



Caravans park free

Ian Cutler

Large self-contained motorhomes and caravans will be allowed a free night of camping in Geraldton under a recreational vehicle-friendly strategy.

In a nine to four vote, City of Greater Geraldton councillors endorsed a motion by Councillor Laurie Graham placing tougher limits on the types of vehicles which could take up free overnight camping in 12 bays at the Francis Street carpark.

The RV-friendly strategy had been revised after a public comment period and recommended for adoption by the City's executive.

Cr Graham said he wanted to make sure campervans and smaller vehicles would not be allowed to park overnight for free.

His motion called for the Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia's definition of recreational vehicle to be used by rangers patrolling the carpark.

The definition includes the vehicle carrying a minimum 20 litres of fresh water, a grey water holding tank with a minimum capacity of five litres per person, or 15 litres per person if the vehicle is fitted with a shower, and have a portable toilet cassette or black-water holding tank.

The motion also called for a review of the strategy in a year.

Cr Shane Van Styn said the motion was "flawed", because it would increase pressure on rangers.

He said the City should not be competing against caravan park operators, whose "sole purpose" was to provide a good tourist experience.



Winch push to be RV-friendly

By **NOEL MURPHY**

MOVES to welcome campervans and RVs to Winchelsea could mark a new tourism sector for the Surf Coast.

Tourism chiefs have long rejected grey nomads and other so-called free campers but the Growing Winchelsea lobby argues RV owners spend an average \$386 a week that local businesses should be able to harness.

A petition tabled with Surf Coast Shire council this week called for Winchelsea to be formally declared an "RV Friendly Town".

"We have every amenity in place for this status and look forward to welcoming our first RV overnights to the banks of the beautiful Barwon River," said

Growing Winchelsea president Stuart Fountain.

The group said RV owners had consistently made a "moderate but important contribution to the town's economy" until Surf Coast mounted a camping bylaws crackdown on RV visitors.

Tourism bosses such as Tourism Greater Geelong and Belarine boss Roger Grant have consistently argued campervans have exploited beaches and bush tracks to the detriment of the local accommodation industry.

Growing Winchelsea told Surf Coast the economic benefits of becoming an RV Friendly Town were significant.

"Camping is the fastest growing segment of the Australian domestic tourism market, valued at over \$5.4 billion, and over the

past 10 years more than 200,000 RVs have been sold in Australia."

Mr Fountain told the *Independent* the TV Friendly Town bid was a "positive" development that had been 10 months in the making.

"The main issue for Surf Coast has been banning sleeping in cars and public spaces, that's really the only issue we've had.

"We've tried to address that and things are looking fairly positive."

Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia has approved RV Friendly Town status.

Towns are required to provide appropriate parking, access to a general shopping area, short-term parking, access to potable water and a free dumping point.



IN BRIEF

Thank you Shane

The Murray Valley Standard would like to acknowledge that Discover Murray Mallee's Shane Strudwick captured the aerial photo of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's 29th Anniversary Rally which was held in Murray Bridge in April. The Standard would like to thank Mr Studwick for supplying the photo which featured with the article 'Rally-goers say farewell' which was published on April 30.



Make campers pay

In difficult times when government is struggling to raise revenue to maintain public services, has anyone in state or local government calculated the revenue being lost by promotion of “freedom camping”.

The Central Coast Council confirmed the average number of overnight stays in the Penguin-Sulphur Creek area in the December-February period increased from 32 (2013) to 50 (2015). A 56 per cent increase!

If only things were so rosy in the caravan park industry. The figures reflect exactly the business lost each year by tourist parks as evidenced by recent articles in *The Advocate*.

Using the December-March period, at a fee of \$30 per night, \$185,000 is lost to the Central Coast community.

Using well accepted economic multipliers, this figure grows to an amazing \$494,406.

This region cannot afford to lose such an economic benefit and the government must be concerned about \$50,000 GST forgone.

It's clear freedom camping is welfare camping. It must be strictly controlled as on the mainland or our tourism industry will be in free-fall.

CHRISTINE ESPITALIER
Wynyard



Campervans use the Logans Beach carpark for free overnight accommodation.

150304LP02 Picture: LEANNE PICKETT

WCC tackles contentious vans issue

FREE CAMPING

By **PETER COLLINS**

WARRNAMBOOL City Councillors are unanimous in wanting to sort out the contentious issue of free camping which has generated negative vibes among travellers.

On Monday night they voted 7-0 to produce an official discussion paper canvassing views from a cross-section of groups as a lead-up to a public forum where the topic would be thrown open to the general community.

Feedback would be used

to help the council update its policy which in current form makes it illegal for campers to use areas other than registered facilities.

Several other councils around Australia are also grappling with the issue as the number of “grey nomads” and vanpackers increases.

Cr Rob Askew told councillors it would be premature to go to a public forum without a well-researched background paper.

“It’s an Australia-wide topic with many versions of what should and shouldn’t happen,” he said. “We need to

get information from the state government and tourism sector for opinions before we go to the community.”

A background report presented to councillors said local holiday park operators had concerns relating to the range of compliance costs they had to bear compared with free camping locations.

“Publicity relating to freedom campers in Warrnambool is ad hoc, however, it receives Australia-wide coverage through the freedom camping forums,” the report said.

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