

To: Director, Standing Committee on Social Issues.

From: Mr Edward Billett.

Re: Submission into *Inebriates Act 1912*.

I wish to make a small contribution to the Committee regarding this sad but important issue. Firstly, if I can outline my background on this topic; I am currently a Police Inspector currently attached to the Marrickville Police Station. However I am contributing this article on my behalf & the contents should not be considered to be those of the NSW Police Force.

Back in about 1992/3 I was working at the Burwood Local Court as a Police Prosecutor when I was contacted by a police officer from a suburban police station. The officer indicated that he had been approached by relatives of a man who was a chronic alcoholic who could not tend for himself. The male would not seek medical treatment & all he wanted to die with a bottle of alcohol at his side. The relatives had sought assistance from their family Doctor, local Community Centre but all had failed to help. In other words the police officer at the station was the relatives last hope. I had previously used the Inebriates Act many years & was unfamiliar with its latest operation. I consulted the local Chamber Magistrate & he supplied me with the relevant forms that I eventually supplied to the police officer. From memory, the man was brought to the Court with police assistance & he was ordered to a facility to seek treatment for his drinking problem. The relatives were relieved that something was being done.

The second case involves a local man at Auburn called 'Dougie'. His story was recently printed in the Auburn Review on the 22 October, 2003 & I have attached a copy of it to my submission.

Dougie has been living on the footpath in Auburn Rd. for the past 2 months. He goes to the toilet where he lies & this is directly outside the ATM. According to the newspaper article 'Dougie' has been admitted to the Auburn District Hospital 197 times regarding excess alcohol intake. 'Dougie' is harmless & commits no offences however his appearance & presentation concern small children. 'Dougie' is currently in Cumberland Hospital & I would say it would be in accordance with the Inebriates Act.

I don't know what the intention of the Standing Committee is from time to time people like 'Dougie' need to be removed from the community & cleaned up for their own good.

Alcohol is perhaps still the greatest problem in the community as I work in an area of Sydney where there is a large number of boarding houses. A majority of these places are filled with mostly males who are addicted to alcohol & they too could end living on the streets like 'Dougie'.

I would only hope that the Committee ensure that some powers are retained so that perhaps some health workers, Doctors or police can have the power to make an application to the Local Court for an Inebriates order.

Thanking your for your time.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eddie Billett".

Eddie Billett
Inspector of Police
Marrickville Police Station.
14 November, 2003.

Dougie's will to live

By JAMIE PANDARAM

'DOUGIE' has been a familiar face around the streets of Auburn for more than four years, but locals shouldn't be alarmed by his sudden departure because his life is set to take a change for the better.

The battling homeless alcoholic was given a second chance when local police organised to take him to a hospital in an attempt to cure him of his debilitating addiction.

On Thursday morning, Dougie wiped a tear from his weather-beaten face, said goodbye to friends, and was helped into an ambulance by officers amid a sea of onlookers on busy Auburn Road.

This was his first step to a new beginning - alcohol has ravaged his body but it hasn't taken away his will to live.

Dougie is well-known and well-liked in Auburn. Well-known as the homeless drunk, well-liked as a gentle character.

After three weeks of paperwork, Flemington police officers received magistrate's permission last week to help change Dougie's life, to take him off the streets and into a detoxification unit at Cumberland Hospital for



Dougie Richardson takes his first steps towards a new beginning as sergeant Peter Nicolle shows the homeless man the way to the ambulance and Auburn ambulance officers carry him into the vehicle on a stretcher.

Photos by DAMIAN SHAW.

the next six months.

Following his rehabilitation program, Dougie will be placed under the care of the Wesley Mission charity organisation.

Moments before he was stretchered into the ambulance, cheered by friends, 53-year-old Dougie shared with me intimate thoughts and feelings.

The former Rookwood Cemetery gravedigger admitted he was digging his own grave with the bottle. But he did not want to die on the streets.

"I'm sick of looking like this, of living like this - I'm living on the streets,"

Dougie said.

"I wake up in the morning feeling like death warmed up ... I've just had enough.

"I've been told by the hospital that most of the lining in my stomach has been eaten away by alcohol, and my liver isn't much better. Now, whatever I eat passes right through me.

"When I don't drink, I go into fits. I want to go to detox, I'll die without it, I just can't get myself there - I can barely walk.

"I'm very grateful for the police taking me, and for my friends. Without

my friends that are here now, I think I'd be dead."

Dougie has been admitted to Auburn Hospital 197 times, poisoned by the drug he loves and hates. His legs have been crippled by arthritis, he cannot even control his bowels or clean himself after defecating. Thankfully, his friends Ian and Linda take it upon themselves to perform the unenviable duties of removing Richardson's soiled clothing and washing him. They also feed him.

He has no family, his sister passed away years ago.

Dougie's affair with alcohol began when he was

13, and he was hooked almost immediately. Now he consumes up to two bottles of port every day.

"My father was an alcoholic, I believe it's hereditary," he said. "Once I started I couldn't stop, it just got worse and worse."

Police officers in Auburn were aware of Dougie's plight for some time, but said they were unable to take action without the court's permission.

Sergeant Peter Nicolle, watching the ambulance officers help Dougie into the stretcher, said: "His body is shutting down. If we didn't do this today, within a month, he would have been dead."