



No future in shire's designated park areas

Why should East Gippsland Shire allow campers to stay in designated zones in Lakes Entrance for free, when it's not proved they spend money in the town?

Lakes Entrance's Deb McTighe cannot see a future for designated free parking areas for campervans and recreation vehicles (RVs) in town.

While the owner of Riviera Country Caravan Park understands shire's vision to possibly trial free parking at the Gippsland Lakes Fishing Club car park and atop Jemmys Point at Rotary Park, she believes the campers who do not holiday with local accommodation providers don't put enough money back into the economy.

East Gippsland Shire councillor and fellow Lakes Entrance resident, Dick Ellis, said council's plan to trial short term overnight parking zones would reduce the scatter of the 'Wicked' vans and other RVs, some of whom don't pay for accommodation and can be seen scattered in locations throughout

the town.

The council said parking would be allowed for two hours between 10am and 6pm and would be unrestricted outside these hours, with tent camping not allowed.

But Ms McTighe, who was asked by the shire to join a concept plan for RV camping committee about three years ago, said the shire was "not looking after the caravan park industry at all" with its handling of the process.

"I do understand that not everyone wants to stay in a park, but they don't spend money in Lakes when they are here," she said.

"They are fuelling up in Bairnsdale, buying their groceries at Aldi in Bairnsdale, and buying their goods in cheaper places.

"Do they buy a newspaper here? Who knows?"

Ms McTighe, however, said she would support the zoned RV areas if they were policed regularly, with everything between "A and Z" checked off the list.



Caravan, camping guide now available

The NSW Caravan & Camping Holiday Touring & Products Guide 2015 has just been released with great new features to help you plan your next caravan or camping holiday.

The free guide, distributed by the Caravan & Camping Industry Association (CCIA) NSW, is available in hard copy and digital format.

It features all the information you need to find the right park, dealership, and repairer across NSW, and provides a comprehensive list of CCIA members covering more than 400 holiday parks and 200 caravan and camping services.

"This year we have redesigned the Guide with improved, user friendly listings for our member parks, and the ability to find your perfect park under search parameters like luxury cabins, powered sites, camping and motorhome spaces," CCIA NSW CEO, Lyndel Gray said.

It's easy to search for a park with all the facilities you need – playgrounds, café's, waterfront locations, pools and tennis courts - you can even search for dog friendly parks throughout NSW.

"The Guide also provides a great reference manual to help you find your local RV dealer, repairer and equipment supplier.

"It is the most comprehensive listing of caravan and camping product suppliers in NSW and

includes over 200 RV product and service suppliers.

"Another new feature of the improved design in the hard copy magazine is the regional maps with highlighted local attractions, helping people make the most of their visit to each area.

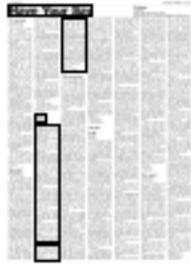
"While many people appreciate the hard copy version of the Guide, we know people on the road often prefer to access information from their personal device so we have also developed digital versions for the tablet and mobile phone.

"This free, downloadable App gives people access to information on their mobile device so they can use it while they are on the road searching for a place to stay, something to do, or a place to get service or repairs, region by region."

The Guide has all the information on where to go, what to see and where to stay across NSW including detailed maps, distance guides, local attractions and events, details on sites for larger RVs, internet access, dump point facilities and disabled access.

You can download the Guide from <http://www.caravan-camping.com.au>

Free hardcopies of the Guide are available at this year's NSW Caravan, Camping, RV and Holiday Supershow April 11-19 at Rosehill Racecourse.



Have Your Say

Just a whinge

Sir,- Answer to Deb McTighe (*Post*, February 18). Headline should read (whinge) "Tidy up the caravan parks".

One can see she doesn't know and rants on (re) us grey nomads.

We would stay in parks, but with the costs and many of us are on a very tight budget.

She is out of context as we do get petrol, tyres and repairs when we stop in a town. Most shopkeepers welcome us with our cash.

Why we don't stay in parks is the excessive charge for power. Some parks charge \$30 per week and more.

The park owners need to lift their game, they are there to entice us to stay, not to treat us like unwanted ferals.

Some parks we get to aren't kept clean in the toilets with dirty walls, etc., showers that need to be replaced, camp kitchens that aren't fit to prepare food in, and then say we want everything for free. Not so.

We pay our way, and don't bludge on others like some park owners with their high charges and no respect for us grey nomads.

What we want is value for our dollar, not to be overcharged all the time. So lift your game, park owners.

When we stop in New South Wales, most little towns have come alive thanks to us nomads.

One is Birraway, with a free park and we can get power if needed from a meter, coin in the slot; all travellers are made welcome.

Before park owners start to whinge they should look at their own parks and see where they can improve. This way, we grey nomads would stay longer in the town.

Caravan parks are like any other business and need to get the service and customer service on a good standing not let them run down like some parks.

Some of these sites aren't big enough to get a motor home into, with vans stacked in like sardines and no fire hoses, with little room and small sites is one of the reasons we stay on the road.

Yours, etc.,
Glenn L. James,
Lara.



Have Your Say

We need tourists

Sir,- In response to Deb McTighe's comments regarding us 'freeloaders', I have never heard such garbage and untruths.

As a previous caravan park owner I am astounded to her comments. Not only do these campers (grey nomads or families) still need to purchase food, but also fuel, alcohol, entertainment for all ages, repairs to vans and vehicles – shall I stop there.

Deb, you state that it's not proven that they spend money in Lakes. Where do you think they spend it (Dromana, then come here, really)? Where is your 'proof' that they spend it in Bairnsdale and at Aldi?

And of course they buy the newspapers in Lakes – what, do they travel to Bairnsdale to get that as well!

As a previous parkie, I would still welcome these tourists into my park for

use of the toilets and showers (for a small fee), use of my shop to purchase goods (including two-minute noodles), newspapers, milk, bread, refill gas bottles, and give them some friendly advice on fishing spots and where to wine and dine.

Just because you are the first point of income in the accommodation / tourist industry does not mean that the campers do not spend money in town.

Even those 'Wicked'

vans etc. still need to eat and obtain fuel.

Perhaps if some park fees weren't so exorbitant nowadays for the campers that are self-sufficient, there may be more customers.

There are so many campers with solar, fuel and water on board, that there is no real need to stay in caravan parks or camping grounds every night, however, there are a lot that choose to do so and prefer caravan parks.

Most 'freeloaders' will stay in parks (whether it's once a week, or more) to re-charge, use washing machines, etc.

I agree that the towns need to look tidy, so why not have a specific area to accommodate such tourists. A lot of these tourists pay a lot of money to travel our beautiful country and, in particular, to visit Lakes Entrance.

So why would you not want to make them feel welcome. A short overnight stay could certainly turn into a week-long stay. Do you think that they just sit outside their van door and do nothing all day long?

Think again.

They eat, drink, dine out, shop in the local businesses, go on many of the tourist attractions, and eat out. They are certainly not travelling for free and most of them are clean and tidy. They take pride in their caravans / campers / RVs and quite often

leave their site cleaner than when they arrived.

Unfortunately, there are people that don't respect other areas, but that is in all areas of life, just like some boaties and anglers leave a mess for us to clean up.

You obviously have not seen the campers outside of Lakes enjoy the spoils of this country and it's not only those eating two-minute noodles as you suggest.

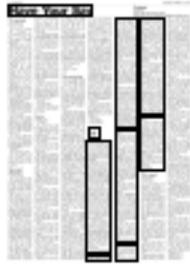
You also state they are taking car parks for anglers, and parks for boats.

Who says that they are the only one with visiting rights? Why should it not be equally divided for all to enjoy?

Maybe take a look at other local towns and see how they welcome the RV tourists. They are certainly reaping the rewards. Aren't we a tourist town? We need tourists.

Yours etc.,

Helen Lieuwen,
Swan Reach.



Have Your Say

On the right track

Sir,- In the article "Tidy up the freeloaders", there was yet another whinging caravan park owner trying to sow the seeds of doubt with the probable aim of eliminating the freedom camping site trial at Lakes Entrance.

What many of your readers possibly don't know is that this is just part of the concerted effort of the caravan park industry to shut down all freedom camping sites Australia-wide.

The Caravan Industry Association of Australia is a powerful group which, by its own words, "... is the peak national body for the Australian caravan and camping industry representing over 4000 industry businesses ranging from caravan parks, manufacturers and retailers of industry products, suppliers of goods and services, and service providers" ... and has stated aims of:

- * Strongly representing the caravanning and camping sector.

- * Caravan Industry Association of Australia undertakes appropriate Federal Government and stakeholder interactions to ensure that the industry is able to develop and advance, and consumers are provided with safe and quality interactions with industry products and participants.

- * A voice for the sector.

- * Caravan Industry Association of Australia reg-

ularly meets with senior federal ministers and sen-

ators to actively raise the profile of the industry, and to advocate industry issues with key decision makers, their advisors and federal departments.

There you have it - "... meets with senior federal ministers and senators ...".

No, this group doesn't represent the needs of travellers. It would appear to be the federal body representing the various state caravan park owners' associations, such as Caravan Parks Association of Victoria.

Some caravan park owners have become greedy - first they took business away from motels by filling their parks with cabins, thereby reducing the amount of space available for other forms of camping. Overheads went up and so did caravan park fees.

The park owners collectively are now trying to force travellers to stay at their high-priced, unsuitable, caravan parks and nowhere else. A bit like a major shopping chain lobbying all levels of government to shut down all shops other than their own even if they don't sell the products you want.

Those with long memories will realise we had a similar discussion in this newspaper (August 2008) initiated by - you guessed it - a caravan park owner

complaining about freeloaders.

What a lot of caravan park owners simply don't get is that they have to entice travellers to use their services, not force them. A lot of caravan parks simply do not have the facilities that owners of larger vehicles (whether caravans or motorhomes) can use - like drive-through sites that do not require the removal of the towing vehicle of a caravan or a trailer behind a motorhome; like clear access without low overhanging tree branches; like surfaces that the heavier vehicles don't get bogged in.

The astute reader will note I use the words 'freedom camping' not 'free camping'.

What is 'freedom camping'? It is, basically, the freedom of choice as to where we stay the night, a couple of days or longer if permitted. Sometimes that may be a low-cost show-ground, sometimes a bush camp, sometimes a lower cost caravan park. If people want to stay in expensive caravan parks, that is their choice.

On the other hand, if people have fully self-contained motorhomes then they simply do not need the facilities offered by the majority of caravan parks.

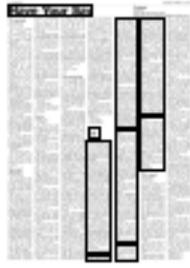
We do want to have our pets with us.

All we need is an area where we can stay without the inconvenience of disconnecting, then re-connecting, the towed trailer.

For example, in the 2008 discussion the outcome was that the manager of an Omeo caravan park (now called Holstens Camping Park) did just that. He offered a \$10 per site per day deal for self-contained vehicles (i.e. no access to the community room, toilets or other facilities). For that fee we had a perfect drive through spot beside the babbling Livingstone Creek, with our dog, well away from other campers (with sometimes noisy children), and free firewood.

It was close to the walking track into Omeo and as a consequence we stayed for three days and spent some \$140 in the Omeo area.

On some points, however, I do agree with Ms McTighe. The backpacking travellers. There always have been and always will be, people travelling on a limited budget. Often these are young overseas travellers who simply do not have the financial resources to pay for high-priced camping accommodation in caravan parks. Some resort to parking wherever they want, often illegally, and often use the sur-



rounding bushes as a toilet.

I agree with the EGSC concept of giving these travellers a place to stay overnight and have them in one spot where we can keep an eye on them.

Ms McTighe commented, "but who's going to police the areas?" I agree that is a problem; signage is simply not enough.

As to not spending money in Lakes Entrance, that is a myopic view in my opinion.

As an EGSC ratepayer, I feel the shire is on the right track with this trial.

Yours etc.,

Ian Bond,

Paynesville.

**▶ LETTERS**

Nothing free about park idea

Editor,

RE: Free camping in Pat Botto Park Strathdickie. Guardian 18/2/15

HOW generous of the Proserpine Chamber of Commerce to nominate the Pat Botto Park as a free camping site for caravans and R/Vs. Apparently benefits will flow to local businesses if the proposal goes ahead.

Did the Chamber of Commerce members give any consideration to the costs involved in establishing this free park and who is going to pay same?

Our council still has a big debt so maybe the benefactors will pay the costs of suitable toilets and water.

Strathdickie does not have town water or sewerage services.

Add the cost of extra garbage and maintenance a park full of campers creates.

Even if the park is available to self contained R/Vs, only, one would be very naive to believe that backpacker camper vans and caravans won't take advantage of a free park.

Who pays to police the park users?

Sadly not every camper does the right thing and uses the dump site in town for their sewerage waste.

Mr Kipping, chairman of RV Clubs Australia stated that providing free

parks is like having access to a caterpillar of bank accounts.

Perhaps he would be kind enough to encourage his members to support hurting towns like Proserpine by staying a night or two in our caravan park that has all amenities including a dump point.

Please take the Pat Botto free caravan park off the agenda. We love it as it is.

**Jan Maltby
Strathdickie**



CARAVANS OF LOVE

The wheels are well and truly back on the state's caravan manufacturing industry, as families rediscover the great outdoor holiday in our backyard

GLEN NORRIS

SENIOR BUSINESS
REPORTER

Younger tourers wanting to take their adventures off-road and families rediscovering the outdoor holiday are helping fuel a revival in Queensland's caravan manufacturing industry.

The introduction of bigger cars, caravans with all the mod cons and an increasing desire of Australians to see their country has helped push production to levels not seen since the industry's boom years of the early 1970s.

Queensland now has the second-highest number of caravan manufacturers in the country, building everything from humble camper trailers to "Rolls-Royce" models that sell for more than \$100,000 and feature widescreen televisions, satellite dishes and spacious showers.

Nationwide production of recreational vehicles is now in excess of 20,000 annually, attracting revenue of \$1.2 billion. More than seven million Australians have gone camping or caravanning over the past two years.

Queensland manufacturers such as Kedron, Lifestyle and Sunland are quickly becoming the new flag-bearers of the industry that two decades ago was on the ropes.

It has been a long road to recovery for the 50-year-old industry that dates back to when Neil Chesney set up a small caravan factory in Brisbane in the 1950s. Local manufacturers such as Chesney, Murrumba Star, Olympic, Arrow and Litecraft rode an industry boom as caravanning became the popular choice for holidaying families in the 1960s and 1970s. At its peak, Lawnton-based Chesney was Australia's third-largest caravan manufacturer, employing 400 people and making up to 100 caravans a week.

However, by the late 1970s the good times were coming to

an end, with surging fuel prices, a penchant for high-rise resort holidays and an economic downturn sending the industry into long-term decline.

Many manufacturers closed down. Chesney was sold to a multinational building company and shut in 1977. National production across the industry slumped from over 35,000 in the mid-1970s to about 5000 in the early 1990s.

In 1990, the industry held a crisis meeting to discuss how to survive what looked like a bleak future. Second-hand caravans were flooding the market as caravanning became something considered impractical and old-fashioned. Industry veterans began to formulate a rescue plan – the targeting of the emerging baby boomer market that wanted to reconnect with the great outdoors.

While Queensland only represents about 10 per cent of national production, with market leaders such as Jayco based in Victoria, locally-made caravans have a reputation for toughness and reliability. The Queensland industry turns over an estimated \$120 million each year.

John Swinglehurst left a high-flying corporate job in the early 2000s, hitting the road in a camper trailer that he built himself. "I then built one for a friend and then another," he says. The hobby turned into a thriving business and his company Lifestyle Camper Trailers now makes more than 300 caravans and camper trailers a year from its base at Slacks Creek. He says Queensland has a strong pedigree in caravan manufacturing because of its good weather.

Roy Wyss, founder of Caboolture's Sunland Caravans, says Queensland caravan manufacturers are considered world class, building vans that can withstand Australia's tough road conditions. Founded 12 years ago, Sunland employs 42 people at its factory, producing about 100 caravans a year that cost between \$80,000 and \$140,000.

Wyss says customers have become more discerning compared with the early days, when a caravan's only luxuries were an ice chest and kerosene stove.

"Even when we started 12 years ago, caravans were fairly



basic," he recalls. "They had no airconditioning or showers." "Now showers, toilets, airconditioners, independent suspension are all standard along with bluetooth, satellite dishes and large-screen televisions."

The \$120,000 Sunland Blue Heeler caravan bought by Burpengary traveller Des Thomas features solar panels, airconditioners and a generator.

Thomas says modern caravans allowed him the freedom to go anywhere in comfort. "I took it to the Cape and back last year and it performed perfectly," he says. "There was more dust in the car than in the caravan. You can park it in the middle of a paddock." Chesney, who is still an industry consultant, says Queensland-made caravans held their own against imported models because of their more robust construction. "A lot of the European-made caravans are very lightweight as they are towed by smaller cars," he says.

Kedron Caravans director Glen Gall notes his company has ridden a wave of demand for more robust luxury caravans that can be taken off-road towed by powerful four-wheel-drives. "Caravans were traditionally designed to go up and down the coast to Noosa or Tallebudgera," Gall says. "We decided to lift the vans up, build a stronger chassis, put solar panels on the roof, install battery power and a satellite dish. Now you can take them up the Gulf to go barra fishing."

Prior to starting making its own caravans in the late 1990s, Kedron had a long history as a retailer. Its landmark outlet on Brisbane's northside at Gympie Rd, Kedron, was opened in the 1960s by Glen Gall's father, Barry.

The company's Brendale factory now makes about 125 vehicles a year with a staff of 25. The Galls road test their caravans in extended trips to the Outback that are filmed and sold as adventure DVDs and their exploits attract half a million YouTube views a month.

The "Gall Boys" – father Barry and sons David, Peter, Craig, Ashley and Glen – have now produced nine documentaries of their trips to remote locales.

Caravanning Queensland chief executive Ron Chapman stressed it was no longer just the "grey nomads" driving the market these days. The largest users of caravan parks are in the 35-49-year-old age bracket.

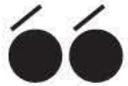
"A lot of younger people may have had the same job since they left school and now have long-service leave owing," he says. "They are packing up and going on a trip around Australia."

While parents these days may have grown up going on holidays to high-rises or resorts, they want to get their own children back into outdoor holidays. Caravanners and campers spend approximately \$7 billion each year in the local economy.

Caravan Industry Association of Australia chief executive Stuart Lamont is upbeat about the long-term prospects for the industry, arguing caravanning has once again become part of the Australian psyche.

"You go to school, buy a house, work for 40 years and then retire and travel around Australia in a caravan," Lamont says.

You go to school, buy a house, work for 40 years and then retire and travel around Australia in a caravan



04

01. Sunland Caravans founder Roy Wyss 02. A family enjoying the great outdoors at Cashes Crossing in Pine Rivers during the 1950s 03. The Gall Boys on one of their Outback adventures 04. A worker wiring a Kedron caravan



03



01



02



Kedron Caravans
production plant
Picture: Steve Pohlner

**Kedron Caravans
production plant**
Picture: Steve Pohlner



RV boost

BOORT has become the fourth RV Friendly Town in the Loddon Shire, joining Bridgewater, Pyramid Hill and Wedderburn.

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia officially declared Boort an RV Friendly Town on February 16.

By promoting the partnership between recreational vehicle travellers and small towns, CMCA hopes to encourage the expansion of tourism related infrastructure and services, and also boost the economy of those small towns providing RV tourist specific amenities.

In order to qualify for the scheme, towns must successfully meet the needs of RV travellers and satisfy stringent criteria including:

- * Access to medical facilities, a pharmacy, a dump point and a general shopping area;
- * Provision of appropriate parking; and
- * A tourist information centre and vehicle service centre.

CMCA also considers the general attitude of the local council and community, so as to truly identify

the friendliest areas in Australia.

Therefore, travellers can enter any RV Friendly Town with the knowledge that they will be welcomed and adequately provided for. In return, CMCA supports and promotes towns with an RV Friendly status.

CMCA director, Ken Kipping says the results of the scheme continued to be promising.

"It is great to see an increasing number of towns qualifying as RV Friendly," he said.

"CMCA strives to promote a number of schemes that will facilitate improved relationships between RV travellers, government and the community. This way we are ensuring that everyone's interests are considered and our programs are mutually beneficial for all parties involved."

The advantage of Boort becoming an RV Friendly Town is that the business communities will benefit from the dollars spent by these mobile travellers. The value of road based tourism in Australia is estimated to be \$7 billion per annum.