



Chamber voucher scheme aims to entice tourists

BOB ANTHONY

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ENCOURAGING Murwillumbah visitors to shop locally is the main aim of an innovative scheme being launched by the local business chamber this weekend.

To coincide with the arrival of about 30 recreational vehicles, which will camp at the showgrounds, Murwillumbah District Business Chamber is producing tourist vouchers designed to entice visitors to support participating businesses.

Chamber president Toni

Zuschke said the chamber had a very positive response to the initial run of vouchers and this weekend would be a good indication of their potential.

"We felt that something like this, or being able to put together a little welcome pack, would make a good impression on tourists and visitors," Ms Zuschke said.

"This weekend, the RV jamboree will see 30 vehicles in town and, by providing the people with offers from businesses which could save them some money, we're hoping it makes a good impression."

Ms Zuschke said the chamber aimed to have Murwillumbah become only the third Northern Rivers town accredited as an RV-friendly town, alongside Grafton and Kyogle.

"There are certain criteria which a town has to have before it is recognised by the Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia, and we think Murwillumbah certainly can fulfil those," she said.

"There are 25 towns in Queensland and it is a tourist market we would like to tap into."

Ms Zuschke said the open-

ing of the Margaret Olley Art Centre at Tweed Regional Art Gallery next month would provide a great chance to promote the voucher scheme.

"The attraction of the Margaret Olley Art Centre is something which we should try to tap into, and a scheme such as our tourist vouchers would be a winner for both the town and tourists," she said.

The chamber will have gallery director Susi Muddiman as guest speaker at its next business breakfast on March 7.

She will talk about the centre's potential tourism impact.



Free camping anger RV plan divides tourism industry

THE tourism sector is split over a plan by South Gippsland Shire Council to attract more visitors.

Council is proposing to promote free camping sites around the municipality to lure the rapidly growing motorhome market, as part of its draft Recreational Vehicle (RV) Strategy.

Council wants to promote the Franklin River Reserve at Toora, Bass Valley Camping Ground between Poowong and Loch, and Buckley Park, Fish Creek as sites suitable for RVs to stay.

But that proposal would rob caravan parks of business. Rachel Brown of the Toora Tourist Park told council last Wednesday.

On the other hand, Keith Moxham of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, said the plan would draw more holiday-makers to the shire and boost the economy.

Ms Brown said for every \$1 spent at caravan parks, another \$1.38 is spent in the community through the parks employing staff.

"If that \$1 is not spent in our caravan parks, then that \$1.38 is not being spent in our community," she said.

"If council wants to open up these camping grounds, they should charge and

that would mean we would then be able to compete." Ms Brown said promoting the Franklin River Reserve as a motorhome stop would negatively impact her nearby business.

"Every night there are up to 10 groups there, people in tents, motorhomes and staying in cars. Most of them are not self contained," she said.

"There is one toilet block serviced by tank water and no shower facilities, so I guess that's why they sneak into my caravan park at night to have a free shower."

Based on a nightly rate of \$35, missing out on those 10 groups cost her business \$350 a night, Ms Brown said.

With lost revenue plus additional costs of water, waste management and risk, Ms Brown said free campers cost the community \$82,000 a year.

Ms Brown said she has ample powered sites to cater for extra RV visitors and said if council opened reserves to free camping, it was exposing itself to risks.

Cr Nigel Hutchinson-Brooks, chairman of council's economic development and tourism committee, said council was trying to "increase the size of the pie" by allowing more businesses to benefit from tourists, not just caravan parks.

Cr Andrew McEwen said people have the right camp alongside roads in other states and added RV travellers tour on a set budget.

"You are not going to be getting more money from them by forcing them to stay at caravan parks," he said.

Elizabeth White, CEO of the Victorian Caravan Parks Association, told council research had indicated free campers spend a third of the amount spent in the local community by people staying at caravan parks.

She said ratepayers would fit the bill for maintaining free sites, and claimed free camping would increase the risk of excess rubbish and waterways being contaminated.

Ms White also claimed council would be acting in an anti-competitive manner by establishing free camping reserves - a claim disputed by Keith Moxham, a director of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia.

He said the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission told him it had no issues with council offering free camping.

Mr Moxham said RV owners should have the right to stay at free camping reserves, adding 66 per cent of the club's members stay

at no frills sites or caravan parks.

"That is the 66 per cent you are not getting," he told council.

He said Wellington and East Gippsland shire councils had adequate dump points and were drawing visitors away from South Gippsland. Furthermore, South Gippsland had few entries in the RV travellers' bible, Camps Australia, he said.

He did state non self-contained vehicles should be staying at caravan parks to use park facilities.

As part of the strategy, council is proposing to install a dump point at Meeniyan. Dump points are effluent disposal points for RVs.

Ms Brown disagreed with this proposal.

"If a town wants a free dump point, I would not be opposed but I believe the town should pay for it. I can't understand why the council thinks the ratepayers' money should be paying for that," she said.

Cr McEwen, a Meeniyan resident, supported a dump point for the town to encourage people to stop and spend.

Public comment on the draft strategy closes this Friday, February 28.





Think of us: Rachel Brown of the Toora Tourist Park is calling on South Gippsland Shire Council to not develop free camping reserves to the detriment of caravan parks' bottomlines.



Caravan park owners oppose RV strategy

CARAVAN parks have indicated they will strongly contest South Gippsland Shire Council's Recreational Vehicle (RV Strategy).

The strategy is designed to improve the tourist market in South Gippsland with a variety of new projects including free overnight camping sites, free dump sites and increasing long vehicle parking in towns.

The provision of free camping and dump sites has the shire's privately owned caravan parks angry.

During discussions on the draft strategy Rachel Brown from Toora Tourist Park, and representing owners from Prom Central, Waratah Bay, Shallow Inlet, Venus Bay, Leongatha, Long Jetty and Yanakie caravan parks and Korumburra Tourist Park, said council should support existing commercial caravan parks.

"South Gippsland Shire Council should support existing commercial caravan parks as a priority over providing free or low cost services to the RV community," she said.

"It is important that the existing caravan parks continue to grow and invest as this provides jobs and investment in local communities.

"Independent research confirms that people staying in commercial caravan parks contribute more to the local economy than those staying in free or low cost venues."

Ms Brown also warned that free facilities were not 'free'; the cost was picked up by ratepayers.

"It is common from October to April to see tents, caravans and motorhomes of all sizes parked in non-authorised sites," she said.

"These people are not paying for their stay and are contributing to costs to the council for use of toilets, water, waste management, and wear and tear on roads and other public facilities."

Ms Brown also noted that some of these campers had snuck into her caravan park to use her shower facilities - another cost that was imposed on commercial

caravan parks.

She also warned council of the costs of installing dump points, a cost that is currently borne by caravan park owners.

"There is a substantial cost of installation and maintenance for these facilities and it is not reasonable for ratepayers to cover this cost," she said.

"South Gippsland Water requires public dump points to be locked at all times and a record of activity has to be maintained.

"There is an installation cost, an ongoing water and cistern charge, plus ongoing maintenance costs.

"We recommend that if a town in the shire wishes to install a public dump point then the town is fully responsible for these costs and they are not borne by the shire of South Gippsland."

Meanwhile, the cost of implementing the RV strategy was considered by some councillors and representatives of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) as an investment in tourism.

"The argument that the council shouldn't allow free or low cost camping indicates that caravan parks believe there is a finite pie of tourism dollars," Cr Nigel Hutchinson-Brooks said.

"What we're discussing is ways to increase the size of the pie. There's an opportunity here to increase your share."

Cr Hutchinson-Brooks and Cr Andrew McEwen said enticing campers, particularly those on fixed incomes and tight budgets, with free and low cost camping options would make them extend their stay in South Gippsland, adding to the local economy and encourage short stays in caravan parks to dump, shower, wash, refuel and fill up.

That view was supported by CMCA director Keith Moxham.

"The shire is well serviced by 11 caravan parks, which is excellent.

"Our member statistics tell us that 33 per cent of our members go from caravan park to caravan park, 51 per cent stay at a mixture of no frills sites and caravan parks, with the remaining 16 per

cent always staying at a no frills site and never at a caravan park.

"That is 84 per cent of our members use caravan parks.

"Expressed another way, 66 per cent use no frills sites and it is this 66 per cent you need to attract.

"The strategy needs to look at how attractive South Gippsland Shire is to this 66 per cent.

"The report mentions that Wellington has 11 dump points and East Gippsland has eight; it should be noted, that these are all free public dump points, not associated with a caravan park; there is one free public dump point in South Gippsland (Korumburra), both of these shires also have many options for the RV traveller.

"From the east after travelling through these two shires, based on the level of RV options, there is not a great deal of incentive for the RV traveller to get off the Princes Highway and travel to South Gippsland; conversely coming from the west with these two shires with all these facilities in front of you, why would you divert south to South Gippsland?"

"South Gippsland has a unique attraction in Wilsons Prom, which has many unpowered sites and attracts a higher than usual percentage of self-contained RVs.

"Without free public dump points, RV friendly towns or no frills options, the tendency is to drive through South Gippsland to The Prom and then straight out again. Capturing more of this market should be an essential part of your strategy."

The CMCA urged council to install free dump sites, develop no frills camping options, allow car parking for long vehicles, erect easy to understand signs and promote RV friendly towns in South Gippsland.

Submissions to council on the draft RV strategy close this week on Friday, February 28.

A final report will be submitted to council for council's vote in April.



Unhappy holidays

RV plan divides tourism industry

By Brad Lester

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CARAVANS, CAMPING, MOTORHOMES & PARK HOMES

Be eco-friendly on road

SCOTT PODMORE

NOW here's a caravan that will make you green with envy as many travellers strive to reduce their carbon footprint while scooting around the planet.

Green-at-heart Bruce Loxton and his team at Kimberley Kampers in Ballina are leading the way in ensuring we pack in some environmentally friendly habits when we hit the road in their Eco-suite, a caravan that not only reduces fuel emissions but fuel costs as well.

It's powered primarily by the sun, but it may surprise many that the secondary energy source is Australian soy bio-diesel and a methanol fuel cell. The caravan can run its own airconditioning, cooking equipment and water heating, as well as powering up devices such as laptop computers, smartphones and iPods. Even the toilets are vacuum-designed like those on aircraft so there are no chemicals involved.

Travelling in this green machine means you could be anywhere for months and operate independently of

traditional power sources.

After winning an AMP innovation award a couple of years ago, Mr Loxton was inspired to invest in lithium batteries and other energy products to create a globally attractive unit now "winning hearts in the US".

"Our Eco-suite leaves only half the carbon footprint of a regular set-up," Mr Loxton says proudly.

Calculated on a 12,000km trip, Mr Loxton says a typical caravan and four-wheel-drive would release about 8600kg of carbon. With the Eco-suite and a new V8 turbo-diesel with 20 per cent bio-diesel, this drops to less than 4400kg and about a 35 per cent reduction in fuel costs.

Because more national parks are clamping down on outboard motors and generators, Kimberley has come up with an electric outboard and an inflatable boat stored on top of the vehicle, so you have the waterways covered, too.

Camping grounds and holiday parks are quickly picking up on the go-green trend as well, introducing

recycling programs, worm farms and alternative power sources such as wind turbines and solar energy.





Sunday Times (Perth), Perth
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The Kimberley Eco-Suite Signature off-road caravan in action