



RV rally to rev up region

Toyah Shakespeare

The Great Southern is hoping to capitalise on the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's national rally, to be held in Albany in October, with an expected injection of \$2 million to \$3 million into the regional economy.

The largest recreational vehicle club in the southern hemisphere will park about 1000 vehicles carrying 1800 members on Centennial Oval.

Great Southern Development chairman Peter Rundle said the CMCA national rally in Albany had the potential to generate

significant economic benefits, not only to the host community but more broadly to Great Southern communities.

"Great Southern hinterland communities should prepare for the influx of visitors as they are in an excellent position to capitalise on the visitors to our region," he said.

"Due to the nature of the RV market, the economic benefits to the region should continue to be felt in the local economy throughout the year through repeat visitation and word of mouth."

Rally manager Vince Calleja will host a regional briefing next Mon-

day in Gnowangerup to outline potential opportunities for Shires, community groups and businesses to benefit from the rally.

Mr Calleja said \$2 million to \$3 million was expected to be spent in Albany and the region, particularly on food and fuel.

"In Robinvale, Victoria, a place smaller than Mt Barker ... they estimated they spent \$3 million at the anniversary rally last year," he said.

Mr Calleja said marquees, trade displays and entertainment would be set up on Centennial Oval where the vehicles would be based and they would aim to "engage the local

community as much as possible".

He said the travellers would spend money "either end" of the rally in places such as Jerramungup, Kojonup and Gnowangerup and shires would need to be ready to be ready with tourism options such as bushwalking and driving tours.

Mr Calleja said the CMCA Solos Network, made up of single travellers, would host its annual general

meeting a week before in one of the Great Southern shires, another boost to the local economy.

Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern chairwoman Di Holly

said there were many opportunities for the rally to link in with wildflower season and the Bloom Festival held at the same time.

"It is anticipated visitors will extend their stay in the region beyond the period of the rally, providing an opportunity to experience some of our region's hidden treasures," she said.

Kojonup Visitor Centre manager Glenys Russell said the event was a fantastic opportunity and events would be held in Kojonup.

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Tourism upgrades benefit Rainbow and Jeparit

WITH the busy holiday season in full swing, Council is hoping that recent tourism upgrades around the Shire will be well utilised by visitors to the Shire.

With RV Dump Points operational in both Jeparit and Rainbow, it is hoped that RV travellers begin to make their way through the northern part of the Shire. Council is currently finalising 'RV Friendly Town' applications for both Jeparit and Rainbow, a status which is known to greatly increase visitor traffic. 'RV Friendly Towns' are listed by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia on a national database and map which is the 'go to' guide for RV travellers.

In addition to the dump point, the Jeparit township has benefited from a set of new cabins at the Jeparit Caravan Park, which have remained popular since their opening in May.

Four Mile Beach remains a popular camping spot, despite the drier season, and Council is pleased to see the improvements to the area progressing as planned. Council has upgraded the power supply to the area, and while on the surface the area looks unchanged, these underground changes have increased the carrying capacity of the site to allow for future expansion of powered sites, as well as additional power supply for the new camp kitchen.

Council is currently working with the Friends of Lake Hindmarsh Committee on the Camp Kitchen project. The design has now been finalised, with final arrangements being made with the contractor to begin

works on the Camp Kitchen early in 2015. Council is also currently recruiting a new caretaker for the Four Mile Beach site, which Council hopes will provide local support for visitors to the area.

Power upgrades are also being undertaken at the Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum in Jeparit, which expand the available power outlets across the site, greatly improving the working environment for volunteers restoring, upgrading, cleaning and maintaining the museum assets. The museum upgrades are in the early design phase, and will move into a more detailed design phase in the New Year. This will form part of the larger Masterplan for the museum which will be developed in 2015, to give direction for investment and development of the museum facilities into the future.

Hindmarsh Shire Council Chief Executive Officer Tony Doyle said, "Council has really prioritised tourism in the current Council plan, and see tourism as a path forward for our smaller communities. The landscape surrounding the river and lake system is one of our strongest assets, and Council is focussed on upgrading the infrastructure around these assets to improve the accessibility and functionality of these sites. We need to keep pace with the requirements of modern travellers to keep our traditional visitors and attract new visitors. Council anticipates a strong year ahead for tourism in Jeparit as these projects are finalised, and the Menzies Square Redevelopment gets underway. Visitors returning to the town over the next 12

months will hopefully notice many positive changes, including landscaping improvements along Broadway to complement the new rock wall. We can all look forward to the progress of the Hindmarsh Trail project as well, which will be a significant drawcard for new visitors to the region."

The Four Mile Beach and Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum Power Upgrades are part of the Powering Community Infrastructure grants funded through the Victorian Government's Putting Locals First Program. The Camp Kitchen and the Jeparit Cabins have been funded as part of the

Jeparit Visitor Access and Amenities project funded

through the Victorian Government's Local

Government Infrastructure Program. The dump points have been funded by Council.



Stingy campers flout the law

IT'S NOISY BUT THE PRICE IS RIGHT FOR BACKPACKERS

BACKPACKERS are pitching tents in a park nestled under the West Gate Bridge in a bid to save a buck.

Westgate Park is the latest piece of public land to be invaded by stingy travellers looking to avoid “expensive” legal campsites and hostels, despite it being strictly off-limits to campers.

It comes after the *Herald Sun* revealed last month that carparks beside the sea and in gardens across Port Melbourne and St Kilda had become temporary homes for backpackers.

Parks Victoria spokesman David Petty said the authority was aware that carparks,

SAMANTHA LANDY

bushland and parkland in and around the Melbourne CBD were becoming “increasingly popular” for camping.

He said campers had recently moved to Westgate Park, which is famed among tourists for its salt lake, which commonly turns pink in summer.

Two tents were pitched when the *Herald Sun* visited yesterday morning. They belonged to German tourist Julia Naumann, 23, and four backpackers, who said they had slept in the park for one night to save money after staying at hostels during their other

nights in Melbourne. This was despite signs warning of a ban on tents, caravans, campervans and any other vehicles used for accommodation being posted around the park.

Mr Petty said there were no legal camping sites within Westgate Park and no facilities to support it, with rangers frequently patrolling the grounds.

Ms Naumann — who has been touring Australia for more than a year — said she had decided to stay there after visiting the pink lake earlier this week, despite knowing camping was not allowed.

“It’s a nice place,” she said.

“Hostels are so expensive in Melbourne — like \$40 a day.

Camping is free. “I think it’s not allowed though.”

Ms Naumann said she and her friends didn’t think there was any harm in their actions, as they would make sure they didn’t leave any rubbish

behind. She said police drove past the park on Monday night and yesterday morning and spotted their tents, but didn’t say anything to them.

An influx of backpackers setting up campervans at the nearby Sandridge beach carpark in Port Melbourne has become such a nuisance for



locals, with the council forced to consider drastic measures to discourage them.

Port Phillip Mayor Amanda Stevens last week said the council was considering bringing in new parking restrictions. samantha.landy@news.com.au
Twitter: @SamLandy





Campers at Westgate Park, Port Melbourne, and (inset) the sign telling them not to. Picture: NICOLE GARMSTON

Dirty, rotten freeloaders

Backpackers fouling beauty spots

JIM O'ROURKE

THE scourge of the dirty overseas backpacker is spreading along the NSW east coast, with more evidence of budget travellers showing little respect for our parks and beach reserves.

These photographs taken yesterday show a station wagon belonging to so-called "free campers" surrounded by rubbish and filthy food containers discarded on the ground at one of the state's most beautiful beaches.

Angry local residents at Shelly Beach, in Port Macquarie on the mid-north coast, have been lobbying the local council for more than 12 months to move on grubby travellers who bypass

paid camping grounds. Locals complain that the car

park at the beach is often taken over by budget travellers sleeping in their vehicles for days and monopolising facilities such as barbecues, taps and showers.

On Tuesday The Daily Telegraph reported that free loading international backpackers had invaded Sydney's parks and beachside reserves this summer, turning them into rubbish-filled makeshift campsites.

Frustrated homeowners say local councils are allowing young travellers to sleep in campervans and station wagons, wash themselves in public, and use public facilities for cleaning cooking utensils.

Residents said some backpackers had even been going to the toilet on the ground.

After a series of complaints from ratepayers, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council began an eight-month "free camping management trial" last September to help regulate camping by backpackers in its popular beachside spots.

No Camping signs have been put up at tourist hot spots and brochures given to travellers outlining the council's policy on free camping.

"Rangers are patrolling the 'hotspot' locations to ensure the campers are not negatively impacting on the environment or other people using those public spaces," a spokesman said. "Infringements are only issued as a last resort, however littering by regular park users and campers is not tolerated."



Free camping travellers litter in the carpark at Shelly Beach, Port Macquarie, and wash their dirty dishes in showers meant for bathers. Picture: Nathan Edwards



Council's comment on the camping issue

MAYOR Peter Besseling said council was proactively seeking the best outcomes for community, businesses and tourists by gathering more information about campers to develop a long-term management strategy to address the emerging tourism trend.

"The 'freedom camper' tourism market segment includes RVs and non self-contained vans/vehicles that have camping and bedding facilities inside such as the Jucy, Wicked and Traveller's Autobarn rental vehicles," he said.

"Many councils have similar challenges with campers along the east coast and manage the trend in diverse ways unique to environment and community."

Cr Besseling said council staff were in the final stages of research which began in September 2014.

"A researcher has been surveying freedom campers around the region to identify their habits, needs and spending patterns," he said.

"Council is also surveying the attitudes and perceptions of other users of the public spaces and nearby residents to gain a community perspective.

"This information will inform councillors, who will be considering the approach to camping in public spaces at the March council meeting."

In addition to the survey, the mayor said council was trialling signage and brochures.

"The signs highlight council's resolution to prohibit camping on reserves, roads and road-related areas and have a QR code that directs campers to a 'Where to Camp' brochure on portmacquarieinfo.com.au," he said.

"The brochure informs tourists and provides

a list of where people can camp in our region including caravan parks and camping sites.

"For those who have evidence of damage to or use of our public spaces I encourage them to use the 'Snap Send Solve' app to notify council or to call 6581 8111 to alert us to the issue.

"We can't be everywhere at all times but if the community notifies us of issues then we can take action.

"We are also aware there is an independent social media site concerning illegal drug use and other activities in our local parks. This is a separate issue and if community members see evidence of these behaviours, I encourage them to notify the police."



Free-camping revolt: 'Save our parks'

By CAROLINE STRAINIG

A PORT Macquarie group has hit back at pro-free-camping comments made by Cr Sharon Griffiths in the Inside Council column of the Independent on January 8.

Andrew Crane from Save Our Parks said he was a member of a growing group of hundreds of residents concerned about council's current management of our parks.

"We are deeply concerned by Cr Griffiths' Inside Council piece," Mr Crane said.

"Cr Griffiths points to the imaginary economic benefits of increased RV tourism and presents us with hypothetical figures based on a town monumentally different to Port Macquarie and council's recent survey of people staying illegally in our parks.

"To council every van in an LGA park seems to represent dollar bills, when in reality many vans house people living in urban parks in squalor, without necessary services."

Mr Crane said most campers were law-abiding decent people, but the lack of services for them put them, the community and the economy in jeopardy.

"Our group supports camping and acknowledges the importance of tourism," he said.

"However, permitting people to live in our urban parks, next to playgrounds without adequate monitoring, without needle-disposal facilities, without sanitary item and contaminated waste disposal and without consideration of environmental impacts is not in the interests of anybody, no matter how much imaginary money it might make."

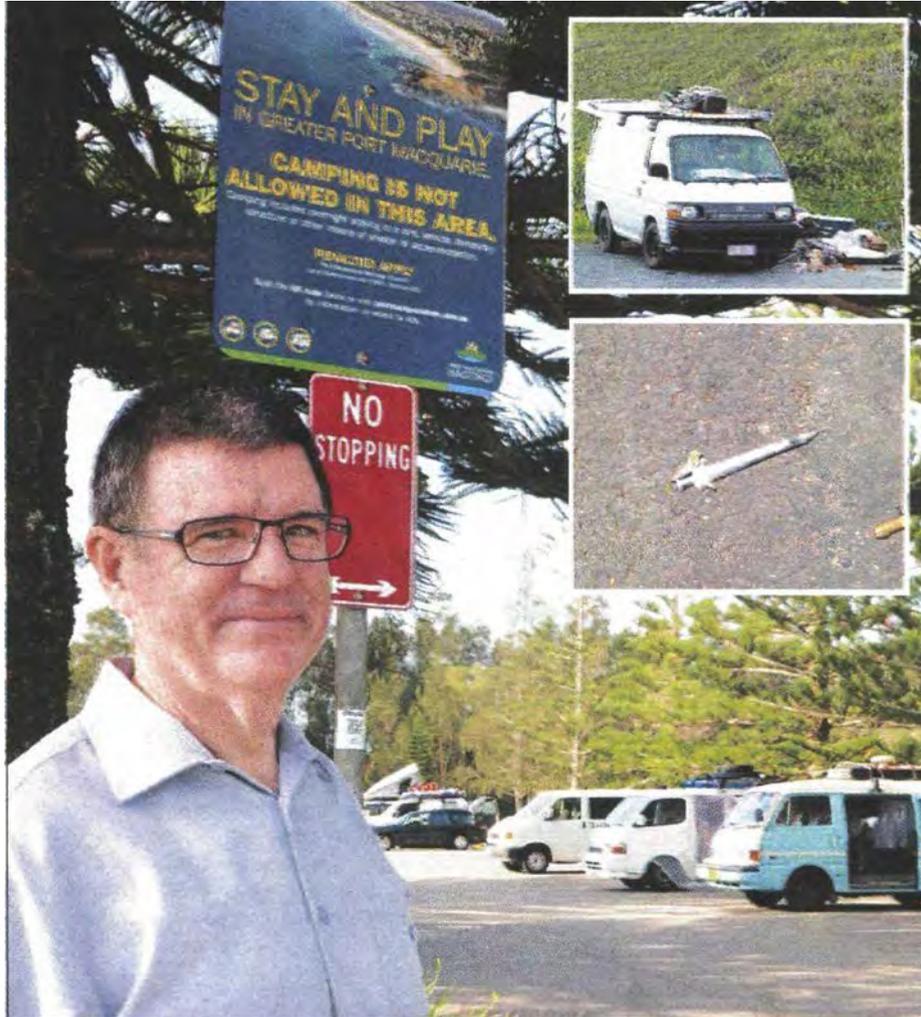
Mr Crane said council had a clear responsibility to provide the infrastructure and ongoing monitoring and maintenance to support free-camping if they wanted to extend it.

"We are deeply concerned that council is considering increasing the strain on existing facilities without first fixing current issues," he said.

Mr Crane added his group was running a petition, calling on council to give rangers back their authority to issue infringements and to better monitor who is living in our urban parks.

"Concerned readers are urged to sign the petition in support for 'Kids Safe Parks' and to join our community Facebook page," he said.

"The address for the Facebook page is Facebook.com/pmqsafeparks and petition <http://goo.gl/dREOCR>."



Mr Crane in front of the no-camping sign and vehicles parked at Settlement Point one morning late last week. Seven vehicles had camped overnight. Above right: Overnight campers making themselves at home at a beach reserve. Bottom right: It is not unusual to find syringes, members of Save Our Parks say



Gnowangerup talk on campervan rally

Great Southern residents will be briefed on the upcoming Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia National Rally on Monday.

More than 1000 caravans and recreational vehicles are expected to travel through the region en route to Albany for the event in October.

Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern chairwoman Di Holly said it was expected many visitors would extend their stay in the area beyond the period of the rally.

“With the influx of visitors over this period, there is an opportunity for our communities to benefit,” she said.

The briefing will cover the estimated number of visitors, demographics and travel patterns, potential opportunities for communities and links to the 2015 Bloom Festival.

The event will be held at the Gnowangerup Community Resource Centre from 1pm to 2.30pm.

Call Gemma Gaze on 9827 1635 for more information.