



Esperance may become RV-friendly

But caravan park owners voice concerns

By **MOLLY BAXTER**

SHIRE of Esperance councillors are set to decide whether to trial Esperance as an RV-friendly town but caravan park owners believe the move may be detrimental to existing parks.

Several community members turned up to an agenda briefing session at the shire's office on Tuesday afternoon to voice their concerns about the scant consultation with local business regarding the impacts of making Esperance RV friendly.

The council is considering trialing a low-cost, self-contained camping area within the confines of the Greater Sports Ground for 12 months from December 12.

It will cost recreational vehicle owners \$10 a night.

The facilities are confined to vehicles which are fully self-contained.

There are plans to host a maximum of eight vehicles a day.

During an ordinary council meeting in March last year the council supported the concept of the Goldfields-Esperance region being designated a RV-friendly region.

RV Friendly has been trademarked by the Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia, which believes RV tourists with self-contained vehicles should have an appropriate accommodation mix, including both low-cost and commercial options as their self-contained vehicles do not need the services offered by caravan parks.

Esperance Bay Holiday Park operator Nigel Gardan said the cost to the shire would be significantly more than \$10 per night.

"We charge people \$34 per night, \$28 of which covers the costs of water, electricity and other such things," he said.

"Who will be the one to decide who gets the spaces if more than eight turn up for a night's accommodation?"

Mr Gardan said the loss of eight RVs each night for his business would come at an annual cost of more than \$100,000.

"That is the equivalent of three staff members," he said.

Also at Tuesday's meeting were Esperance

Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive

Grant Shipp and Goldfields Esperance Development Council district manager Shane Liddelow and both agreed there had not been enough consultation with park owners before a decision was to be made.

Mr Shipp said the chamber did not support becoming RV friendly without more consultation with stakeholders.

Bathers Paradise Caravan Park operator Darlene Burkin read her letter to the council which said becoming RV friendly would increase the risk of deceitful customers, with rubbish dumping an issue for the shire.

"We have issues with Wicked Vans and other similar travellers who steal things such as toilet paper and a night's accommodation," she said.

She questioned who would pay someone to monitor such things late at night at the sports grounds.

Both Mr Gardan and Ms Burkin said the RV Friendly label would not encourage more people to travel to Esperance.

"It was originally meant to be given to small towns with no caravan parks where travellers could pull up for a night and rest their heads," Mr Gardan said.

"But now it has spread to towns with multiple caravan parks."

Councillor Lara McIntyre said the benefits would be not having to supply power or water as the vehicles must be fully self contained.

She said the sports grounds were a "Leave No Trace" centre.

The council said a local trial would enable it to evaluate the positive and negative outcomes before making a more permanent decision.

A decision to run past the trial period is suggested to occur after the 2014-15 summer tourist season.

Two potential sites have been identified.

They are the corner of Black Street and Harbour Road, inside the Greater Sports Ground and the vacant land opposite the Civic Centre and behind the shire administration building on Council Place.

The council will decide on Tuesday whether to go ahead with the trial.



Worried: Nigel Gardan from Esperance Bay Holiday Park is concerned about what RV Friendly could mean for the owners of caravan parks in Esperance.



'Parking a problem, but city shines elsewhere'

BY ELLA SMITH

WHERE Wagga fails to cater for the campervan and caravan market with limited and unsuitable city parking, it makes up for in other areas, according to passing visitors.

A 62-year-old man was angered to find a parking fine slapped across the windscreen of his car and campertrailer last month after parking in a car park on Berry Street for about 15 minutes.

Ian and Irene Hardie maintained they were unable to park further away from the centre when they passed through Wagga because of her recent arthroscopy, launching a month-long battle with Wagga City Council (WWCC) and the state debt recovery office to waive the payment.

The Sydney-based couple believe parking in central Wagga needs to be addressed, adding fuel to suggestions Wagga isn't a recreational vehicle friendly town (RVFT).

While Albury, Coleambally, Lake Cargelligo, Hay, Narrandera and Lockhart are among the 46 RVFTs in NSW, Wagga hasn't yet been formal-

ly recognised as an RVFT under the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's (CMCA) stringent requirements.

John Miller, a free camper of almost four years, believes city parking could be improved but Wagga is otherwise suitable for RVs.

"(Wagga is) pretty much (RV friendly)," Mr Miller said at Wilks Park's free camping area yesterday.

"There could be more parking in town itself for people who want to stop in town.

"A lot of people don't want to (free camp).

"You see someone pull up and park and it's quite obvious there's not enough parking in town."

South Gippsland's Jane and Gary Plier also maintained parking was problematic for a transient crowd but said free camping at Wilks Park allowed them to inject money into the local economy.

Mrs Plier said Wagga wasn't alone in its limited city centre parking, but it wasn't an issue for free campers.

"It is but Wagga's not entirely on its own," she said.

"We love Wagga, we always come here.

"If you're driving through, it could possibly be an issue and you can drive miles to park but if you stay here overnight, you can go into town."

The first criteria a town must meet to be labelled an RVFT is having appropriate parking within the town centre, including access to a general shopping area with groceries or fresh produce, as well as provision of short-term (24/48 hour) parking for self-contained vehicles within the town precinct.



ON THE ROAD: Gary Plier believes parking is a problem for travellers.



Campers have top new place to holiday

By Sue Gardiner

AS MURWILLUMBAH Showgrounds gears up for the annual agricultural show on Friday, there are plans to throw open the gates to campers.

Up to 20 "primitive" sites for caravans and recreational vehicles on the 10ha site were recently endorsed by Tweed Shire Council.

It is hoped the new camping site will attract more tourists away from the coastal areas to Murwillumbah and surrounding hinterland villages.

A report to the council from Destination Tweed said the region already attracted a large number of RVs but predominantly to the coastal areas.

"If there is no parking facilities for RVs in Murwillumbah, they will continue (as they currently do) to drive through Murwillumbah and the rural areas onto Queensland," the report says.

It comes after now Mayor Gary Bagnall instigated a

report last year on the Recreational Vehicle Friendly Town Initiative, which led to the council asking Destination Tweed to see if the hinterland and remote areas of the shire could benefit from the RV market.

Showground Trust secretary Allan Brown said they had already been approached by a caravan club wanting to use the camping facilities since word of the plan was reported.

A fortnight ago the trust applied to Crown Lands to add "recreation" to the purpose of the showgrounds reserve, which is necessary to open the site up to campers.

Mr Brown said this would also open the grounds up to other recreational users.

"It's a community facility and at the moment the community can't use it," he said.

He said the money generated from the camping site would go to maintaining the grounds, with the trust currently limited in how it can raise funds.



OPENING UP: Murwillumbah Showgrounds may soon be used by campers.

PHOTO: JOHN GASS



Merredin's officially friendly

IT is official, Merredin is an RV (recreational vehicle) Friendly Town.

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) last week informed the shire it had officially declared Merredin as an RV Friendly Town - a CMCA trademarked status.

The scheme aims to promote a partnership between travellers and regional towns to encourage an expansion of tourism-related infrastructure and services and also boost the local economy through attracting more road-based tourists.

To qualify as an RV Friendly Town Merredin had to meet CMCA criteria, including having access to medical facilities, a pharmacy, a dump point and a general shopping area, as well as a visitor information centre and vehicle service centre and to provide appropriate parking for motorhomes which often tow second vehicles and need long-vehicle spaces.

The CMCA also considered the attitude of the local council and community.

CMCA national consumer representative and government liaison director Ken Kipping said 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."

He said the advantage of Merredin becoming an RV Friendly Town was that businesses would benefit from dollars spent by mobile travellers encouraged to visit the area.

The value of road-based tourism in Australia is estimated to be \$7 billion a year, Mr Kipping said.

RV Friendly Towns are listed on the CMCA website and in its monthly Wanderer club magazine.

"This is a great step forward for Merredin. It forms part of a council strategy to encourage more people to visit Merredin, and to further encourage those who do to stay longer, have a look around, sample our local restaurants, buy fuel or supplies, and recommend Merredin to other travellers as a place to visit," Merredin shire chief executive Greg Powell said.

"Access to a free dump point within the town was one of our final hurdles, but the installation of the new RV dump point at Merredin Tourist Park recently allowed Merredin to meet all the criteria," he said.



NT:German tourist found dead at Kakadu

The body of a German tourist has been found in Kakadu National Park.

Police say an emergency beacon registered to the 31-year-old man's campervan was fired yesterday about 7pm (CST).

Police from Jabiru found the man dead in the back of the campervan in the car park at Jim Jim Falls, where investigators from Katherine have established a crime scene.

A police spokesman says it's too early to determine whether the death is suspicious.

AAP RTV



Caravan event in the pipeline

A VISIT to a recent Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia event at Port Stephens has given strength to a Gunnedah Shire Council proposal to consider hosting an event in 2016.

Mayor Owen Hasler, Councillor Colleen Fuller and working group members Barry Baldock and Pat Mayoh attended the Port Stephens Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) 29th National Rally this month.

Cr Hasler said a “portable city” of about 820 vans and motorhomes were at the rally, bringing up to 1800 people into the area.

“The CMCA has some 60,000 members,” Cr Hasler said.

“It is a very powerful organisation. That is expected to double over the next six years or so given the number of baby boomers.”

Cr Hasler said if Gunnedah felt it had the potential to stage the event, it would have flow-on effects for the whole community, particularly businesses such as pharmacies, hairdressers and clubs.

The 2015 events have already been booked, but Cr Hasler said Gunnedah could look at making a bid for the 2016 March, April, May event.

He said a number of people on the organising committee had expressed an interest in visiting Gunnedah to meet with council.



Council split over RVs

COUNCIL has postponed its decision to engage in an RV-friendly trial because it believes there has not been enough community engagement.

At an Ordinary Council meeting on Tuesday, several members of the public attended and voiced their concerns both for and against the trial.

Acclaim Holiday Parks chief executive officer Sally Chacko said there had not been enough community engagement to make a decision about the trial.

She said she had eight caravan parks in Western Australia, personally owning two in the Esperance area.

"The shire has not engaged with locals and other community members about the damage our businesses will suffer," she said.

Ms Chacko said her caravan parks in Norseman and Kalgoorlie were hit hard after the towns became RV-Friendly, with many choosing the option over caravan parks.

During the meeting, Caravan Industry Association member support and sales manager Michael Collins said occupancy in caravan parks was less than 50 per cent throughout the year.

"Because of this, we can not endorse becoming RV-Friendly," he said.

Campervan and Motor Home Club of Australia (CMCA) member Jan Fiegert represented the group and said she supported Esperance turning RV-Friendly.

Ms Fiegert said becoming RV-Friendly would encourage more tourists to the area.

"Even those who don't spend a night in a caravan park still spend money in the town on food and petrol and such things," she said.

"I hate people talking about Esperance not being RV-Friendly."

She said a maximum of eight vehicles per night would be allowed in the RV-Friendly area and if they decided to stay a sec-

ond night, they would have to pay for a night's accommodation in a caravan park.

"The CMCA has 8000 singles who stay in caravan parks throughout Australia," she said.

However councillor Lara McIntyre was met with applause after she stood against the motion, saying the shire should not be bullied into a decision.

"Esperance is 200 kilometres away from the nearest shopping centre, it is not somewhere people pass through," she said.

"If tourists come to Esperance, they come for Esperance, not because it is RV-friendly."

"There are other options we can look into such as working with caravan parks to become more RV-welcoming but we do not have to be bullied by a brand who don't care about us."

Shire of Esperance deputy president Victoria Brown said Council needed more informa-

"Council laid this item on the table in order to enable further discussions to take place before a decision is made," she said.

"We want to know more about the potential benefits and impacts of providing a low-cost camping area that RV users would be able to use for one night, on Esperance camp site operators, other local businesses and visitors."

The provision of a low-cost campsite is the final element required for Esperance to be considered an RV-Friendly region.

All other conditions are met, including the provision of a dump point and access to potable water.

Consultation with relevant stakeholders will take place over the coming weeks and council will discuss the RV-friendly trial again on November 25.