 2003 I was a member of the New South Wales Police. During that time I served in a variety of positions including general duties, criminal investigation, operations, management and policy, in particular, drug policy.

I was sent to take charge of the then Greater Hume Region, which included Cabramatta, in late 2000 and formally took up that command at the beginning of 2001. At the time policing in Cabramatta was, to say the least, a mess.

During my 14 months at Greater Hume, with the support of a strong Region Leadership Team and the commitment of front line police we:

- o significantly reduced violence and other crime, and
- o broke flagrant drug markets.

As a result, by the end of my command, Cabramatta specifically and the Region generally were much safer places.

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These claims are supported by:

- o Cabramatta: A Report on Progress (April 2002),
- o New South Wales Recorded Crime Statistics 2001 and 2002, produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, and
- o Recent trends in recorded crime and police activity in Cabramatta, May 2002, produced by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

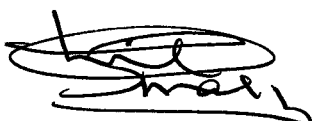
In addition, sworn and unsworn staff, front line police, supervisors and managers at Cabramatta (and across the Region generally) say that under my leadership the workplace was increasingly seen as one in which:

- o honest behaviour was encouraged and dishonest behaviour was discouraged
- o the work environment was more open
- o there was a higher level of trust and higher regard was held for supervisors and managers, and
- o management was more consultative and perceived to "practice what they preach".

These are the results of the Ethical Culture Survey administered to front line police, supervisors and managers, and unsworn officers across the Region. The Independent Commission Against Corruption developed the survey. These improvements were produced to the Parliament's General Purpose Standing Committee No 3, Inquiry into Police Resources in Cabramatta.

Relations with the community were also improved and community support increased significantly. Three examples that support this claim are:

- o the establishment of City Watch
- o The Fairfield-Cabramatta Police and Community Youth Club Annual Report for the year 2001, which discloses that

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- compared with the previous year there was a significant increase in Club membership during 2001 and that membership is increasing into 2002 and
- income for 2001 more than doubled when compared with the previous year.
- o the introduction of a basic Vietnamese language and cultural awareness course for Cabramatta Police.

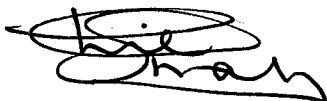
In addition, other constructive police-community partnerships are outlined in "Cabramatta: A Report on Progress".

In March 2002 I was seconded to the Strategic Projects Division, Premier's Department, for a period of two years.

In September 2003 my contract with the Police was not renewed. I completed my secondment and finished with the Premier's Department in March 2004.

During the second part of 2002, as part of my duties in the Premier's Department, I was involved in a number of meetings and discussions about "the drug problem", and in particular, the status of the "heroin shortage". Mixed messages were received and as a result I made a number of inquiries. These inquiries included trends in heroin arrests and incidents, ambulance callouts to heroin overdoses, the number of heroin deaths, and the number of needles distributed. I chose three areas for comparison: Cabramatta, Kings Cross and Redfern.

As a result of the information received I prepared a table – copy attached. It gave me cause for concern. Briefly, it revealed that heroin indicators in Cabramatta showed drug markets had declined and were declining at much greater rates than was the case in both Redfern and Kings Cross.



What stood out in the data for both Redfern and Kings Cross was the very low number of arrests for heroin related offences – an average of about six a month for both Redfern and Kings Cross – compared with the very high number of contacts for needles and the number of needles distributed – more than a million needles distributed at Redfern and Kings Cross each year.

On the simple indicator of the number of people obtaining needles, by 2001 both Kings Cross and Redfern appeared to have larger heroin markets than Cabramatta, and this continued throughout 2002. Kings Cross had about five times the number of people obtaining needles compared with Cabramatta and Redfern had about twice as many. While there are different ways to interpret this piece of data, on any measure it is an indicator of very large and active heroin markets.

Within a few days I informed John Whelan, who was then in the Office of the Police Minister, Michael Costa, of the data and my concerns. Within a few weeks, probably late September, I attended a meeting in Minister Costa's office, which was also attended by Minister Costa, John Whelan, Deputy Commissioner Madden and another police officer – I can't recall now whether it was Commissioner Moroney or not. I outlined my assessment and distributed the one page summary of the data. I then left.

Subsequently, the Health Department provided revised numbers of the needles distributed. This change did not and does not alter the thrust of the points made.

Within a few days I was informed that there would be a crackdown on heroin in Redfern and a few days later I was informed that a drug strategy was being developed for Redfern.

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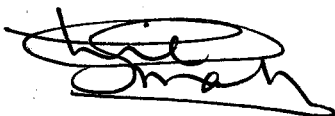
During the latter part of October and/or first few weeks of November there was a heroin operation conducted in Redfern – I believe that it was called Operation Players. It resulted in a number of arrests and received considerable media coverage on 8 November 2002 and over the next two weeks or so.

On 21 November 2002, the Premier announced in the Parliament a new Redfern Anti-Drug Strategy that included an enforcement crackdown and a number of other strategies to deal with the illicit drug problem. It was a "renewed action in Redfern and Waterloo to arrest dealers, shut down the drug houses and get users into treatment." It included "a sustained, proactive policing strategy targeting the drug trade ... and a sustained, high visibility policing strategy ... designed to stop dealing, prevent outsiders coming into Redfern for drugs, and reduce drug-related crime."

On 27 November 2002, the Premier announced in Parliament that the Redfern Community Drug Action Team was finalising "a (further) plan to reduce the impact on drugs in the area" and that it would be released in December 2002.

About 12 months later, around October 2003, again as the result of various meetings I attended and discussions had with various people, I learned, among other things that:

- with one or two exceptions, all drug house related charges preferred in Redfern during 2001 and 2002 had been dismissed and as a result no attention was being given to prosecuting offenders for these offences – it was estimated there were about nine to 12 active drug houses operating in the Redfern-Waterloo area at the time;

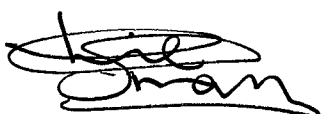
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- the number of arrests for heroin related offences had not increased following the announced crackdown 12 months earlier (I was later to learn they had in fact gone down – from an average of around six to an average of around four a month);
- there were only four designated detectives out of an authorised detective strength of 14 and this was impacting adversely on police investigations, particularly complex drug investigations;
- there was a high proportion of very junior police in the command and this was adversely impacting on police operations and investigations, and
- I believe, there were a number of unfilled supervisory positions. This was critical because of the significant number of inexperienced police and the operational complexities of the command.

More generally, while the Police as a whole has a high proportion of very junior and inexperienced officers, the impact of this is far greater on the more difficult commands such as Redfern.

On or about 26 November 2003, The Cabinet Office chaired a meeting that included police and various other departments and Minister's representatives. At that meeting I outlined my concerns. The meeting concluded with the agreement that the matters raised would be followed up. I heard nothing back from the meeting and around mid December 2003 I was told that feedback from the Police Minister's Office was that "everything was okay at Redfern", or words that had that effect. That is, that there was no need to do anything about the issues raised.

I had certain views about this advice, but had little if anything further to do with Redfern prior to completing my time at the Premier's Department.



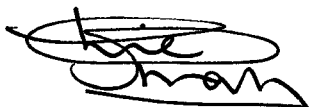
There are a few observations that I would like to make about crime generally and Redfern in particular.

It needs to be acknowledged that police are not the first line of defence against crime and disorder. The true first lines of defence are families, friends, peers, teachers, schools and community groups and organisations such as churches. Police are only the first line of deployment by the government against crime and disorder once they exist.

We must acknowledge the root causes of crime and disorder are poverty, unemployment, racism, poor health care, truancy, failure to complete school, mental illness, alcohol, illicit drug dependency, poor parenting practices and child maltreatment, and single parent families. These acknowledgements must not be used as an excuse, but as a means of improving our understanding of and our response capabilities to our problems.

Redfern suffers from all these root causes and has done so for several decades. Apart from the obvious physical conditions of the area, by that I mean the condition of the houses, streets, and the like, the most tangible and visible debilitating signs of the area are alcohol abuse and the highly visible signs of heroin markets, including dealing and abuse, and streets littered with needles.

Rigorous application of the 2003 Redfern Anti Drug Strategy would go a long way towards making things better for the Redfern community and towards reducing the illicit drug trade and its associated problems in the area.

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There have been claims reported in the media that the needle and syringe distribution van in Redfern has acted as a "honeypot" for drug users. This is nonsense.

Dealers and users do not set up drug markets around needle distribution centres. Rather these centres are established in areas where there are already active and mostly highly visible drug markets operating. Such a claim is an excuse for a failure of strategy and action.

The memorandum between Police and Health is not a deterrent to enforcing drug laws or tackling heroin markets, but can be used as an excuse for not doing so.

To put the Redfern needle distribution service into context, it is one of more than 300 public outlets and several hundred private pharmacies at which clients can exchange needles and syringes and obtain information, advice and referral to other services. Access to needles is relatively easy across the Sydney Metropolitan Area. The service, properly managed, not only provides a significant health service to those at risk but also improves the health and wellbeing of the general community and reduces the health risks and costs to the community.

Having said that, I believe that some health professionals are their own worst enemy. Their language and actions can tend to focus on the health of the individual drug user to the total exclusion of the broader harm caused to the community through crime, disorder and fear. For example, in 2002 in Redfern for each "contact" with a user an average of 28 needles was handed out. This compares with about 10 needles per "contact" in Cabramatta and Kings Cross. Little wonder that Redfern was littered with needles.

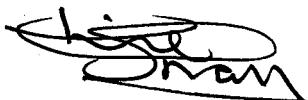
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Reports suggest that there has been little, if any, improvement in the clean-up of discarded needles since the announced 2002 Anti-Drugs Strategy, yet improved needle clean up programs were a component of that Strategy.

According to media reports, it has been argued by some that the concept of "harm minimisation" should be abandoned in favour of a zero tolerance and pure enforcement approach to the "drug problem". I regard this as ill informed. However, there are, I believe, good grounds to better articulate and inform the community about the policy, to improve the understanding of those who are expected to apply the policy, and to improve its application in the field, including improved application of enforcement strategies.

Given the changes and redevelopment that are occurring in Redfern/Waterloo I believe that establishment of a needle injecting centre in the area at this time would be ill timed and would work against the success of the Redfern-Waterloo Project. It would send the message that the government accepts that Redfern will continue to have flagrant and open drug markets, supported mostly by "visitors" to the area, even on completion of the Project.

Last, we must move the debate about policies and practices in Redfern in particular, and the community generally, away from populist band-aid solutions towards sustainable evidenced based solutions. The focus of debate must shift to those economic, social and cultural support programs that we know work to the benefit of society in the mid to longer term.

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**SOME DRUG DATA COMPARISONS:
CABRAMATTA, KINGS CROSS AND REDFERN**

	Cabramatta (Cabramatta/Fairfield)	Redfern	Kings Cross Postcodes 2010 & 2011 Injecting Centre
Needles/contacts per year:			
• 2000 - needles/contacts	629,519/69,575	1,049,602/41,811	1,346,249/182,692
• 2001 - needles/contacts	272,012/27,179 (-76%)	(+52%) 1,596,829/55,932 (+34%)	(-17%) 1,111,606/148,520 (-19%)
• 2002 (5 months)	57,027/6,749	539,412/19,490	332,021/32,793
• - needles/contacts			
• 2002 - needles/contacts projections	(-50%) 136,865/16,198 (-40%)	(-19%) 1,294,589/46,776 (-19%)	(-28%) 796,850/78,703 (-47%)
			* (24,324/3,272)
			* Injecting Centre commenced May 2001. Data for 15 mths.
Ratio of needles per contact			
• 2000	9:1	25:1	7:1
• 2001	10:1	28:1	7:1
• 2002 (Jan-June)	8:1	28:1	10:1
			8 to 1
Ambulance call-outs to overdoses:			
• 2000 - year/month	670/56	126/10	705/59
• 2001 - year/month	109/9	106/9	234/19
• 2002 - 5 mths/mth	63/10	49/10	169/34
			N/A
			115/14*
			190/32
			* Centre commenced May 2001.
Drug charges*:			
• 2000 - monthly ave	91 (71)	32 (13)	94 (13)
• 2001 - monthly ave	70 (39)	31 (6)	149 (7)
• 2002 - monthly ave	47 (34)	31 (6)	106 (6)
Note: Heroin incidents in brackets.			

Note: (1) The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre commenced operations in May 2001. On the one hand this resulted in "street" overdoses being reduced - some drug injecting and overdoses having moved into the Centre. On the other hand, all overdoses in the Centre are recorded and treated by medically trained Centre staff, whereas it is likely that an unknown number would not have resulted in ambulance call-outs if they had occurred on the "street".

(2) Sometime during 2001 a mobile needle van relocated from the Kings Cross/Surry Hills area to Redfern. This would have resulted in a significant reduction in needles administered in the Kings Cross/Surry Hills area and an increase in Redfern. The increase in Redfern is much greater than the reduction in Kings Cross/Surry Hills and, overall, the combined areas incurred a significant increase in needles distributed compared with a state-wide reduction. 2001 saw a significant reduction in the availability of heroin.

Clive Small
10 September 2002