



very high expectation that Councillors should devise and announce an equitable and transparent process for making the selection.

One of her colleagues accused Cr Moriarty of grandstanding with her 'Notice of Motion', but I think she's on the right track. All the candidates should be given an equal opportunity to make their pitch just as they would at a 'Meet the Candidates' forum during an election.

Without transparency and equity, the mayor and councillors expose themselves to serious criticism by the community, particularly if, for example, they were to appoint a former Councillor. It will immediately be perceived as 'jobs for the good old boys' at the expense of the best interests of the community.

It's really important for them to get it right. If they don't, unsuccessful candidates may even have justifiable cause for a formal complaint if it appears in any way that the selection process has been sub-standard. I might even save them the trouble by lobbying in a formal complaint myself. Councillors need to objectively assess if the candidates have the right skills, track record, attitude and experience to perform well in the role of Councillor.

Selection of the replacement councillor must be based purely on merit and ability.

I don't envy the Councillors - they've been handed a poisoned chalice that could even affect their chances of re-election if it's not handled in a way that meets with the approval of the community.

This is definitely not a time to be running around like headless chooks.

With so many strong candidates, there's a critical necessity for transparency and equity in the selection process.

Our community expects nothing less than the best.

Café culture comes of age in Lowood

I do love a good cup of Java, so I'm very pleased to welcome a brand new addition to the café scene in Lowood.

Customers to SUPA IGA Lowood will have noticed all the building activity in the shop on the front of the store over the past few weeks as a new café has taken shape.

The brand new 'Signatures on Main' Café at SUPA IGA Lowood had an official opening on Friday. They will be open seven days a week serving Campos Coffee, delicious cakes

and slices and culinary delights from the menu created by their Manager, local chef Jason Kaeser.

The Whitten and Lowry families who operate SUPA IGA Lowood have invested big in making the café into a first class venue for local people to enjoy. The excellent coffee and food is served by very friendly staff. They offer free Wi-Fi with every purchase from their extensive menu of All Day Breakfasts, grilled and slow-cooked meat dishes, grilled sandwiches and healthy salads.

There's a great human interest story I found out about the manager, local chef Jason Kaeser from the 'Drink Wine... Think Wine' blog when I researched him on the Internet - I found out that he's a local floodie as well as being a foodie:

(When the floods from Lockyer Creek rose around their farm in January 2011, Jason and his wife Rachel made it to a nearby olive farm) where they would stay in a shed with their dogs, wet and miserable and subsisting on 2 minute noodles for the rest of the week. On Tuesday, on top of the 18 meter flood-waters, there was another 15 inches of rain. And this is what really did the damage. The Kaesers were stuck in the shed, unable to make it within 2 kilometres of their house, unable to make phone calls, unable to reach

their neighbours. On Wednesday one of their neighbours managed to reach them and told them there was a raging torrent of water around their house which had reached the windows of their second storey and that they could kiss their vineyard goodbye. Rachel and Jason were devastated as it hit home that they had lost everything."

After the flood, the first thing Jason Kaeser did was to make a generous donation to the Australian Wine Industry flood recovery fund raiser even though they themselves had lost nearly everything and did not qualify for any government flood recovery grants.

Starting from a blank page, Jason Kaeser has designed the new café from the ground up with a unique decor and menu. Signatures on Main is a long way removed from any of the franchised coffee chains such as Maccas and Coffee Club. It will be a great asset for local residents and for tourists coming to our region.

Lowood has recently been awarded 'RV Friendly Town' status by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, so the development of a café culture in the town will help to drive the local tourism economy and create more jobs in our region.

I'm also going to give a special mention to another fairly new café in Lowood. For a few weeks, I've been quietly sampling the menu at Rudy and Ada, a small café in Railway St just near the Dentist and opposite the Solicitors office that specialises in good coffee and delicious salads and rolls made from ingredients sourced from local Somerset farmers. There's nothing flash about the premises and they need to do something about the signage as many local people have yet to notice their presence, but they're well worth a visit as the food is delicious and friendly service is excellent.

Anyone who invests in a new business or expands an existing one is taking a significant financial risk, so I hope they will be supported by the local community.

The power of a good cup of coffee to help drive tourism in our region should not be underestimated.

Disclaimer: Paul Heymans has not received any financial or other benefit for writing these reviews. He does however provide I.T. services to SUPA IGA Lowood.

Paul Heymans is a Somerset resident, computer business owner and community activist who is passionate about our region. He can be contacted at paul@paulcomputers.com.au. Readers can join the discussion in the companion 'Passion for Somerset' Facebook group. The opinions expressed in this column are entirely his own and they are entirely opinions.

Pictured Inset: Jason Klee of Rudy and Ada café in Railway St, Lowood.

Pictured main: Chef Jason Kaeser and staff at Signatures on Main





Campers welcome: Shire considers a van-guard approach to backpackers

■ JULIE POWER

Many Sydney councils want backpackers to go back where they came from, but Sutherland Shire is exploring ways to make its beachside suburbs a “destination point for local and overseas campervan users.”

The Sutherland Shire council voted last month to investigate the possibility of providing facilities for campervan parking and single overnight stays in suitable areas of “high tourist” appeal with easy access to cafes and businesses.

Councillor Steve Simpson, who proposed the motion, said there was a shortage of tourist accommodation, particularly camping sites near the beaches of Cronulla or Wanda

where most people wanted to stay. As a result, valuable grey nomads – who spent \$700 on average during any stay on shopping and dining – were bypassing the shire.

“We want people to come to our country, we want them to visit us, but in many cases it is as long as you don’t come in my street and don’t come in my area,” he said of the outcry in response to backpacker vans crowding beachside streets.

A short-stay camping site with facilities nearer the beach, for example, would encourage retirees in campervans, caravans and motorhomes to visit, while providing younger nomads in campervans with an affordable way to spend the night without breaking the law.

“By not having that, we miss out on the benefits. I want them to spend their children’s inheritance at local shops,” Cr Simpson said of the grey nomads. “I want them to spend money and go to restaurants.”

It would also address the problem of younger visitors parking their vans illegally overnight. “If you put people in areas that are well-maintained, and they can go there at a reasonable cost, it takes away that problem of being harassed in streets, and people knocking on their windows.”

While the sight of younger nomads in campervans doing their washing or changing their clothes in the street has infuriated residents of many Sydney suburbs, Cr Simpson said most were well-behaved with a hand-ful giving the rest a bad reputation.

Sutherland’s mayor Kent Johns said the shire was looking at how to improve tourist numbers “without attracting undesirables”. The current investigation was only “an exploratory document”, he said.

Locals said skyrocketing property prices near the beach made it unlikely that the council would find suitable land.

While other councils in NSW and Victoria, particularly near popular beaches, have had a big problem with unwanted backpacker vans staying in unauthorised areas – often treating locals to intimate views of them undressing, cooking and worse – Cronulla has so far avoided the worst. After complaints, Waverley mayor Sally Betts asked the NSW government if it could erect signs saying ‘no camping or

overnight stay’ at multiple entry points to the local government area. It was knocked back, according to media reports. The president of the Cronulla Chamber of Commerce, Mark Aprilovic, said Cr Simpson was opening a “can of worms”.

The shire wanted more visitors, but beachfront areas were densely populated and heavily used by locals from early morning boot camps to surfing competitions.

The owner of the Cronulla Beach Youth Hostel Michael Keogh said backpackers often asked if they could sleep in their vans but use the hostel’s facilities. His answer is no.

He applauded Cr Simpson for recognising the importance of tourism but he said Cronulla’s rising land values would be the biggest hurdle to the plan coming to fruition.



**Camper-
vanners
young and
old want to
visit the
beach, but
often there is
nowhere legal
to park
overnight.**

Photo: Ben
Rushton



TOURISM BACKLASH

Campers' online comments a blight on our city

CITY COUNCIL

By **PETER COLLINS**

PUBLIC criticism of free-camping tourists has tarnished Warrnambool's reputation as a welcoming community.

Internet and social media chat sites portray an insight into the feedback from vanpackers and grey nomads responding to criticism from some sectors of the community.

"There's a perception out there that we don't welcome these tourists," the city's tourism services manager Peter Abbott told *The Standard*.

"I've seen lots of online commentary where Warrnambool cops a bagging."

Their response is sparked by occasional stories in *The Standard* where some residents and business operators criticise free campers who roll into town and park overnight at foreshore spots, sports grounds

and other locations, thus avoiding caravan park and motel fees.

The free camping community argues there is a spin-off in revenue spent on food, fuel and other commodities.

Mr Abbott said the debate was not unique to Warrnambool.

"It's a national issue with no right or wrong way to handle it," he said.

"In small towns they seem to open up facilities for free campers, but in larger centres with big investment in accommodation venues there are restrictions.

"We need to get the message out that we welcome all types of tourists."

Here's a taste of what some campers said after *The Standard* ran a story in January featuring a caravan park owner's complaints about illegal camping near the Hopkins River mouth:

"Personally I do not visit that area (Warrnambool) because of council policies. There are much better places to visit."

"We seem to be getting more and more councils realising this and providing areas for freedom of choice camping. Pity Warrnambool council haven't got the message."

"Caravan park managers/owners need to get over it. Offer a decent price for their product and stop trying to force their businesses down peoples' throats."

"If the city of Warrnambool wants tourists then they need to accommodate them by providing some budget options."

"I live in Warrnambool and if you go down to the mouth of the river you have to be very careful where you walk. This is the sort of things that give us free campers a bad name and the cause of many of free camps being closed down all round Australia."

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Campers' online comments a blight

FROM PAGE 1

"The problem with councils and caravan park owners trying to force all travellers with RVs, vans and caravans into caravan parks is that all it will do is force nomads to boycott the town and look elsewhere for cheaper or 'free' camping spots."

"In June last year I stayed in a Warrnambool caravan park for \$30 per night for ONE (1) in the middle of winter when it was blowing a gale!"

The increasing trend towards travellers using social media and internet sites for sharing tips on where to stay and go is bypassing traditional visitor information centres.

Mr Abbott said the viability of retaining a shopfront for these services was under pressure.

"These are still vital, but they

need to adapt," he said. "For some small centres the cost per walk-in visitor is extremely high.

"Warrnambool runs the only visitor centre on the coast between Melbourne and Adelaide with an online booking service and has one of the lowest operating costs.

"We also have Facebook and a website."

Mr Abbott said another challenge was to have appropriate language skills and marketing for increasing numbers of self-drive international tourists.

"Chinese, Singaporeans and Indians are quite adventurous in driving themselves around," he said.

"If we can get them in a car there's a greater chance they will go past the Twelve Apostles and see more of the south-west."

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Hoons cause havoc

PUBLIC open space on Warrnambool's Lancefield Street was torn up by hoons, who mounted the kerb and drove on to the large grassed area overnight Saturday. Daylight on Sunday revealed deep wheel marks in circular patterns and piles of torn up grass across the north Warrnambool reserve. A vehicle was also used to damage a grassed area on a roundabout in Jamieson Street overnight on Saturday.