



Tills ring in shades of grey

| Ben Leahy

There appears to be a silver lining to Hedland's economic downturn after the visitor centre estimated grey nomads spent up to \$50,000 a week this season.

Port Hedland Visitor Centre manager Natasha Fry said the rough estimate was based on voluntary receipts dropped off by grey nomads over a two-week period.

She said the two weeks of receipts showed travellers spent a total of \$105,000 in the local economy.

"Importantly, \$34,000 of this investment was to small local businesses such as the Seafarers Centre, local hairdressers, newsagents and tours through the visitor centre," she said.

"(This) turned, what was looking to be the worst tourism season in three years, into a season that has eclipsed the last two seasons in visitor numbers, tours and importantly positive feedback."

Ms Fry said the tourism surge was directly linked to Town of Port

Hedland's decision to open a free overflow campground at the turf club for travellers in caravans and recreation vehicles.

Town of Port Hedland Mayor Kelly Howlett said 47 per cent of grey nomads surveyed at the visitor centre would have passed Hedland by if the campground had not been available.

"Offering a pet-friendly, central ground ... with grey-water dump

point, close to local shops, restaurants and businesses encouraged more people ... to consider Port Hedland as a destination ... this winter," she said.

Hedland tourism figures last week also backed the overflow campground.

Port Hedland Seafarers Centre tour guide Ray Ives said his non-profit group ran two-to-three tours a day when the campground was open.

Once it closed, the group's tour numbers almost instantly dropped by half.

ibis Styles Port Hedland manag-

er Jason Green said his hotel's restaurant had not only gained business, but also enjoyed the spark and atmosphere the tourists brought.

Representatives of Aspen's Cooke Point Holiday Park and The Landing village also reported good tourist seasons, acknowledging the overflow ground helped to boost overall tourist numbers.

South Hedland's Blackrock Tourist Park was the only accommodation business to report a bad season and expressed concern the overflow park was competing for business.

However, Ms Howlett said the Town would look to work with Blackrock to find ways to help it profit from the surge in tourists.

Ms Fry said she was keen for the overflow campground to continue next year because it had put Hedland back on the map.



City delays camping trial decision

BY MELISSA CUNNINGHAM

THE City of Ballarat have further delayed making a final decision on the fate of a 12-month Pioneer Park freedom camping trial.

At the council meeting on Wednesday night, councillors again postponed a final decision on the issue, opting to instead look at other sites.

Ballarat Councillor Samantha McIntosh put forward an alternative motion urging councillors to vote in favour undertaking discussions with the supervisory team and the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia on alternative models and locations for operating freedom camping in Ballarat.

Cr McIntosh said she felt there was more scope to investigate other sites.

"We need to be to be provide to diversity in accommodation for all our visitors to Ballarat," Cr McIntosh said. "We have had issues, that you would expect to see in a trial period but in my view, these issues aren't alarming."

Cr McIntosh said while there undoubtedly problems with the trial, there were "easy fixes" and "justifications" for many of the issues raised.

It comes after councillors received a request from the two biggest local caravan parks in the city which said it was affecting their numbers earlier this year.

There were also claims of breaches including alleged misuse, including people overstaying the two permitted nights and not meeting the self-containment water

and toilet measures.

All claims have been vigorously denied by CMCA member Grant Tillett.

But Ballarat councillors Glen Crompton and Amy Johnson both raised concerns about the current trial.

Cr Crompton said while he supported the economic benefits of the trial, the current management site was a "dangerous risk" to council because it was being supervised by residents who "had no actual authority for enforcing rules on public land."

Cr Johnson said the council had discussed the issue in depth and decision needed to be made on matter. Cr Belinda Coates voted against the alternative motion alongside Cr Crompton and Cr Johnson. The issue is expected to go back to council later this year.