



Rangers to look for free campers

THE Kempsey Shire Council is taking a different approach to the issue of 'free camping' over the Easter break with council rangers rostered to patrol known hotspots.

The rangers will encourage campers to use one of the designated campgrounds or caravan parks rather than 'free camp' at beachside car parks.

The issue of illegal camping came to a head over the Christmas holidays with the Crescent Head reserve beachside car park in particular being a magnet for campers.

The Kempsey Shire Council were powerless to act because of the wording of the 'no camping' signs and the lack of rangers on duty outside of normal office hours.

Police from Kempsey were forced to respond to concerns over illegal parking when the rubbish

collection truck picking up from the caravan park was unable to manoeuvre safely because of illegally parked camper vans.

Councillor Sue McGinn raised the issue at the most recent council meeting on March 17 asking if the council staff could produce a report into the issue for consideration by the councillors.

A spokesperson said the council was committed to a 'proactive' approach to control free camping.

"The council's rangers have been rostered to actively patrol known 'hotspots' over the Easter holiday period and will encourage campers to utilise our local designated tourist facilities," they said.

"Residents or visitors who have concerns relating to illegal camping over the Easter break are encouraged to report it to the council."



Long line: council rangers will be at the Crescent Head foreshore car park this Easter



CAMPERS FLOUT LAW

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BACKPACKERS in campervans invaded The Strand over the weekend, taking up more than a dozen parking spots and setting up camp in several areas with beachfront views.

The illegally parked visitors set up makeshift clotheslines, unloaded their vehicles into the park next

to them and filled bins to the brim along The Strand and in nearby parks. Chair of the Healthy City Safe City councillor Gary Eddiehausen said council did not condone the behaviour, with caravan parks not too far from where the vans were illegally parked.

"These people should be using the caravan parks in the region, that's the only appropriate place for them to park overnight and sleep," Cr Eddiehausen said.

"It's against our local laws anyway ... they are taking up parking

spaces, dropping their rubbish, hanging washing from the side of their van. It's just not a good look.

"I don't like the look of it ... the Strand is the jewel in our crown of Townsville and should not be looking like that at all."

Michelle Conn, of Rowes Bay Caravan Park, said people had been sneaking into their park and using their facilities.

"Council need to address it, it's an eyesore ... the more people that get away with it, the more people will do it," Mrs Conn said.

"We were having problems with our amenities block. People were parking opposite the park, particularly the vans, and just coming over and using the facilities.

"So we put pin pads on, then it came to light about six weeks ago that someone had posted the code to the toilets and showers on a Facebook page.

"They are in touch with each other. They let each other know that they could get away with parking down the Strand and then sneaking into our park and using

our facilities and they were saving themselves \$27."

Deputy Mayor Vern Veitch said it was an ongoing challenge for council to keep vans out of the parking spaces.

"We've got security down there seven days a week trying to deal with it," Cr Veitch said. "We give directives to move on whenever we see them setting up but if they don't, then we call the police and the reason we don't give out fines is because you would be chasing your tail trying to get them."



ILLEGAL: Campervans park at Strand Park on the weekend.
Picture: EVAN MORGAN



NO SHAME: Aset Kalevala and Leith Khai, of Brisbane, with their campervan at Strand Park.

Picture: EVAN MORGAN



Shire could allow camping at showgrounds

MOIRA Shire could soon allow Recreational Vehicle travellers to camp at the Numurkah showgrounds over 48 hours for a small nightly fee.

Cr Brian Keenan said at the March council meeting, that he had met with Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia board members, after the Combined Victorian Chapter RV rally in Numurkah last week.

He had said that the showgrounds could charge a \$10 a night fee for travellers for a maximum 48 hour stay.

"I was talking to the CMCA board members, we went through some things to advance this shire through the RV Friendly category. It's a real industry within our community," Cr Keenan said.

Currently no camping is permitted at the Numurkah showgrounds, except during designated events, although some locals have reported RVs illegally parked there overnight.

Moira RV Friendly Working Group representative Marg Paulo stressed that the meeting was a preliminary discussion and that nothing was set in stone.

"We are in discussion with the Moira Shire about overnight parking in Numurkah and Wunghnu.

"It's in early days and it would be a couple of months before anything could happen. There were a lot of positives that came out of the meeting."

She said that people were aware of the benefits of travellers camping around the shire.

Ms Paulo said the Numurkah RV rally had raised more than an estimated \$53,000 for the local economy.

Ms Paulo would not comment about illegal RV overnight parking at the Numurkah showgrounds.



Dump point proposal stinks

AT present, it is seven o'clock on a Thursday night. After spending my one day off from my nursing job, completing my university studies to further my career and receive my Bachelor Degree of Nursing, I have gone to the local supermarket to purchase some necessities and picked up the local paper. This I do every week, mostly to keep up to date with what is going on in our shire and of late, to find out times and dates of funerals of people I have known and loved.

This week, I find myself at a loss after opening the first page. I am not usually one to bother with council politics or follow the pathetic excuses and statements released by the council, but tonight I find myself angry enough to voice my opinion. The opinion of a 25-year-old who was born and bred in this shire, and continues to reside here while studying a uni degree full time via correspondence and working full time as a health care professional.

I have followed the Letters to the Editor columns about the council's plans to build a waste disposal structure for the Recreational Vehicles that pass through our little town and am personally appalled by the council's actions regarding the opinions of the shire's ratepayers. These people that will be affected by this waste disposal unit deserve to have input into this matter. Who in their right minds would ever think "Oh well, maybe we will just place a sewerage disposal structure in a local park." Seriously? Perhaps it will be good for tourism, but realistically most probably will just use this facility to dump their waste free of charge and carry on with their adventures. They might stop in Grant St and buy a coffee and a pie from a local store, but then leave our little town with an empty sewerage tank to continue on their endeavours.

After reading Geoff Hall's most recent Letter to the Editor, I now feel it is time for the people that reside in Alexandra to battle this council related circus routine. Of course, everything comes down to expenses - this is now the most important thing to most of humanity. So when propositioned with a cost free alternative, that has generously been offered by the new management of the Alexandra Showgrounds Caravan Park, I find myself unable to wrap my head around the fact that the council would not jump at this

chance. This alternative ticks all of the right boxes: cost free, has the support of the residents and ratepayers, and could potentially bring in more commission to the Alexandra Showgrounds as these tourists could decide to stay there out of pure convenience.

But instead, the council still sticks by the idiotic statement of 'put it in the park.' Really? How do you people not see the problem in even that short, five word statement, 'put it in the park.' Well, as a resident of Alexandra, you will not see me walking my dog or sitting under a shady tree completing my studies in a park that will now be known as the s**t park. My deepest sympathies for the residents of the streets surrounding this parkland, as your beautiful park views are desecrated by an "aesthetically appealing" concrete sewerage disposal facility for people passing through the town.

This proposal stinks; pun intended.

Carly Murphy, Alexandra.



Council digs a hole for itself

The council meeting at Yea on Wednesday night saw the further deterioration of the relationship between the council and its ratepayers. Despite a big turnout of residents and others and an extensive presentation by two speakers, council passed a motion to proceed to install the RV dump on the corner of Lamont St and Station Street. A respected Police Officer and resident gave an extensive explanation of the inherent dangers of the proposed site on the OD route. B double trucks with huge loads of timber travelling at 60km would be impeded by RV vehicles pulling in and pulling out. Semi trailers from Lamont St and vehicles coming over the rise would all meet at this same point. Add to this the constriction of the concrete bridge where two trucks are unable to pass and you have a recipe for disaster. Add to this critical point an RV dump point, and the additional hazard could be the cause of a disaster.

The council ignored these concerns, at the same time responding to acknowledge that there were many less dangerous and more preferable sites available. When questioned if any of these sites had been investigated the council officer admitted only a 'desktop' study had been done. No visual inspection, no feet on the ground visit, no unseen physical features accounted for, just a quick 'desktop' evaluation.

When it was pointed out that because the issues of safety were a concern to the consultative group, the council had a duty of care to examine safer sites. The silence reigned. No councillor acknowledged their duty of care. When it was also pointed out that they also had a duty to examine other sites that would be more economical given the parlous state of the council's finances, no councillor questioned the \$13,000 estimate for the works compared to the costs of other sites.

We contend that the earthworks and road works, plus bringing water from the cricket pavilion and the plumbing contract to install and connect to the sewer line will easily blow out to \$20,000 of rate payers funds.

This for people who don't live here, don't pay rates and don't spend money on accommodation food or fuel. The spurious contentions of the benefits that will flow to tourism need questioning given the capital costs anticipated.

Therefore it is urgent that the council consider the alternatives to save \$20,000 of rate payers funds. One alternative is entirely cost free.

Two other are at the barest of minimal cost.

The consulting group of ratepayers are bewildered at the refusal of the council staff and now four councillors out of seven who won the vote to install the sewer dump in station street in the dangerous intersection.

We can only wonder at the motivation of these people. We have concluded that their decision defies logic and therefore we can only conclude that they are motivated by fear.

Fear of being seen to have made a mistake. Fear of a loss of face or embarrassment. Fear and disappointment that drives denial and a siege mentality that to admit to the need to examine possible alternatives may expose the poor decision making that led them to this situation.

We don't care. We only want a decent outcome for the RV owners, the rate payers and residents, the park users, like little Aths, cricket players, yes, even councillors and staff. We want the best for an ailing town with struggling businesses, empty shops and increasing rates to a shortfall of 1.7million annually.

What is it that they don't get? They have resorted to denigrating the very people that they should be consulting with.

The rate payers and consultative group intend to persist. If the council won't give us a chance to put out alternatives then we will take them directly to the people of Alexandra. Subsequently we call a public meeting at the helipad in the park so that we can present all the information to anyone who is interested.

Then we will conduct a walking tour of the alternative sites so that rate payers can decide for themselves by looking at the evidence. This process will start at 11am on Saturday, April 4 and finish at 12.30pm. Everyone is welcome, including those who are unsure of the issues involved. We would welcome the Mayor and CEO to join us. This is the second invitation we have offered them to visit the sites that are available. We promise to be respectful and courteous to anybody who attends. We also invite council staff to leave their 'desk top' and join us. If the council act precipitously by starting work before our protest we would consider this a deliberate act of vandalism.

Geoff Hall, Alexandra

Note: Saturday's meeting has been cancelled as works on the site have commenced since.