



# Yarram Standard

## Make Port RV friendly

PORT Albert needs a lift and the Wellington Shire Council needs to be proactive and promote Port Albert as an RV friendly destination.

Yes, years ago the council closed the town's caravan park that brought much needed tourist dollars to the town, for the last three years the town fought the draconian building regulations on land thought to be flood prone, thankfully overturned in January this year and just when the town had reason to smile the town's icon pub burned to the ground in February.

Talk about a kick in the guts for a small tourist town with such a colourful and proud history.

The South Gippsland Shire is promoting its shire as a RV friendly destination with new long term parking, signage and an RV parking trail at Fish Creek. The shire is also kicking in \$3000 for any town wanting to install a dump point to encourage tourists to stay.

Port Albert is a beautiful village and lends itself beautifully to become Gippsland's first RV friendly town.

The unpopular decision to close the town's caravan and camping park is on the shire's head and now it is time for the shire to jump on board and give something back to the Port.

The Port Albert Progress Association would like to see an RV parking area developed in the town and put this to the shire but unfortunately this was knocked on the head.

Come on Wellington get behind this campaign and put the Port back on the map!



# We're RV friendly

WHILE the South Gippsland Shire wants to be seen to be promoting the shire as an RV friendly destination the Foster community is reeling after the shire failed to back a plan for a new free camping spot for the town.

The Foster community will have to wait to establish free camping for recreational vehicles and reap the economic benefits of that growing industry.

South Gippsland Shire Council adopted its Recreational Vehicle (RV) Strategy last Wednesday.

That plan will develop long vehicle parking in the shire, erect new signs and conduct a trial of RV parking at Terrill Park Recreation Reserve at Fish Creek for six months over the peak tourist season, with a maximum stay of two nights.

The strategy will also maintain the Bass Valley Camping Ground between Loch and Poowong, and Franklin River Reserve near Toora as free camping sites, with a maximum stay of two nights.

Council will also work with the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia to promote the shire as a RV friendly destination.

The Foster community had hoped council would support the creation of a free camping spot for RVs at the Foster Station Park. If that proposal proceeded, a dump point would be built at the town's service station.

While council did not back that plan last Wednesday, council has not ruled out considering the proposal in the future.

Council will offer communities wishing to attract motorhomes up to \$3000 to install dump points to boost tourism.

The points will enable travellers to dispose of waste and council hopes they will spend money in town while doing so.

Cr Andrew McEwen successfully pushed for council to support dump points financially.

"The RV market is growing rapidly," he said, noting the industry was worth billions of dollars.

Cr Mohya Davies said the strategy was a start and would help promote South Gippsland as an attractive destination for RV users.

"It is important we adopt the strategy and look at it within 12 months time," she said.

"I know the Foster Community Asso-

ciation will be disappointed with me but we have to make a decision that suits the community as it stands at the moment."

Cr Davies noted the Foster Chamber of Commerce had not commented on the strategy because it felt it should support small business and caravan parks were small businesses.

Some caravan park operators are concerned establishing free camping would rob them of income.

Foster CFA captain David Jones addressed council, also speaking as a member of the Foster Station Park Advisory Committee, in support of establishing an RV stop at the park.

"There will be virtually no cost to council of policing the area but the benefits to the Foster community and to the shops would be immeasurable," he said.

"Foster could be South Gippsland's first RV friendly town."

Toora Newsagency proprietor Irene Spooner said every town in the shire seeking RV facilities should be supported.

"Our motto is come for the beauty. Let's not make it stay if you pay," she said.

"Why should we restrict some people from coming to our shire because we don't like the way they come?"

Karen Barwick lives opposite the Franklin River Reserve and said many RV users find the site appealing and well maintained.

But not everyone was in support. Victorian Caravan Parks Association representative Fenna Van der Meulen read a letter from Toora Tourist Park proprietor Rachel Brown opposing free camping at Franklin River, given that would take business from her park.

Ms Brown wrote that she had been treated with hostility by council when she addressed council recently, and therefore Ms Van der Meulen read the letter.



# Sports club grounds turn temporary tourist spots

By **JOE FLYNN**

A CALOUNDRA tourism operator has called for sports club facilities to be allowed to act as budget caravan parks to cut down on illegal camping in Coast car parks.

Bill Darby believes government red tape is holding back affordable caravan parks and forcing backpackers to flout parking laws.

His comments are in response to revelations a major campervan hire company has been telling its customers they can set up camp in a public car park next to Mooloolaba Surf Club.

“Camper van companies wouldn’t be recommending customers camp illegally if, as a region, we provided more flexibility in regards to accommodating these travellers who are, like it or not, a growing part of this market,” Mr Darby said.

The problem arose because there were not enough affordable caravan parks and Sunshine Coast Council made it too hard to establish campgrounds, he said.

“A lot of councils around the state have found ways to access public land at affordable prices to encourage RV travel and the Sunshine Coast isn’t one of those areas.

“The State Government, the council and a lot of sporting clubs have the facilities that would suit

itinerant campervan and RV overnights but there are complications and costs in getting those areas as a permitted use in council zoning.

“There’s a blockage there and we need to look at how we can be more flexible in allowing (those) places that otherwise aren’t used at night to provide those facilities for RVs.”

Australian backpacking founding father Michael Higginson said fining illegally parked campervans

would only hurt the Coast’s tourism market.

Mr Higginson started Australia’s first backpackers in Byron Bay and the first four in Cairns, and raised his children in Tanawha before recently moving to Gayndah.

He returns to the Coast regularly and believes backpackers will go to more affordable areas if they are hit with fines. “What would you do if you were a traveller and you got a fine,” he asked. “You’d move away and you’d tell your friends.”

Social media has made reputations more important and Mr Higginson says a bad experience could be extremely damaging if shared online. “In the world of social media it can happen in no time at all.

“Some of the information is wrong, but bad news in the backpacker industry travels 10 times quicker than good news.”



ISSUE: Saturday's front page.



# Rosedale just got even friendlier!



**A long term favourite for visitors to our great Shire, Rosedale has just been named Wellington's fourth RV Friendly Town, joining Sale, Heyfield and Yarram, by the Caravan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA).**

By promoting the partnership between recreational vehicle (RV) travellers and small towns, CMCA hopes to encourage the expansion of tourism related infrastructure and services, and boost the economy of those small towns providing RV tourist specific amenities.

Rosedale's Willow Park is a popular overnight stop, offering free overnight camping for visitors a short walk from the town centre, but in order to qualify for the RV Friendly scheme, towns must successfully meet the needs of RV travellers and satisfy stringent criteria including:

- Access to medical facilities, a pharmacy, a dump point and a general shopping area

- Provision of appropriate parking
- A Visitor Information Centre and vehicle service centre

CMCA also considers the general attitude of the local council and community, so as to truly identify the friendliest areas in Australia.

Therefore, travellers can enter any RV Friendly Town with the knowledge that they will be welcomed and adequately provided for. In return, CMCA supports and promotes towns with an RV Friendly status.

An RV Friendly Town designation encourages all RV travellers to stop, shop and enjoy Wellington's wonderful towns!



# ACT NOW FORUM DEMAND

## Short-term fix wanted on transport issues

**REX MARTINICH**

SOUTHERN Grampians Shire has laid out its long term plans for freight and passenger transport on road and rail at a public forum this week, but some audience members were more interested in the short term.

Former Southern Grampians Shire councillor Holford 'Tiger' Wettenhall led a group of attendees asking for the shire to move ahead with a parking and sewage dumping facility for campervans and RVs (recreational vehicles).

The proponents of the RV facility claim it would put Hamilton on the tourist map because such facilities are rare in south-west and western Victoria.

Hamilton has a standing plan, which has seen little progress in many years, for a heavy-transport alternate route around the CBD.

However, some audience members would rather see wider roundabouts to improve safety in the short term instead of waiting to force trucks out of the middle of town.

Shire chief executive Richard Perry told the forum that "over the last few years we

have certainly delved deeper into what the key transport issues are for Hamilton and the shire."

Mr Perry said that state planning reports had "nominated Hamilton as a regional centre" but his had "often been a point of conjecture and uncertainty."

Mr Perry said the State Government's Regional Growth Plan had now recognised the important location, the north-south link, the important current and future plans, education and health and accessibility to other provincial centres.

After the main presentation, Mr Wettenhall asked if the shire could establish facilities for tourists and 'grey nomads' to boost the local economy.

Mr Wettenhall was one of multiple audience members who said busses were sitting idle during the day in central Hamilton parking spots.

"It would be ideal if the spot the busses take up now was instead prompted as a park for caravans," Mr Wettenhall said.

"If you put up a sign that said there was a (sewage) dump point I would guarantee

it would pay for itself in next to no time.

"They will fall over backwards to stop here and you can get grants from the Australian Motor Home Association to get a hand with it."

Mr Perry said RV tourism was a "growing market" and a shire tourism unit report was due to council in coming months.

Mr Perry told the meeting the busses were "probably an impediment" and the shire was working with the companies to establish an alternate parking site during the day, possibly located near the railway tracks.

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FORMER SOUTHERN Grampians Shire Councillor, Holford 'Tiger' Wettenhall, listens to a shire response to one of his questions on recreational vehicle and campervan facilities. Photo: REX MARTINICH.

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## Short-term fix wanted

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Mr Wettenhall also advocated for roundabouts on the main truck routes through town to be widened as a provisional safety measure ahead of the heavy truck route.

The condition of local roads continued to be a major theme for discussion, with questions posed as to how the shire would recover costs from damage done by blue gum harvesting trucks.

Shire infrastructure director, Kevin O'Brien said the shire now had a "much more scientific approach" to industrial road damage by surveying roads before and after their use.

Mr O'Brien also confirmed that the shire had received compensation for road damage from companies associated with blue gums.

The shire's presentation also revealed a projected shortfall of government grant funding of almost \$5 million compared with the

shire's evaluation of local repair and maintenance needs.

Shire futures director Michael McCarthy said the shire's transport plan had considered that a successful copper mine project in Western Victoria during the next 20 years would add hundreds of millions of freight tonnes to the rail network.

The Spectator asked Mr Perry if the National Commission of Audit recommendation to privatise the Australian Rail Track Corporation would help or hinder the plans for passenger rail.

Mr Perry said "any answer I could give right now would be speculative".

"If the shire and the rail corporation were both government agencies then some people would say it is easier to communicate with them," he said.

"And if they are privatised it means they have to respond to market forces so it could affect passenger rail."



SOUTHERN Grampians Shire chief executive, Richard Perry and Shire futures director, Michael McCarthy, outline the shire's future transport plans for freight and passengers on road and rail to a public forum on Wednesday night. Photo: REX MARTINICH.

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