



Squatters' free ride hurts town

■ Cally Dupe

Campers squatting on Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley land have been branded as having a “blatant disregard” for local business and the environment.

Shire figures reveal there have been more than 30 complaints this tourist season regarding illegal campers setting up in quarries, parks and roadside locations — sometimes lighting campfires and leaving rubbish.

The squatters — who risk a \$100 on-the-spot fine — have angered the town’s business community with some saying the set-ups were unfair to paying guests and caravan parks.

Kimberleyland Holiday Park manager Lee Irvin said she was frustrated after repeatedly catching backpackers “sneaking in” to use the park’s showers, washing machines and pool.

Ms Irvin said the culprits were usually between 18-30 years old.

“If caught, they are forced to pay and we eject them from the property,” she said.

“(They have a) blatant disregard for our business, and will not spend the money.

“Our park and facilities are first-rate here so (there is) no excuse about quality of stay.”

Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley chief executive Carl Askew said

illegal camping was a “common problem throughout regional Australia”.

Mr Askew said offenders usually placed themselves in areas near public toilets or with pleasant surroundings and that Shire facilities were often “mistreated and vandalised”.

Ms Irvin said the out-of-town areas she had seen backpackers squatting on, resembled a “tip”.

“Obviously ‘leave no trace’ is not a term they understand,” she said.

Kimberley Croc Backpackers YHA owner Lisa Spackman said illegal camping, and people sneaking in to use facilities, placed a “financial burden” on local businesses.

“The extra cost (of people using services without paying) is then passed on,” she said.

“Prices go up for in-house guests. It just creates an extra financial burden for everyone.”

Nicolas Baldi, a French backpacker living and working in Kununurra, said he thought illegal

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Anger over misuse of tourism facilities

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camping wasn't fair on those who were doing the right thing.

"I don't want to be in the bush and have a problem with the rangers in Australia," he said.

Mr Baldi said he thought people camping "in the bush" might not have employment.

"It is expensive to live in Australia, and if you want to travel afterwards it can cost a lot," he said.

"I think to save money is why they would do it, but I wouldn't."

Mr Askew said while no fines had been issued this tourist season, more than 40 vehicles had been issued with a caution.

He said offenders details were entered into a database record and those who were caught twice would be fined.

A WA Police spokesman said determining whether campers were "illegal" or not depended on local Shire by-laws and was a matter for respective rangers to look into.

Mr Askew said Shire rangers were on-call 24-hours-a-day by phoning 9168 4166.



A red campervan parks up for the night at a quarry on Crossing Falls Road. Pictures: Cally Dupe



Rubbish left behind by people squatting in a quarry about 10km from Kununurra.



Town receives travelling tick

A SECOND town within the Gannawarra Shire has received RV Friendly Town classification.

Murrabit recently joined Leitchville in receiving the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia accreditation, which recognises appropriate parking for long vehicles near supermarkets, long-term parking options, access to portable water and access to a free dump point at a convenient location.

Murrabit Recreation Reserve Committee president, Vince Maher said the community is set to benefit from the title.

“We expect an increase in the numbers of travellers stopping in town and spending money whether at the local store, the Busy Bees Gift Shop or visiting the market,” he said.

The shire’s economic development manager, Roger Griffiths said council has agreed to allow street parking adjacent to the Murrabit Market site, suitable for motorhomes, campervans and caravans.

“Unlimited short and long term overnight parking is also available at the



RECOGNITION: Vince Maher, left and Jodie Hartley, with one of the RV Friendly Town signs that will be installed at Murrabit

Murrabit Recreation Reserve along with the free public dump point and access to potable water,” he said.



Campaign to lure visitors

FRASER Coast Regional Council has launched the Stop and Shop campaign to attract RVs, caravans and grey nomads into Maryborough and Hervey Bay.

The Stop and Shop concept was one of the recommendations presented by the Camping Options Stakeholders Working Group when the council adopted the Fraser Coast Camping Options Strategy in March this year.

“Stop and Shop encourages people to stop and enjoy our attractions and explore our shops, in exchange for an overnight stay at designated Stop and Shop rest stops,” Tourism, Marketing and Communications Portfolio Councillor Stuart Taylor said.

“It creates an incentive for the RV market to stay and explore the region and stay longer in one of our fantastic local caravan parks.”

The first four of eight designated Hervey Bay Stop and Shop spaces have been developed at the Hervey Bay Visitor Information Centre. An investigation is underway to determine the location of the other four sites in Hervey Bay.

Four sites will be developed in the

Maryborough CBD at the rear of Alan and June Brown car park as soon as the Maryborough CBD Revitalisation Project is completed.

Two dump points are already available in Maryborough, at the showgrounds and the

airport.

“RV travellers have to spend a minimum of \$10 in a local business and show their receipt at the Maryborough or Hervey Bay Visitor Information Centre to obtain a Stop and Shop voucher to stay for up to 20 hours in the designated long parking areas,” Cr Taylor said.

The Hervey Bay site has already attracted visitors.

Adam and Sandra Layfield from Mansfield in Victoria stopped over this week.

“We could not find a site in Hervey Bay. All the parks were booked out,” Adam said.

“Dan in the Visitor Information Centre told us about Stop and Shop so we decided to take advantage of it.”



STOP AND SHOP: Councillor Stuart Taylor catches up with Victorian visitors Sandra and Adam Layfield, who had pulled up at new parking bays at the Hervey Bay Visitor Information centre.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



Changes to by-laws for Kingston RV parks

KINGSTON District Council has amended its by-laws to allow more types of camping vehicles to stay at designated free RV park locations.

At its July meeting, council moved to allow caravans, campervans, 4x4 vehicles with dedicated roof top camping and camper trailers to stay in the free RV parks under by-laws three and four.

These vehicles, along with RVs, will be able to stay at the Maria Creek park, adjacent to Lions Park, for up to 24 hours, and at the Pinks Beach site for three to five days.

However, tent camping and standard, non-camping vehicles are still prohibited.

Council CEO Andrew MacDonald said the change in by-laws would have a positive effect.

"I think council's decision to loosen these by-laws is a good decision," he said.

"Some good things are that other vehicles who have used the parks unlawfully before and have slipped through our sights can now use it lawfully," he said.

"It will bring a diverse range of people to the town, which will be a benefit to local traders."

At its June meeting, council resolved to close

Wyomi Beach RV park in consideration of the new land development within the area, and continue to monitor the Maria Creek park for 12 months to see whether additional capacity is required.

Council also moved that the Pinks Beach site remain until a new, long-term free parking area is identified.

Concerns were raised about how the new by-laws would be policed.

"Is there any point in looking for someone to police the area more?" Cr Deane Starling said.

"Maybe a retired person who is prepared to go around."

Cr Jeff Pope agreed.

"There is a common belief that we don't check them," he said. "Perhaps we do need someone."

Mr MacDonald said many community members were not aware that the area is checked regularly.

"The public are not aware that, in my time, there has been regular inspections and the percentage of people who weren't meant to be there was quite low," he said.

"With the revised by-laws it will change nothing other than allow those people to be compliant, and the park will continue to run successfully."

Mayor Reg Lyon raised a particular con-

cern he had regarding campervans.

"They sometimes pull up onto the kerb and use the power out of the toilets, with the cost on us," he said.

"Can we not do anything about that? It's what sometimes happens at night."

Mr MacDonald said council will continue to monitor the free park areas to the best of its ability.

"We will continue to inspect as we have over the past 12 months," he said.

"We are intending to closely monitor this change in by-laws and see how it travels, we all want to see it successful.

"It will be a 12-month trial, basically."

Council were also shown a draft design of a sign to be placed

near the entrance to the Maria Creek park.

"We've tried to make sure the language is welcoming rather than 'Don't do this, don't do that'," Mr MacDonald said.

Council then discussed the best location for the sign, what each side would say, and how the sign would be positioned for best visibility.

It was proposed that the front of the sign welcome campers and the other side show Kingston Caravan Park details such as opening hours,

location, contact details and special offers.

It was then suggested that the caravan park details should be displayed on the front of the sign, so people can make a decision as to where they want to stay before setting up in the free park.

"This is one of the many steps we've taken to work with the caravan park owner," Mr MacDonald said.

"Council wants to make sure it gets the balance right with the caravan park."

The design is yet to be finalised.

Cr Rick Wingard moved that:

- Council give permission for people to camp in RVs, caravans, campervans, 4x4 vehicles with dedicated roof top camping and camper trailers in the Maria Creek RV park for 24 hours and at the Pinks Beach park for three to five days.

- Tent camping and standard vehicles (non-specific camping vehicles) are excluded from using the designated RV park areas.

- The CEO ensures the areas are appropriately signed.

- The CEO informs relevant agencies and motor home groups of the authorised parking areas.

These were seconded by Cr Graham Usher and passed by councillors.



Kingston District Council has amended its by-laws to allow more types of camping vehicles to stay at designated free RV park locations.



RVs pay town a friendly visit

By Mark Gallagher

A LOT more campervan and caravan travellers are heading to Wauchope since it became an RV (recreational vehicle) Friendly Town recently.

Wauchope earned its eligibility for RV Friendly status in late March when a "dump point" for onboard toilets was installed at the showground.

It was paid for by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia Ltd, which runs the RV Friendly program.

Wauchope Show Society pres-

ident Bob Kennett said overnight visits have increased "big time" since the town became RV Friendly.

He estimated that paid showground stays had increased by 30 per cent, giving the show society's income a welcome boost.

Following a push by Councillor Sharon Griffiths, council voted last November to "fund \$4185 and \$2200 towards up-front costs in obtaining RV Friendly Town status for Wauchope and Kendall respectively".

Cr Griffiths said the result is a very positive outcome in terms of marketing and publicity through

a very small outlay by council.

RV Friendly towns and their facilities are listed on the CMCA website (www.cmca.net.au) and publicised in guides and magazines for travellers and "grey nomads".

The CMCA says the program aims to help "recreational vehicle (RV) consumers as they journey throughout this wonderful country".

When RV tourists enter a town displaying the RVFT sign, they know they will be welcome, certain services will be provided and they will have access to a safe place to camp.



NO HAPPY CAMPERS

Local businesses
to be hit by
closure of free
Burringbar park
for anti-social use

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Closure to hit campers and businesses



By DIGBY HILDRETH

TWEED Shire councillors have backed plans to close Burringbar's Masterson Park to all campers due to the anti-social behaviour of squatters.

They have also supported a move by council officers to investigate creating a new site in the area specifically for short stay RV campers.

While no formal decisions were made at Thursday night's council meeting, the councillors were briefed about the problems in the park and were supportive of council officers' actions this week, Planning and Regulation director Vince Connell said.

The park is popular with "free-camping" pensioners, grey nomads and backpackers, who were told this week by council compliance officer Nick Tzannes that they had until yesterday to move on, after which the park would be closed.

Such visitors are welcome in the town, where they boost the bottom line of many local businesses.

However, the goodwill has been damaged by an upsurge in the number of "undesirables", who residents say stay for weeks, drinking, lighting fires and dumping rubbish.

Some of them have been seen urinating and defecating in bushes near residential homes. Logs with plaques attached placed in the park by schoolchildren to honour their grandparents have been dug up and used as firewood.

One parent, Kirsty Porter,

said children could no longer use the park to play in or to walk through because of the health and safety issues – including one incident when a child was bitten by a dog.

One corner of the park was a "no-go zone", one resident said – but the council says it cannot move people on because the park is sited on State Rail land.

Some free campers, such as Ian and Lyn Derrick, who often stay in the park as a holiday break from their home in Cabarita, are dismayed by the "out-of-the-blue" closure.

"We've been coming here for many years," Ms Derrick said.

"This is what Freedom Camping is all about. Most of us pensioners can't afford the \$25 or more that most other camps charge.

"But like other campers we regularly spend our money in the local shops and sports club, where we feed the pokies and buy raffle tickets."

Chinderah-based Ross and Lyndell Winn stay the odd night here on their way to join the Caravan Club in

Mullumbimby and Marie Bradbury was using it until her new rental home became available.

Dutch travellers Erik and Lies Noorlandt said the park was a "perfect spot" for a couple of nights as they tour the east coast, with every facility they could wish for, including hot

meat pies.

The man who makes them, butcher Brett O'Keefe, said the park was

"great for business", a sentiment echoed by the general store's Kate Coronel and pharmacist Trong Tran.

"It's just a couple of idiots who are ruining it for everybody," Mr Tran said.

Ms Coronel said it would be "a great shame" if the park was closed. "We all do good out of it," she said.

The laundromat, mechanic, hairdresser and even remedial masseur were better off as a result of having the park open to campers, said the unofficial mayor of Burringbar, real estate agent Stuart Cahill.

He, like the other residents and business owners, would like to see the park stay open – but only if it is policed.

"Land beside the railway station has been a camping ground for 125 years and it's being swept away by the stroke of a pen in less than a week," Mr Cahill said

Pharmacist Trong Tran It's disappointing it's being closed ... It's just a couple of idiots who are ruining it for everybody.



Ownership creates problem

THE problem being faced at Masterson Park in Burringbar is that it falls into a kind of bureaucratic limbo.

The land is owned by RailCorp, so council officers have no authority to move people on. The state rail body passed on residents' complaints to the Tweed police.

"We have had to take action as a community to deal with these issues that have proven to be highly convoluted and tedious based on the ownership of the land and the laws surrounding camping in the shire, which the Tweed LEP clearly states is illegal under the current act," said resident Kirsty Porter.

"Sadly, it has now reached a point that we do not see any other option but to take an 'all-or-nothing' approach ..."

Tweed council has put aside \$60,000 to build a shower block on the site and Ms Porter said Mayor Gary Bagnall was keen to try to keep the park open.

A time limit, nightly fees after two free nights and ranger patrols are some of the solutions residents are willing to discuss to protect "the heart of our community".



CARRY ON CAMPING ... ELSEWHERE: Lyndell and Ross Winn, Marie Bradbury and Lyn and Ian Derrick are dismayed by the sudden closure of a park they have enjoyed staying at for many years.

PHOTOS: DIGBY HILDRETH



Lies and Erik Noorlandt, from the Netherlands, spent a night at the park, which they found through WikiCamps.