

Mr Cowen has pleaded guilty to a charge of wounding. On 18 August 2021 he wounded a man named Hokanson by striking him multiple times to the head and body with a kitchen knife.

Mr Cowen has had a drinking problem for many years. In the winter of 2021 he was homeless. A man in Glenorchy allowed him to pitch a tent in his yard and to live there. I was told that the householder asked Mr Cowen to keep an eye out for people coming to the house, and to usher them away.

On the day in question Mr Cowen left the premises, became heavily intoxicated, returned at about 3pm, and found that there were two visitors at the house, Mr Hokanson and a woman. He got angry about Mr Hokanson being there. Mr Hokanson tried to leave, but Mr Cowen blocked the way and started throwing punches at him. He came off second best. Mr Hokanson knocked him to the ground and pinned him down, but let him go after he promised not to attack him again.

Mr Cowen broke that promise. He attacked Mr Hokanson again. Mr Hokanson punched him. Mr Cowen grabbed a knife from the kitchen drawer. It was about 20cm long and 2 inches wide. Mr Hokanson ran to the back door but found it was locked. Mr Cowen chased him to the door and struck him to the upper back with the knife, causing a superficial wound. Mr Hokanson turned towards him, and he attempted to strike him with the knife several times. Mr Hokanson blocked most of the blows, but Mr Cowen struck him once to the forehead, causing it to bleed. Mr Cowen continued to try to hit Mr Hokanson with the knife. He protected himself, but the knife hit the top of his head and the blade broke in two. That impact caused a further wound to the scalp.

Mr Hokanson again knocked Mr Cowen to the floor and pinned him down. Mr Cowen continued to try to stab him with the broken knife. The householder unlocked the back door. Mr Hokanson ran outside. A stranger took him around the corner, sat him in a chair, and gave him tissues to try to stop the bleeding. A taxi took him home. His partner took him to hospital. As a result of this incident he suffered a 1.5cm wound to the scalp, a 3cm wound to the forehead, a 2cm superficial wound to the upper back, a black eye, and bruising to one cheek. The wounds to the scalp and forehead were washed out and closed with sutures. They have resulted in scarring.

I was provided with a victim impact statement by Mr Hokanson. He twisted his neck to get away from the final stab, and has since had problems with weakness and pain affecting his neck. He has had ongoing crippling headaches. His wounds have been painful. He has suffered a range of psychological symptoms. He had never had any problem with anxiety before, but is now taking medication for it. He has become reclusive. He suffers from nightmares. He is embarrassed by his scars. He has experienced difficulty with his memory. His symptoms have put a strain on his relationship with his partner. He considers that his life will never be the same.

Mr Cowen was 45 years old on the day in question and is now 46. He was arrested at the scene of the crime some hours afterwards. He was bailed the next day, but his bail was suspended four days later and he has been in custody ever since. During that period he has served three

other sentences of imprisonment totalling 8 months. To take account of those sentences and other periods in custody, I will impose a sentence that is backdated to 23 April 2022.

Mr Cowen has a bad criminal record. He has been in and out of prison ever since 1995. He has served sentences of imprisonment for assault on a number of occasions in Tasmania and South Australia.

His counsel told me that he had a very unpleasant childhood, leaving home when he was 14 because of physical violence and verbal abuse. He lived on the streets some of the time, but continued his education and completed grade 10. Not surprisingly, he met people who were a bad influence on him, and got involved in crime and substance abuse. He went to South Australia in 1999, and made a fresh start, but his partner died of leukaemia ten years later. He has psychological difficulties as a result of her untimely death, and as a result of witnessing the murder of a friend in 2005. He suffered a serious arm injury in or about 2012, and became a disability support pensioner as a result. He has had an alcohol problem since he was 16 years old. He has made several unsuccessful attempts to stop drinking. He has not had stable accommodation for some years, and the lack of it led him to drink more, to the point where he would often black out. I was told that he wanted to undertake drug and alcohol counselling and grief counselling, but that the necessary programs were not available to him prior to sentencing.

The attack on Mr Hokanson was stupid, vicious and sustained. It has left him with permanent scars and serious psychological problems. The only significant mitigating circumstances are Mr Cowen's plea of guilty and the fact that the sentence I impose will follow on from three others. The plea of guilty was indicated at a sufficiently early stage for the Crown never to go to the trouble of preparing the case for trial. Because of the other sentences that Mr Cowen has served, the totality principle requires me to impose a slightly shorter sentence than I would otherwise impose. However the only appropriate sentence is one of imprisonment. I will make provision for parole since Mr Cowen might benefit from conditional release under supervision.

Robert Leigh Cowen, I convict you and sentence you to 16 months' imprisonment with effect from 23 April 2022. You will not be eligible for parole until you have served 10 months of this sentence.