



Shire sets to woo campervan users

Shannon Hampton

The Shire of Plantagenet is working towards having its RV Friendly Town status reinstated by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia after it was stripped in 2012.

The Shire is hoping to have the status reinstated before the Anzac Centenary commemorations and the CMCA national rally in October next year in Albany.

RV Friendly Towns are promoted through the club's website and magazine to have appropriate facilities for self-contained travellers.

To qualify, a town must have adequate parking within the town centre, parking for short-term self contained vehicles and access to potable water and a free dump point.

The RV Friendly Town status was withdrawn when the council decided to erect "no overnight camping or parking signs" on a lot on Mt Barker Road after it received a 48-signature petition seeking restrictions to overnight parking.

At the Plantagenet council meeting on Wednesday, members elected to advise the CMCA of the facilities the Shire had, that

Frost Park would be available for special occasions and the Shire would hold a workshop before its June meeting to determine which sites in the town were not suitable for camping.

Shire of Plantagenet chief executive Rob Stewart said there was a growing number of people travelling around Australia who were self-sufficient and did not require the services found in a caravan park.

"The idea of this is if we do let people camp overnight, they will be completely self-sufficient, we don't want caravans rocking up and camping," he said.



Merbein's message to our Grey Nomads

SOME of the forward-thinkers in Merbein have moved swiftly to make the 'army' of Australian Grey Nomads aware that only a minority of townfolk were against the move to make Merbein an RV-friendly town.

Writing for the Letters page in *The Wanderer*, the official Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia magazine that reaches 66,000 members, the Merbein Progressive Group and a couple of residents who are regular travellers wrote

in support of all things Merbein.

Even though there is no mention if there is to be a second attempt at achieving RV-status, the proud Merbein community members wrote that travellers in recreational vehicles are still welcome, suggesting the Merbein Common would provide some perfect camping spots, boasting 7.5 kilometres of Murray River frontage.

Secretary of the Merbein Progressive Group and

Merbein Markets, Mickey Bottrell, wrote of Merbein's many attractions, including wineries, bushwalking and cycling trails, first-class sports facilities and friendly, helpful townfolk and traders.

"Although we are not an official RV-friendly town, we extend a warm welcome to all members of the CMCA to spend time in and around Merbein...it is a friendly place, and there is a lot on offer," Mickey wrote.

And residents Suzy and

Kevin Buck wanted to let motorhome owners know that "the bad publicity" given to Merbein was because a small group of residents didn't want to see motorhomes from their residences.

They said 99 percent of townfolk – and all the trad-

ers – would welcome CMCA members to the town.

They wrote that Merbein residents were not happy that a few people stopped the township getting the RV-friendly logo.

"We are friendly, and would love to see you," they wrote.

Meanwhile, Mildura's Alan 'Sandy' Cameron, who has strong family connections with Merbein, said it wouldn't take much for the Calder to get a reputation as "the RV-friendly highway" if more applications were granted.

He said there was a possibility that Ouyen would apply for official status, and applications had either been granted, or were under

consideration, for Bridgewater, Wedderburn, Charlton, Wycheproof and Sea Lake.

- **FOOTNOTE:** Merbein had originally been awarded a trial period as an RV-friendly township, with camping space set aside on the cliffs near Chaffey Park Oval and Mildara Winery, but this was rescinded by council after a campaign by a handful of town residents.

Great Southern RV Business *profile*



How does a journey become a destination? In a luxury caravan of course.

The first new caravan dealership to open in Adelaide in seven years and opening with style, Great Southern RV in Clovelly Park. These guys really know their caravans. The first thing you notice is the difference in the look and feel of the caravan stock on offer. There is certainly a level of luxury that appears exceptional. As the Premium SA Dealership for Elite Caravans, the manufacturer of the year in 2013, and Billabong Custom Caravans, they have the luxury end of the market comprehensively covered. Dealer Principal Andrew Szcotka (Shotka) explains that not all caravans are equal. "Certainly there is a lot of good product on the market today, we are very pleased with where the industry is heading as far as raising the bar on quality and optioning" In 2013 alone Andrew and his team collectively attended 110 caravan shows nationally in search of the Holy grail, the best the industry had to offer. "It all started out fun but after the 20th show I can assure you it was hard work". GSRV scoured the country to get right at the coal face of what brands were hot and which were not. They had a very specific scope of what they were looking for. It had to be the best, it had to represent absolute premium quality

and it had to be moving with the times. "We found those exact qualities and then some with Billabong and Elite". At Great Southern RV it is the touring public, our customers that come first. The team there spend time to work through the specific requirements of their customers to consult on the right van for their needs. "For many of our customers the decision to purchase a caravan may be the second or third biggest investment in their lives, we respect that this is a big decision and can never be rushed". Says Andrew. Caravan touring is a part of the Australian culture, an amazing privilege that has been enjoyed for generations over. At GSRV they are totally focussed on helping you make the right van, the right options and at the right price. The freedom, the adventure, the great times with old friends, new friends, there's nothing like it. Elite Caravans, award winning manufacturer of the year in 2013 offers many firsts in the caravan industry. The first pop up 32" TV, first Ethanol fuel cell, first caravan manufacturer to be accredited by the RVMA and many more firsts. Its quality and innovation like this that separates GSRV from the pack. In Billabong they offer true custom built caravan options to suit the specific requirements of the discerning traveller. Great Southern RV where the destination and the journey become one.



Motor home villa opposed

NICKY MOFFAT

Council reporter

A PROPOSAL to build a motor home village on Racecourse Rd in Calliope was rejected by Gladstone Regional Council at its general meeting yesterday, following community opposition.

The council had last year approved construction of a 140-site caravan park at the 24 hectare location.

The applicants had recently sought council's permission to instead accommodate 92 relocatable homes.

Councillors rejected the application on the grounds

that the proposed amendment was substantially different to the development already approved and introduced new impacts.

A petition with 138 signatures was received in the public submissions process.

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Flying the flag at field days



Sales consultant Stephen Gilboy will represent Jayco at Richmond for the second time, with a good selection of the fleet in tow. He is pictured inside a 16-foot Starcraft pop-top featuring a full ensuite.

WHATEVER your leisure, Jayco Townsville's range of caravans, pop-tops and toy haulers will make it a pleasure.

Sales consultant Stephen Gilboy will be representing Jayco at Richmond for the second time, with a good selection of the fleet in tow.

"We primarily head out to Richmond to help support the School of the Air, and give back to the region in which we've conducted a lot of business," he said. "It's our way of giving back to the area, and also to fly the flag for Jayco in the region while showcasing the range. We aim to make our display at Richmond bigger and better each year."

The Jayco display will feature the all-new 23-foot 2014 Basestation Toy Hauler, which should prove to be a big hit with locals. The Basestation gives you the best of both worlds.

The living area up front features the trademark comforts that come with all Jayco RVs, while the 'garage' area made up of the entire back of the vehicle

“ We aim to make our display at Richmond bigger and better each year. ”

can store all of your equipment vital to expanding your holiday experience.

"It's the perfect adventure holiday vehicle, with the rear loading ramp allowing for storage of your dirt bikes, mountain bikes, go carts, surf boards and jet skis," Stephen said. "I'll also be taking a 17-foot toy hauler, a 16-foot Starcraft pop-top featuring a full ensuite, and also on display will be one of the hire fleets camper trailers."

A Jayco Starcraft is the ideal RV for a young family – the

budget conscious who are seeking value without foregoing quality. While the Starcraft boasts features synonymous with the Jayco brand, its affordability makes this caravan the first port of call for many fun seekers.

The Jayco range has two distinct advantages over competitors. They have an aluminium frame as opposed to a wooden one, which is great for northern conditions where wood rot and ants eating away the wood are two big problems.

The entire fleet also has galvanised chassis to ensure against chipping.

Stephen said he'll offer special low prices on selected vehicles from the Jayco range at the field days as well.

"We'll be offering our discounts on the range that we'll again be offering at the Richmond Show, so drop into the site for a chat and we'll see what we can work out," he said.

● Contact (07) 4779 9759 or visit the showroom at 29-33 Duckworth Street in Townsville, near the RAAF base.



Backpackers find camping loophole

ANDREW JEFFERSON

YARRA Council says it is powerless to stop a group of European backpackers from camping next to Abbotsford Convent — and the police say they can't help either.

Up to half-a-dozen station wagons and camper vans have set up camp in Clarke St and show few signs of moving on.

The European backpackers are living in their cars, with some even washing in inner-city public pools, much to the dismay of local residents.

Residents also say they are noisy and take up limited parking spots. Yarra Mayor Jackie Fristacky admitted the council

had fielded a number of complaints from nearby residents in recent weeks but said the travellers were exploiting a local laws loophole.

“Council’s local law regarding illegal camping specifically relates to people setting up structures and camps on public land,” she said.

“We understand ... people sleeping in cars is not an ideal situation for residents living in the vicinity, but unless they contravene parking restrictions, they would not be doing anything illegal.”



Caravan park residents are taken for a ride

EXCLUSIVE

Changes to the NSW law favour operators, not residents, of parks

ANTHONY KLAN
HOUSING

THE caravan park and “manufactured estate” sector is running hot, with values soaring, yields firming, and a string of investment groups moving to package up the sector, where the top 10 operators hold just 5 per cent of the market.

Groups such as Alceon — run by Phil Green and Trevor Lowensohn, the founding boss and top executive of collapsed Babcock & Brown investment empire — are snapping up parks and manufactured estates across the eastern seaboard.

CBRE hotels director Andrew Jackson said demand from investors in the sector — both caravan parks and manufactured homes estates — had long been strong, but was soaring.

“There has been a real flurry in the market, both at the mum and dad’s end of the spectrum and at the investment-grade end,” Mr Jackson said.

“There’s a bunch of new groups out there beating their chests and putting out press releases every few minutes, there’s real depth to the market.”

Other analysts agree the sector has never been more viable.

But the NSW government claims something very different.

The government has said, as the pretext to overhauling laws in the sector with the introduction last November of the Residential (Land Lease) Communities Bill 2013, that the industry is in deep trouble.

As the fair trading minister who brought about the changes, NSW MP Anthony Roberts has repeatedly and publicly raised concerns over the future “viability” of the sector as the reason behind the need for the changes.

They were necessary “to improve the viability of the industry as a whole so as to ensure that

these communities are profitable” and to “therefore secure their future”, Mr Roberts told parliament in October last year, days before the bill was passed.

“Without this we face the very real possibility of these communities being forced to close and some 33,000 residents left with no alternative but to find a new place to live.”

Residents and retiree groups claim the changes — which park developers and operators had long lobbied for — are slanted heavily against the interests of residents.

Among the changes are provisions which allow operators to allow park operators to charge residents in advance for future park developments and to take a share of the profits in the capital gains of a home when residents leave.

An investigation by *The Weekend Australian* reveals the integrity of the key organisation representing caravan park and “manufactured home” residents has been brought into serious question amid the overhaul of the laws late last year.

A number of residents and other groups have claimed the Australian Residential Parks Residents Association (ARPRA) inexplicably sided with the government and property developers over the new laws.

Now *The Weekend Australian* can reveal ARPRA, which received a \$100,000 NSW government grant to produce a submission on the legislative changes, inflated by more than sevenfold the number of residents it represents in an official document provided to the NSW government.

The Weekend Australian has also raised serious concerns regarding the man operating ARPRA, “Dr” Gary Martin, who has repeatedly declined to comment when asked where he obtained his PhD.

A former NSW Young Liberal, Mr Martin has received fawning praise from Mr Roberts.

In front of a public meeting, a video of which has been obtained by *The Weekend Australian*, Mr

Roberts lavished praise on Mr Martin, referring to him as a

“saint” and a “living saint”. In December last year, weeks after the bill was passed, Mr Roberts moved on to become NSW Resources Minister to replace Chris Hartcher, who stood down amid an Independent Investigation Against Corruption inquiry into political donations.

Documents submitted to the NSW Department of Fair Trading, and obtained under Freedom of Information, show ARPRA claimed to have 15,000 members

at the year ending June 2012. But an analysis of the finances of the group, which relies on membership fees, shows it had fewer than 2000 at that time.

Mr Martin told *The Weekend Australian* that ARPRA, through its member organisations, currently had “just over 5000 members”. “It is beyond dispute that ARPRA NSW, through our affiliated associations, represents far more park residents than the next nearest association in number,”

Mr Martin said. He declined to comment when asked where the 15,000 figure had come from.

The resume of Mr Martin — who routinely refers to himself as Dr Gary Martin in government submissions and official correspondence — states he holds a PhD in “political science and government” from the Canterbury Christ Church University, with the dates “2000-2005”.

The Canterbury Christ Church University in Britain, and the university of the same name in New Zealand, said they had no record of Mr Martin.

Despite providing *The Australian* with more than 10 pages of responses to questions he declined to comment when questioned over his PhD and other questions.

When pressed further, Mr Martin said he was unwell and on sick leave.

Mr Martin earlier said ARPRA had represented the interests of its members at all times and he was



proud of the work the organisation has done. He said concerns about ARPRA's operations were raised by a noisy minority and most members were happy with its operations.

Company searches show Mr Martin was the founder and sole director of a Newcastle-based company called GME Logistics and Warehousing, which collapsed in 2005 owing creditors \$30,571. The company's liquidator said a reason for its failure was "poor financial control including lack of records".

Mr Martin declined to comment regarding the company.

Also raising eyebrows are donations recorded in ARPRA's accounts as coming from controversial northern NSW property developer Chris Condon, who demolished a caravan park to build a shopping centre in the coastal town of Ballina.

The accounts show Mr Condon donated \$20,000 last financial year — a figure representing more than half the ARPRA earns in resident membership fees — and \$10,000 the year earlier.

Mr Martin said those entries had been made incorrectly and Mr Condon had donated about \$5000 to fund a park resident's trip to Sydney to review new laws.

Mr Condon, who has since moved his operations to Dubbo, declined to comment.

The integrity of ARPRA in its role of representing residents — many elderly and with little money — was vital in preparing the new parks bill as it was the key resident's body in discussions with the NSW government.

The other group to represent tenant's interests under the new bill, the Park and Village Service — which had been the biggest critic of the new bill — had its funding completely removed last year by the Office of Fair Trading.

Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW senior research adviser Charmaine Crowe said the new bill could see new residents have over "100 per cent" of any capital gain made on the sale of their home in return for reduced rent.

This was of major concern be-

cause, while the profit share arrangements were "voluntary", there was often a power imbalance in play between park operators, responsible for setting site fees and other charges, and park residents, who were often elderly and less educated.

"ARPRA is supposed to represent residents but threw its support behind key changes that serve operators' interests, not those of park residents," Ms Crowe claimed to *The Weekend Australian*.

"There is nothing stopping an operator from hoodwinking a resident into a deal that would see the resident lose money in the long run. This happens all the time in the retirement village sector."

Mr Martin said ARPRA had always strongly represented the interests of residents and said concerns were raised by a vocal minority.

It separately emerged late last month that there were claims made in ICAC that donations were made by Norton Whitmont, who runs the Camping and Caravan Industry Association, to Mr Hart cheer in 2011.

The CCIA was highly instrumental in drafting last year's bill, for which Mr Whitmont had been lobbying since the late 1990s.

Mr Whitmont's son Theo told *The Weekend Australian* his father said he had held a fundraising dinner for, and made donations to, Mr Hart cheer of "about \$4000". He said no favour was sought or received from the donations.

NSW opposition spokesman for fair trading, Tania Mihailuk, called for an urgent review and overhaul of the legislation in light of the revelations. She said the NSW ALP had last year called for 10 amendments to the bill, all of which were rejected.

"Given these revelations the Baird government should urgently review the legislation and amend the act accordingly," Ms Mihailuk said.

Mr Lowensohn of Alceon said the company had never made any donations to the NSW Liberal Party.

"We would never go anywhere near anything like that," he said.



Park residents say the body that is supposed to represent them inexplicably sided with the developers and the government



Campers told where to stay 'free', and guess who pays

A SUNSHINE Coast public car park has been taken over by travellers who are camping in their vans overnight. And the campers – who plug in for free power, use the water from taps in the nearby park, and use the public toilets – say the spot was recommended to them by their camper van hire companies. **STORY ON PAGE 4**

Great spot to park, but camping at club not on

By **NATASHA CHRISTIAN**

THE car park of Mooloolaba Surf Club has been taken over by travelling backpackers who are setting up to camp in the spot overnight.

The campers say the spot was recommended to them by their camper van hire companies.

This is despite it being illegal to camp in Sunshine Coast Regional Council-controlled car parks.

Mooloolaba Beach lifeguard Buck said the campers started coming about two weeks ago.

"It started with one wagon that stayed for about two days, then there were three, then there were five – (yesterday) there were 11," Buck said.

"I think someone has put it on an app saying it's the safest place to park."

Buck said he understood why campers were choosing to stay in the car park because there was access to toilets, electricity, showers and barbecue facilities.

But he said the nearby caravan park nearby looked pretty empty.

The lifeguard said he felt it was unfair on ratepayers if campers were allowed to use the car park and utilities for free.

"The locals use (the car park) to use the beaches – these people are utilising it without paying for anything," he said.

"I guarantee if I were to

park my car there for two weeks, someone would move me on."

One backpacker who stayed in the car park for one night told the Daily she heard about the spot through her camper van company.

"We stayed the night because it was close to a beach and near a toilet," she said.

She said she hadn't heard of anyone receiving an infringement notice for camping there and had not been asked to move on.

Mooloolaba Surf Club general manager Anthony Johnston was contacted for comment on the issue, but he said it was a matter for the council.

"I don't think it's an issue the club needs to comment

on. Our role is to make sure the beach is safe and this doesn't have an impact on us doing that, which is what is important," he said.

One camper van company was contacted for comment but did not respond.