



FREE CAMPERS OR FREE LOADERS?

TRAVELLERS in campervans and motor homes are heading to Yarram and the Gippsland region in their droves, many choosing free camping spots, some even parking illegally in car parks.

While there are those who welcome the boost in trade to local business from the free campers, others see them as free loaders.

Rachel Brown from the Toora Tourist Park isn't at all happy free camping is being allowed especially on popular reserves so close to her established business.

Mrs Brown said they are booked out for the four days of Easter, but having a free camping area so close is detrimental to her business.

"It has a major negative impact on my business and I don't think it is good long term for the region," she said.

"Our occupancy has been significantly affected for powered sites, and long term if this continues, we will have to look at reducing sites and turning them into something else."

Mrs Brown said reducing the number of sites at her park would have substantial impact on the town, because it will reduce the number of people coming in.

"Statistics prove people who stay in commercial caravan parks spend more money in the town," she said.

"It is a real shame the Franklin River Reserve is being wrecked for the local community. It looks terrible and is being over used."

On Monday night Mrs Brown estimated there were around forty campsites at the reserve.

"It is dangerous, risky, unsupervised and ridiculous," she said.

"More and more locals are coming up to me and saying they hate it, but don't want to say anything about it."

Continued on page 4.



Great choice: Max and Sheila Ford, who are originally from Melbourne but now spend life on the road, were at the Franklin River Reserve on Monday night. They said the reason they use free camping areas is not to save money, but more for the lifestyle. They said the Franklin River Reserve is becoming an increasingly popular place to stay.



Free camping or free loading?

Continued from page 1.

On the other hand Port Albert Progress Association president Saul Stainer sees only positives and said it is a wonderful thing to be able to promote Port Albert as an RV friendly place.

"It is unfortunate in Port Albert we only have limited number of those spots available," he said.

"The progress association is currently in the throes of having discussions with the Wellington Shire to establish more camping space in the town."

Mr Stainer said the RV parking provides a constant business flow and economic benefit for the town.

"The local businesses need all the help they can get," he said.

Wellington Shire Council mayor, Carolyn Crossley said the council has promoted the region as a welcoming destination for motor homers and caravanners for the last seven years.

"We have facilitated provision of nine dump points across Wellington and helped to establish and promote more than 50 free and low cost campsites within our region," she said.

Reeves Beach and McGaurans Beach offer free camping, Port Albert Town Centre has free camping and a dump point for grey and black water but has a 24

hour time limit.

White Woman's Waterhole at Won Wron has a free camping area, the Tarra River rest area just outside of Yarram allows free camping, as does the Gormandale Recreation Reserve.

At Port Albert, the dump point is located in car park on Wharf Street, adjacent to the water tower and toilet block. This dump point is locked and the key is available from three nearby businesses.

There is another dump point at the Yarram Recreation Reserve.

Cr Crossley said, "We work cooperatively with the Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) which has endorsed Yarram as an RV Friendly Town under its national classification scheme.

"The CMCA endorsement has seen increasing numbers of RVs visit the region, resulting in greater tourism expenditure."

Cr Crossley said a survey conducted in one of the regions RV Friendly towns revealed visitor expenditure over the summer season is around \$15,000 per week.

This is largely in food, fuel, chemist, souvenirs and general retail.

"During one summer season, that adds up to more than \$200,000 injected into the town from visitors who

simply stay overnight and leave the next day," she said.

"A consequence of such increased expenditure is that small town shops remain viable, junior staff are employed casually or part time and towns feel more vibrant."

Three years ago, Wellington hosted the 25th CMCA Anniversary Rally which has helped position Wellington as a premium RV destination offering a number of visitor experiences and all the facilities and infrastructure needed by RV visitors.

"Tourism Research Australia estimated 201,000 travellers visited the Wellington region as part of a caravanning/camping experience in 2012/13," Cr Crossley said.

The council has helped establish Tarra Territory Tourism, a new organisation aiming to grow visitor numbers to the Yarram region.

"They are working on a number of projects including the production of an exciting new tourist brochure to capitalise on and promote the abundance of waterfalls within Tarra Territory," Cr Crossley said.

"Ongoing promotion of the region's caravan parks and campsites as well as the development of an additional major event for Yarram are on the cards for Tarra Territory Tourism."

South Gippsland Shire Council tourism develop-

ment officer Danielle Todaro said there are a number of options and locations throughout the region for people with RVs.

"There are a variety of options in proximity to the attractions and places of interest of the area to suit most budgets and the type of stay people are looking for."

Some of the other free or low cost camping areas in the South Gippsland Shire Council area include the Walkerville Foreshore Reserve, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Bear Gully Camping Ground within Cape Liptrap Coastal Park, Shallow Inlet Camping Reserve, Bass Valley Camping Ground, Franklin River Reserve and the Loch Recreation Reserve.

Ms Todaro said the council is actively engaged in promoting South Gippsland as a RV friendly destination.

Corey Owens from Tarra Valley loves to camp with his two dogs and said free camping areas are a really good asset to have.

"The one at Yarram and the Franklin River Reserve are really good," he said.

"It is good to have a free, low cost alternative; I come here (Yarram Tarra River rest area) quite a lot. I love camping and this provides an alternative."

Mr Owens said some people don't do the right thing and leave their rubbish behind, or light fires on the grass.



INGHAM

RV park windfall

AN Australian-first RV park run by the Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia is set to open in Ingham on June 1 and is slated to bring in \$1 million to the local economy per year.

The “no frills” site on the Bruce Highway near the BP, will be a CMCA member-only site with a dump point, water station and large shed.

CMCA government and stakeholder communications manager Colin Balfour said Ingham was an ideal place to open their first RV site to attract the grey nomad market.



Council now charging \$10 a night for RV stay at Tyto



Hinchinbrook Mayor Rodger Bow holding welcome packs for RV site users at Tyto.

THE proposed Hinchinbrook Shire Council-run RV parking spot at Tyto has been given the go ahead to operate from April 1 through to October 31.

The council will be charging \$10 a night to help offset costs associated with running the land, which in the past would have been footed by Hinchinbrook ratepayers.

Mayor Rodger Bow said last year alone

people who stayed at the RV parking site brought in \$160,000 to the Ingham community.

"They did spend money in the community, whether that was at the mechanics, buying fuel or groceries or at locals pubs and restaurants," Cr Bow said.

"It was so successful that businesses have asked us to keep it open because it was

good for business."

The site, for fully self contained RV's, will be run by Tyto and after the success of last year's trial, it is expected to be a busy stopping point again this year.

"When I came down and spoke with people who were staying here, they all said they would be willing to pay \$10 a night to park here and be able to dump their waste and fill up their

water," Cr Bow said.

"It is a beautiful site overlooking the water and we expect it to be busy again when the Grey Nomads get on the road.

"Last year we had 781 permits given out and we are expecting about the same, if not more this coming season.

"We did have a few complaints last year, but this is only a 48-hour site, if they missed

out on seeing something in the area, than they will need to move onto one of our local caravan parks."

With each permit bought, Tyto will be handing out welcome packs, which include visitor, caravan park and local business information, which is expected to drum up even more business for locals.

CHRIS MCMAHON



RV PARK SET TO BRING \$1M ANNUALLY

**CHRIS
MCMAHON**

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AN Australian-first RV park run by the Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) is set to open in Ingham on June 1 and is slated to bring in \$1 million to the local economy per year.

The "no frills" parking site situated on the Bruce Highway near the BP service station, will be a CMCA member only site and will hold a dumping station, water filling station and will propose to erect a large open plan shed for its members.

CMCA government and stakeholder communications manager Colin Balfour said Ingham was an ideal place to open their first RV site, with Grey Nomads expected to start hitting the roads in the next few months.

"Council has asked us to have the park operating by

June 1 and the member only facility, will be available to self-contained vehicles only," Mr Balfour said. "We will put in a dump point, water taps and there is a concrete pad there about the size of a double garage and we've been in talks with council about putting a shelter shed over there, so people can get together in the afternoon and have a few drinks in the shade.

"And we've planned out the land so people can dump grey water and black water waste as they enter or leave the park."

Mr Balfour said the site would be a tourism facility they could market around Australia and overseas, bringing an influx of visitors to the region.

"We think the site in Ingham, if it performs the way we are thinking it will, could bring \$1 million into town a year," he said. "The beauty of the site in Ingham is that it is only 500m from all the shops, pubs and restaurants, they'll be able to go and have a few beers and walk back to their RV."

He said council won't have to maintain the land with the CMCA taking over the maintenance of the site.

"The great thing for the council is that it is land that would otherwise be sitting unused, it's a floodway and we accept that we won't be operating 12 months a year, but if it does flood, because it will be an open site, nothing will get damaged.

"We will use local contractors to take care of the maintenance of the land and we will have a custodian on site, who are volunteers who go through a training course, and they'll spend a month during each rotation and their job is to oversee the place and make sure everyone obeys the rules."

Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce president Mary Brown said it was "fantastic" that the CMCA site would be up and running by June 1.

"It's fantastic to hear that we are going to have more than double the capacity RV sites than what we had last year ... they'll have 50 or 60

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We think the site in Ingham, if it performs the way we are thinking it will, could bring \$1 million into town a year.

Colin Balfour
Campervan Motorhome Club of Australia

sites, which will be a welcome boost," Ms Brown said.

"Right now the biggest challenge that we as a community have and what's impacting our economy is purely population and spend, so every person we can bring through the door and they can spend an extra \$5, \$10 or \$20 will make a big difference." Mr Balfour said the CMCA was aiming to establish 100 parks across Australia over the next five years and Ingham would be the first, with other parks expected to open in North Queensland over the next year.



Have Your Say

Pipeline was a good idea

Sir,- A gas pipeline to Lakes Entrance was a good idea 10 years ago. Now, I'm not so sure.

The price of gas is set to double in the next few years and nobody around here wants coal seam gas in our area.

How much will the pipeline cost? How many home owners would be willing to spend \$5000-plus connecting to the pipeline and buying new gas appliances?

Would people's money be better spent putting solar panels on their

Ros Young,
Lakes Entrance.

Sir,- East Gippsland Shire manager major projects and economic development, Tim Ellis, states he wants to "corral itinerate campers" (*Post*, March 25).

Recreational motor homes are not livestock and do not need a strong stockade. Also, it is not "free" camping, but "freedom" camping, meaning an area set aside for fully self-contained motorhomes. The overnight stay could incur a small fee.

Yours etc.,
Gwen Van Den Born,
Lakes Entrance.

'Freedom' camping

houses to reduce power bills? Could the money allocated to the pipeline be put to better use?

Having the National Broadband Network in Lakes Entrance would seem to me a higher priority.

In regards to Bullock Island, the island is a major drawcard for our area with an estimated 100 people per day using the island for recreation, sightseeing and fishing.

What a shame the only way in is a dirt potholed road passing by a Gippsland Ports junkyard.

On arrival, there are no facilities, no toilets, no picnic areas, etc.

Surely the proposed fourth toilet in the area around the bridge into town would be better placed down there.

Yours etc.,



Free campers made to feel at home in many towns

■ Everard Himmelreich

Free camping grey nomads and backpackers in campervans are being welcomed by Victorian towns keen to boost tourism numbers, as long as the visitors abide by the rules.

Public reserves in areas such as Panmure, Hawkesdale, Cobden and Lismore are being promoted as popular free camping spots through online travel blogs and by word of mouth between travellers.

Hawkesdale and District Development Action Committee secret-

ary Frank Huglin said the group was keen to discuss “the significant growth of free campers” in the town’s Apex Park with the Moyne Shire Council.

Mr Huglin said Hawkesdale had won good online reviews about the free camping available. However,

he said there was a need to control the unrestricted use of campfires and fuel collection for the fires.

More rubbish bins were also needed and “toilet issues” had to be resolved, Mr Huglin said.

Panmure resident Paul Moroney said many people camped for free

at a picturesque picnic spot near the Princes Highway bridge over the Mount Emu Creek.

Mr Moroney said the site was equipped with public toilets and a barbecue and the campers caused no problems.

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