



Camper 'blow ins' to be hit

Council considers toughening local laws

By **KATHY SUNDSTROM**

SOCIAL media and quirky new apps are encouraging campers to bunker down at Noosa hotspots illegally, creating a headache for council local laws officers and residents.

The problem, which has sparked 36 formal complaints since the start of the year, has prompted the Noosa Council to look at changing the local law to better deal with the issue.

Strategic planning officer Anne Wilson said the council was looking at changing the law so the owner of the vehicle, instead of the driver, could receive the \$550 fine.

This was because many of the drivers were overseas backpackers visiting the area who were difficult to trace once they'd left the country.

The Noosa Spit, Noosa Heads Lions Park, Noosa Lookout, Noosa River foreshore areas and beachside car parks have become known as hotspots for illegal campers in and

out of peak season.

Council officers will write to campervan hire companies Wicked, Juicy, Space Vans, Apollo, Brits and others, advising free camping is not allowed on council-controlled land in Noosa and will provide advice on where people can stay. Campervan drivers caught camping illegally had informed local laws officers Wicked Camperhire – best known for its crass graffiti on the sides of its vans – had been advising customers of free places to camp.

"In discussions with the drivers (camping illegally), local laws officers found an app on their phone advising they could camp in Noosa free," Mrs Wilson said.

The officers also had to blog Wicked's site to let readers know free camping was against the law in Noosa. A campaign in 2010 advising campervan hire companies free camping was not permitted in most areas had a "positive, albeit minor" influence in reducing the number of

illegal campers.

With mobile travellers in recreational vehicles the fastest-growing segment of the tourism industry in Australia, the council was looking to ensure there were adequate places for such visitors. Council officers have recommended in a report to be voted on at last night's Ordinary Meeting that the infrastructure charges rebate for community organisations policy be amended to enable community organisations providing a camp ground to be eligible for a rebate.

This will benefit community groups in the Noosa Hinterland who desire to offer camping options to visitors.

Local laws officers have also increased their patrols, however enforcement is difficult "due to the early departure and late arrivals of well-informed free campers", nevertheless council staff have received advice that the increased patrols are having a positive result.



Changes to Forbes Street parking proposal

The Weddin Shire Council has decided to implement a plan to change parking conditions in Forbes Street.

The subject of the changes has now been on the Council's agenda since a plan was mooted in October last year. The original objective to change the traffic conditions in the street came about after approaches from business interests to make the street more amenable to tourists with campervans and other "Grey Nomad" recreational vehicles.

The main thrust of the proposals emphasized that a lot of tourism came through the town and there appeared to be a distinct lack of suitable parking spaces to accommodate them when they stopped to do some shopping and sightseeing.

It was also proposed to the Council that closing the street to deliver one-way traffic would help keep tourists in the Main Street, especially those who stopped in town in the future to view the new Henry Lawson statue that will be placed on the corner of Main and Forbes Streets. It was felt that this move would definitely value-add to the attraction of the statue and the business precinct at the same time.

When the original proposed plans for the one-way traffic changes in Forbes Street were published, the council received many complaints. It seemed that not all of the citizens in town, especially some property owners in Forbes Street, were happy with plans they felt would impact on their businesses.

As a result, the matter was further discussed in the Council over the course of a couple of monthly meetings.

However, after canvassing several views and talking to traffic authorities – a new plan has been proposed and passed by the council.

The proposed changes will see two-way traffic conditions installed along with parking areas provided in the middle of the street for touring vehicles. New trees will also be planted to provide shade and old diseased trees will be uprooted and healthy, shadier trees planted.

The Council also called for submissions from the public regarding the proposals and many residents responded in a healthy manner.

Among some of the more salient points made in the proposals from the public included:

The whole plan was a waste of money, The Railway Station precinct was as suitable a place as any for tourists to park as it was still only a short walk in to Main Street and would cost the council nothing to implement yet serve the same purpose. The high kerb in Forbes Street also got a mention as a safety issue along with grey water being flushed from parked mobile homes.

Other points made by the public included: Larger vehicles detracting from the character of the town: Several complaints were also received regarding the at-the-moment plan to move the taxi cabstand: safety issues for drivers manoeuvring vans: pets becoming an issue.

In the end the Council decided at the April meeting to take into account all the submissions made and will now consider them in its deliberations regarding implementation of the plans.



Tourism board to apply for city grant

SAM NORRIS

Maitland's tourism credentials could get a boost under a state government program tailored to regional areas.

"Our tourism board on Hunter Councils will make an application," the mayor of Maitland, Cr Peter Blackmore, said. "It's best for the experts to decide what the application will be."

Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism and Major Events Andrew Stoner announced the latest round of grants opened yesterday under the Regional Visitor Economy Fund.

"Regional NSW tourism is vital to the state's economy," Mr Stoner said.

"In the year ended September 2013, visitor expenditure to our regions was worth more than \$9.9 billion – an increase of 11 per cent compared to the previous year."

Cr Blackmore said an overnight camp at Harold Gregson Reserve, opposite the tourism information centre, was

one of the tourist strategies council was steadily working toward.

This would provide free, short-term stays for travellers.

"I think it would be terrific and we've had an offer on the table for a while now for the Motor Home Association to provide a dump point," Cr Blackmore said.

"The association is very keen to see the town become RV friendly."

The RVEF fund is part of a \$21.6 million government commitment to regional tourism.

"Of the \$7.2 million available, \$3.7 million will be quarantined for regional tourism organisations applications and \$3.5 million will be available for industry, local government and regional tourism organisations to contest.

"I encourage all NSW tourism operators and organisations to apply and not miss out on this great opportunity."

Visit www.destinationnsw.com.au/rvef for more information.