



Free camping at what cost?

SOUTH Gippsland Shire Council is facing strong opposition from commercial caravan park proprietors to its plans to expand camping opportunities in the shire.

Submissions to the draft Recreational Vehicle (RV) Strategy close this Friday, but already caravan park proprietors from across South Gippsland have let Council know in no uncertain terms how they feel.

A joint submission has been prepared by representatives of Toora Tourist Park, Prom Central Caravan Park at Foster, Long Jetty Caravan Park at Port Welshpool, and the parks at Waratah Bay, Shallow Inlet, Korumburra, Venus Bay, Leongatha and Yanakie, and last Wednesday Rachel Brown from Toora Tourist Park addressed Council in person, supported by Drew Studham from Prom Central CP.

Broadly speaking, they took issue with two of the Strategy's recommendations in particular, one being the "creation of a network of free camping reserves". This would see "free camping" allowed at the Franklin River Reserve, Bass Valley Camping Ground and Buckley Park in Fish Creek. A maximum stay of two nights would apply.

They also objected to the planned installation of a dump point in Meeniyar for the use of the RV market, arguing that with the exception of Waratah and Sandy Point, South Gippsland Shire has sufficient dump points readily

available.

"We believe that the shire should support existing commercial caravan parks as a priority over providing free or low cost services to the RV community," said Ms Brown. "It is important that the existing caravan parks continue to grow and invest, as this provides jobs and investment in local communities."

She quoted statistics showing that people staying in commercial caravan parks contribute more to the local community than those staying in free or low cost venues.

She warned that the shire managed sites of Franklin River Reserve and Bass Valley and the proposed Buckley Park are a cost to the shire "and should their usage increase then these costs will increase".

There was also a cost, she pointed out, in installation and maintenance of a dump point, and "it is not reasonable for ratepayers to cover this cost".

She said that now that the shire was allowing camping at Franklin River Reserve, through February there had regularly been 10 different camping vehicles staying there each night. During this time none of the surrounding caravan parks were at capacity. "Based on an average nightly site rate of \$35 this is \$350 per night of revenue lost to a caravan park. Based on independent research this translates to \$483 per day of lost local economic activity and a loss of \$200 in

average daily spend of each camper to the local community," said Ms Brown. Extrapolating these figures, she argued that it meant as much as \$82,000 of lost economic activity for the local community per annum.

The financial side, however, is only part of the argument against "free camping," insisted Ms Brown on behalf of the caravan parks.

There are issues with safety, water, risk, waste, maintenance and fire.

With no one to look after them, sites can quickly become degraded, and this, she maintained, was already becoming the case at the Franklin River Reserve. "Free campers" have disrupted the picnic plans of locals, making the once scenic spot unsightly with their rubbish and general paraphernalia.

Ms Brown's case was supported by the next speaker. The CEO of the Victorian Caravan Parks Association, Elizabeth White, reiterated that there should be a level playing field. Caravan park owners, she pointed out, have to meet all sorts of rules and regulations. There is a reason for this and there are costs involved. There is, she said, no such thing as "free camping". Ultimately, someone has to pay – and in the absence of anyone else it is likely to be ratepayers. She warned that the public liability costs could be substantial – and in the absence of a caravan park owner such costs could fall to the shire council, and

ultimately ratepayers. She suggested that South Gippsland Shire Council look at what other councils are doing. Greater Geelong, for example, after commissioning an independent report, decided not to provide "free camping".

Speaking on behalf of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, Keith Moxham said that there were noticeably few no-frills sites suitable for self-contained vehicles in South Gippsland and this situation should be remedied.

He said that the RV market was growing and there were benefits in this for everyone, commercial caravan parks included. He quoted the example of Moira Shire in northern Victoria, which manages to have both successful commercial caravan parks and towns which are officially 'RV friendly.'

Cr Nigel Hutchinson-Brooks spoke up after Ms Brown's presentation, saying that he felt strongly that there was an economic case for "free camping" and he could not support the case put forward by the commercial caravan parks. With similar (though somewhat watered down) sentiments expressed by several other councillors, Rachel Brown said later that she was bitterly disappointed at the reception she had had. "I can't help feeling that the councillors have already made up their minds and are not open to taking our case into account," she said.



Clash over caravans

CALL FOR LAWS TO RESTRICT STREET PARKING

Naomi Lim

ONE Balmoral street could be mistaken for a caravan park rather than a suburban thoroughfare.

Residents along the street, which they asked not to be named, have complained to council about a number of large vehicles, including caravans and campervans obstructing the road and nature strip for long periods without being moved.

But council officers are powerless to do anything

about the problem because laws only regulate vehicles that are 7.5m or longer.

One resident said a group of neighbours was willing to organise a petition because the vehicles were endangering motorists and pedestrians.

“One of our neighbours has to park on the road and nature strip because his family has a four-wheel drive, a ute, two Commodores, a Camry, another

sedan, a caravan, a camper-van, a boat, a tinny and a jet ski,” the resident said.

“It’s dangerous because it’s hard to see oncoming traffic and we don’t have any pathways, so kids have to walk or ride their bikes on the road. Another neighbour has a caravan too and the issue for me is that they are hardly ever used.”

Morningside Councillor Shayne Sutton is calling on council to introduce laws that regulate vehicles be-

tween 5-7.5m, including restricting the number of medium-length vehicles that are allowed to be parked on residential streets to one per household and limiting the period of time they can be parked without being moved.

A spokeswoman said council responded to complaints about heavy and long vehicle parking and conducts proactive patrols around Brisbane.



Cr Shayne Sutton wants regulations to cover caravan parking. Picture: RENAE DROOP



Picture: STEWART McLEAN

Call to stop penalties and provide more facilities

\$ A FINE WAY TO TREAT VISITORS

BUSINESS leaders want the council to scrap fines for illegal camping and provide more facilities to accommodate the self-drive market. The call comes as travellers are continuing to evade council inspectors by either parking in back-streets or refusing to pay the \$220 fines. **FULL REPORT PAGES 4-5**



Evasive camper tactics

**KIMBERLEY
VLASIC**



kimberley.vlastic@news.com.au

SELF-DRIVE backpackers continue to evade council inspectors by parking in backstreets or simply refusing to pay fines.

Cairns Regional Council began cracking down on illegal campers in October, nabbing 64 offenders during a two-week blitz.

Thirteen on-the-spot fines have been issued since.

But self-drive travellers argue more facilities are needed in the CBD to accommodate their market, a call that has been echoed by local business owners.

French backpackers Fabien Martin and William Grillot, both 25, have been travelling along the east coast in a Wicked camper, parking in backstreets during their stay in Cairns.

"It's really difficult to sleep and find electricity (in Cairns)," Mr Martin said.

"Compared to Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, it's totally different, not as good."

They admitted they were concerned about being caught camping illegally, their friends having copped a hefty fine in Byron Bay.

"We want to come back so we would pay," Mr Martin said.

But Hannah Averback and Hannah Nemitz, both 19, said they wouldn't cough up the cash.

"I think most people would walk away from it because they're backpacking and they can," Ms Averback said.

"It's hard to find us because we don't have an address in Australia."

The childhood friends from Germany camped on The Esplanade on Tuesday night and said they move around to avoid getting caught.

"We could afford to pay for a camping site but you want to save that money to do some other stuff," Ms Averback said.

Enforceability has proved problematic for council – only eight of the 64 fines issued during the two-week blitz in October and November have been paid, with 36 infringements withdrawn because no address was obtained.

The issue of free camping areas for self-drive visitors is included in the current local laws review survey and residents have until close of business tomorrow to respond.

A council spokeswoman said further "blitzes" on illegal campers would depend on the outcome of the survey.

"An on-the-spot fine can be issued only when a person is caught in the act of camping – generally this means being asleep at the time with evidence that they have stayed overnight," she said.

"In cases where council officers have responded to a complaint or where there has been some evidence of illegal camping without the act having been directly observed, a warning may be given and personal details recorded.

"Multiple warnings may result in a fine."

The spokeswoman couldn't specify how much was spent on enforcing the policy on illegal camping but identified The Esplanade and car park near Muddy's Playground as hot spots.



ILLEGAL CAMPING FINES

Illegal camping fines from October 26 to November 8, 2013:

- 64 infringements issued in total
- 8 have been paid
- 3 were appealed and waived
- 17 have been referred to SPER
- 36 were withdrawn as no address was able to be obtained





Camped out: French travellers Fabien Martin and William Grillot enjoy breakfast on the Cairns Esplanade yesterday.



Pictures: STEWART McLEAN



Parked off: Swiss couple Erica Fossati and Jamin Simoncelli with their RV on the Esplanade.



On the move: French couple Leo Hospital and Julie Bonhomme relax beside camper on the Esplanade.



Mobile: German backpackers Hannah Nemitz and Hannah Averbeck at their campervan, getting ready for the day ahead.



Additional service for Kapunda tourists

Visitors regularly attend the Kapunda Harness Racing Club to enjoy the races, but now the site can offer a completely different service to the township and its tourists.

At last Sunday's race meeting, Mayor Bill O'Brien officially opened a new RV Dump Point, the first in the region to be financially supported by the Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia; the SA Tourism Commission and the Light Regional Council.

"The establishment of this facility will allow Kapunda to become an RV friendly town and will also allow other towns in the region to reap the benefits of the self contained, self drive tourism market," said Mayor O'Brien.

"The facility will also allow Recreational Vehicle owners to be able to responsibly dump waste from their vans and refill with potable water in their tanks," he said.

President of the Club, Mr Marcus Hearl said the facility was installed in response to requests from local RV owners. He said the site was perfect for the purpose and added another facility to the region.

With a large septic tank and effluent system already in place, Harness Racing Club volunteers needed only to connect the new system with the cost to the community and council being only \$4,000.

"RV owners can come here and, for a gold coin donation, use the service. The money raised will go towards general maintenance of the facility," he said.

And in a major boost for Kapunda Tourism, Mayor Bill O'Brien was pleased to reveal that Light Regional Council had also received a tourism grant of \$100,000 for the continuation of the Kapunda Mine Historic Site project.



Light Regional Council Mayor Bill O'Brien and President of the Kapunda Harness Racing Club, Mr Marcus Hearl with the new facility.



Nomads seek Qbn refuge

By David Butler

THE local economy could reap thousands of dollars in tourism expenditure each year if Queanbeyan pitched itself as an 'RV friendly' town, according to the peak body for 'grey nomads.'

There are 182 RV friendly towns and 71 RV friendly destinations across Australia, according to general manager of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA), Richard Barwick. And with easy access to the tourism attractions in the nation's capital, he said Queanbeyan was ideally placed to join the RV-friendly club.

"It can be a real income driver for the community," Mr Barwick said.

"When people are on the road, they'll spend \$572 a week on essentials. That doesn't include the luxuries; they might go out for dinner a couple of nights, they might go and see some sights on top of that.

"For low cost, the community can set this up, and the RV tourist is worth about \$8.5 billion nationally per annum, and it's the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry," he said.

Central Coast retiree and self-confessed 'grey nomad' Paul Callaghan travelled to Queanbeyan in his RV last week to visit his son and grandchildren. He said he'd stayed in 'RV friendly' towns across Australia, and said they encouraged grey nomads to include the participating towns in their trip plans.

"With so many of us on the roads, it's a great opportunity for Queanbeyan," he said.

"A lot of us still stay at caravan parks for

the extra facilities they offer, whereas I like the free camps. They're quite friendly and everyone talks to everyone," he said.

To become 'RV friendly' and gain the CMCA's official recommendation to its 66,000 members, Queanbeyan would have to provide a flat piece of land near the city that included a dumping point for grey/black water reserves, and do so at no or low cost to users.

Local businessman and Development Board committee member Frank Bresnik has been advocating part of the Queanbeyan Showground as a possible site.

"It's in the centre of town, we can make a latent income from making it RV friendly, there's already a potable water sport for people to fill up their tanks, and you only need some sort of drop-off point for your sewer, and that's not that hard to organise," Mr Bresnik said.

"And it's one of my aims to get more toilets at the Showgrounds, and make it even more user friendly," he said.

Mayor Tim Overall was also supportive of the concept, but said the Showground wouldn't be an appropriate site due to a NSW Government-approved Plan of Management that doesn't allow for RVs and camping as a designated use, except as a one-off.

"The proposal of Queanbeyan becoming an RV Friendly town is a positive one and we have previously given consideration to this," Mr Overall said. "There are significant hurdles, but we are very much open to ideas and suggestions."





Queanbeyan Age, Queanbeyan NSW

07 Mar 2014, by David Butler

General News, page 2 - 269.43 cm²

Regional - circulation 3,000 (----F--)

ID 240735465

BRIEF CMCA-AUST INDEX 1.5



Copyright Agency licensed copy
(www.copyright.com.au)

PAGE 2 of 2



Self-confessed 'grey nomad' Paul Callaghan and his dog Tramp



The Queanbeyan Age A tourism opportunity

COULD Queanbeyan businesses net thousands of tourism dollars each year by opening itself up to grey nomads in campervans and RVs? Our page 2 article this week turned up plenty of evidence suggesting that it could.

The nature of the 'Grey Nomad' traveller coupled with our proximity to the tourism attractions of the nation's capital makes it seem a no-brainer.

RV and campervan tourists are generally older retirees looking to see Australia on the cheap by taking their accommodation with them. The more money they can save on nightly accommodation (parking) costs, the more likely they are to visit a particular town and see the local sights. But while they're there, they'll spend money at local pubs and cafes, supermarkets, newsagents, chemists, and so on.

As Richard Barwick (general manager of grey nomad peak body, the CMCA) told us this week, grey nomads are regional focussed.

"Our members aren't

interested in the big cities, because they can't get around and there's not the parking facilities," he said.

They're looking for towns like Queanbeyan to visit, and our proximity to Canberra makes us the perfect RV location, so long as we could make a section of inner city land available.

This is where it gets complicated for Queanbeyan. The land would need to be within walking distance of city facilities and businesses if we're to maximise the commercial benefit from such an arrangement.

The only really obvious spot is using a small part of the Queanbeyan Showground. However that's not as easy as it sounds.

Mayor Overall listed some of the difficulties for us this week, which include:

* The Showground is owned by the Crown with Council the Trustee, and the Showground was listed on the NSW Heritage Register in November 2012. The current NSW Government approved Plan of Management does not provide for RVs and Camping as a designated use except as one-offs linked to an

event taking place. A NSW ruling also applies that if showgrounds around the State are to be used for regular camping and temporary accommodation, they must be licensed and provide the same level services as licensed caravan parks including amenities and laundry facilities.

* The Showground is well used by the community and for hire events. In a typical year the Showground is utilised 35 out of 52 weekends and on average two week nights per week for 45 weeks of the year.

The major events - the 4WD and Camping Expo, the Rodeo, the Queanbeyan Show, the American Car Nationals and Swap Meet, the Circuses etc, attract thousands of visitors each year and the smaller events attract visitors in the hundreds - all boosting the local economy.

Nevertheless, it's worth pursuing the concept, as it could prove a major boost for struggling local retailers while also providing a kick start for Council's ongoing CBD upgrade.



Campervans to roll in \$2m

By **MICHAEL MCGOWAN**

THE sleepy hamlet of Nelson Bay will be transformed for a week in October, when the 2014 campervan and motorhome club of Australia rolls into town for its biannual rally.

Described by the council as “the largest single event ever staged in the Nelson Bay”, the rally is expected to attract about 2000 people and inject more than \$2 million into the Port Stephens economy.

In a report to councillors, the council’s economic development manager, Ross Smart, said the event would “deliver significant economic impact” not only for the bay but towns across Port Stephens expected to benefit

from the population influx.

“Economic benefits of the event will be far reaching with CMCA members expected to stay a minimum of seven nights in the region,” he said.

“Multiplier effects supplied by Tourism Research Australia estimate that the rally will inject more than \$2 million into the Port Stephens economy, in direct spend.

“Social benefits will be varied and far reaching with an open day held during the rally to encourage the local community to become involved in the event.”

Mr Smart said that the event would promote the region to a “national travelling audience”.

“Council’s tourism and

events unit has been working closely with the CMCA for a period of over 12 months to secure and plan for the event,” Mr Smart said in his report.

In recent years, Port Stephens Council has been aggressively pursuing an agenda aimed at bringing events to the region outside of the summer months.

As part of that, tomorrow night councillors will vote on whether to support a proposal aimed at waiving the \$30,000 hiring fee for the Tomaree Sports Complex where the event will be held, and providing \$20,000 in sponsorship.

The club would also make a \$10,000 donation to the council.