



Towns divided over RV Friendly scheme

MOIRA residents fear the shire's RV Friendly Town Scheme will negatively affect local businesses and amenities.

The shire recently launched an RV friendly working group, which is part of the Caravan Motorhome Club of Australia's Friendly Town Scheme, to lure tourism dollars.

The shire installed RV dump points and drinking water in town centres including the Numurkah recreation reserve.

However, Some RV campers had been flouting council rules by camping overnight at the Numurkah showgrounds.

It is believed Numurkah showgrounds is being wrongly promoted as free town camp site via a user-generated Wiki website.

Moira Shire Tourism Development Officer Louise Munk Klint said, "The showgrounds does not allow camping unless it is in accordance with an event at the site.

"The facility can be hired through the committee of management which can stipulate whether an event can have access to on-site camping for the duration of the event."

Numurkah Caravan Park owner Terry Harbor said that the scheme was undermining his business.

"It's like selling petrol in town and then setting up a pump out of town and selling petrol at a third of the price. They are interfering with trading."

He said a lack of regulations was a safety liability and a burden on ratepayers.

"Caravan parks have to pass a certificate of renewal. You have to have an emergency management plan and pass CFA tests.

"They call it free camping, but nothing's free. The CFA is not involved, it's a risk. The ratepayers have to pay to collect rubbish and dog poo that's left there.

"Instead of calling it free camping, the caravan industry calls it non-compliant camping."

He also believed some campers had been taking liberties with town amenities.

"I've seen RV vehicles plugged into the electricity boxes, I don't know who pays for that. They are parasites.

"I've seen one stay longer than a week at the netball courts, that was earlier this year."

Victorian Caravan Parks Association CEO Elizabeth White, who is also on the working group committee, said the scheme should not represent a conflict of interest for park operators.

"It's not a level playing field if councils allow free camping near town," she said.

"One of our concerns is that council doesn't have the resources to check that people are only staying one or

two nights. They can't inspect for rubbish or damage."

She said she "was delighted" that the shire invited her to be on its working group, which met last Thursday and will meet again in February.

"I think the challenge will be to find workable arrangements to suit everybody."

Nathalia Riverside Caravan Park co-owner Mary Aguis said, although the scheme was a great way to welcome visitors to town, her business was suffering.

"They can use the dump point up there on Weir Street for free. The shire is hoping they will spend their money in town, but they don't spend much money at all."

Ms Aguis believed the scheme encouraged people to free camp in town and move on without paying for local services.

"We get them coming to ask me to use the dump point, but I tell them only if they pay to stay the night.

"We pay for the water to flush the dump point. It costs us to put it in. I feel all the parks are suffering because there are too many free camps available," she said.

Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia Director Keith Moxham rejects these claims. He said RV tourists are "travelling bank accounts".

"If they come to town for three or four nights, they spend money. It doesn't matter if it's a low cost camp or in a caravan park."

He also said most RV tourists will use both commercial caravan parks and free sites, but they don't always need the facilities commercial parks offer.

"Caravan parks go on about compliance issues. They have a lot of rules and regulations. But these are for facilities we don't need, like playgrounds.

"I think your showground is a wonderful site because

you can walk into town. Numurkah is a great place to stop after leaving from Melbourne. The whole area has everything."

Some locals commented on the Numurkah Leader Facebook page that RV tourists are welcome in town.

"We are highly in favour of people camping. Also we would like to point out that there is never any rubbish left behind of any kind," said David Cook.

"Yes we see motor homes and caravans camped at the showgrounds, at least four a week. They spend money at the golf club, the hotels and grocers, baker, fuel and general shopping."

He also pointed out that rally attendees each donated five dollars to the new hospital fund after the 2012 floods.

Earlier this year Numurkah hosted an RV convention which injected \$50,00 into the town.

"You can't knock that back," said Numurkah Recreation Reserve Committee Secretary Phil Meagher.



But he shared other local concerns about the scheme.

"I've had serious complaints about camping over there, you can't police it.

"They are allowed to camp for special events for four or five days and then move on," he said.

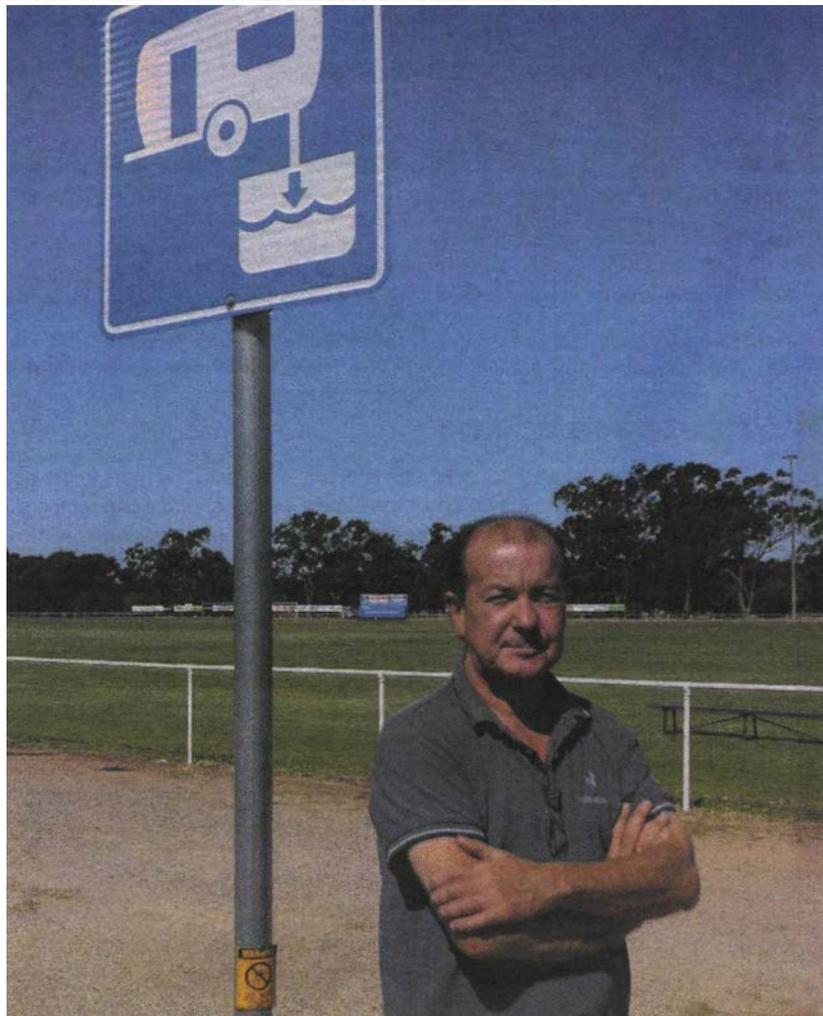
"We are an RV Friendly town, but we are caught between a rock and a hard place at the moment."

A Numurkah local, who did not want to be named, told the Numurkah Leader that some showground campers are a public nuisance.

"It seems to have arisen without planning. From one day to the next I have no idea how many vans there are going to be."

"They are an eyesore in our beautiful parklands and community recreation reserve.

"It's not pleasant seeing someone's washing line full of washing hooked up on the calf stalls next to the footpath and road."



Upset ... Numurkah Caravan Park's Terry Harbor is disappointed with non-compliant campers.





Free camping trial in park

Open to recreational vehicles and campers in tents

WILLIAM VALLELY

A LOCAL park frequented by families with young children could become swamped with tents after a 12-month free camping trial began on Saturday.

The City of Ballarat's "freedom camping" trial involves allowing large recreational vehicles to stay for two nights at Pioneer Park, Wendouree. However, Grant Tillett from the Campervan and Motorhome Club (CAMC)

said the club wouldn't oppose people pitching tents if campers contained their waste.

"If someone doesn't leave a mess it would be churlish of us to turn them away," he said.

The park has no toilet facilities, but Mr Tillett said miniature Portaloos were just as efficient.

A local, who did not wish to be named, said she had no problem with RVs, but the idea of people pitching tents at a park where families frequented was "ridiculous".

Some of CAMC's local members will volunteer to police the site on an ad hoc basis, and Mr Tillett said he had no concerns free camping would attract less-desirable types to the park.

The contentious trial caused ructions in the City

of Ballarat council chambers, with most councillors voting to defer a decision on the proposed trial in July.

Local caravan park owners previously voiced serious concerns about the impact of the proposal, including the build-up of litter and waste on the site, an influx of homeless and needy people using the site, and visitors residing illegally.

They were also concerned people would still use the site despite not having self-contained vehicles, and there would be a lack of staff to monitor or manage the site.

However, Mr Tillett said the caravan park proprietors were effectively "blackmailing" campers.

"There's a protectionist approach because of the attitudes of the caravan park owners who mistakenly think that people who go to free camps would have stopped with them," he said.

"They're effectively saying, 'Either stop with us or don't stop'. And people don't stop, they keep driving."

According to a City of Ballarat report on the trial, council officers can also shut down the site at any time during the 12 months if it is damaging the viability of existing caravan parks.

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