



# \$1m boost for Tasman Peninsula camping

**SITTING PRETTY:** Port Arthur Holiday Park operators Steve and Leanne Sowerby on the deck of one of their new safari 'glamping' units, inset, within the grounds of the park with a resident Tasmanian rosella perched on a deck chair.

Pictures: LUKE BOWDEN

**JENNIFER CRAWLEY**

THE Tasman Peninsula will receive a further tourist boost as the Port Arthur Caravan Park gets a \$1 million refurbishment.

The Caravan Industry Association says Tasmania is attracting more international caravan and camping holiday-makers.

There were 20,100 visitors in 2015, up 3 per cent on 2014, who stayed 206,966 nights, a 5 per cent increase on 2014.

TT-Line has also reported a 17 per cent increase in caravans and a 15 per cent increase in motorhomes crossed Bass

Strait last summer.

The \$1 million upgrade comes a year after a \$800,000 injection to the park, which introduced five-star safari tents and waterview cabins.

Managers Steve and Leanne Sowerby say the recent opening of the Three Capes Track Walk has led to an influx of visitors who use the caravan park as a stepping-off point,

"Campers come from all walks of life to stay here," they said.

The park has a 800-person capacity but traditionally does not exceed 600.

"It's not a manicured setting. There's plenty of wildlife and no one is on top of each other," Mr Sowerby said.

There are 44 powered sites, waterview cabins, a 64-bed bunkhouse and five-star safari glamping tents sprinkled throughout the 16ha tree-filled setting guaranteeing privacy for most campers.

The park has been awarded a TripAdvisor certificate of excellence for the past five years, granting it automatic inclusion into the Tasmanian Tourism Council's Hall of Fame.

The *Mercury* yesterday

reported that 22 per cent of the \$509 million invested in tourism for 2015 went towards accommodation.

Australian Tourist Park Management chief executive Mark Manteit said the extra funding would pay for more luxury cabins, studio rooms, a new playground and a timber pump track for cyclists, roller skaters, scooter riders and skateboarders.

Mr Manteit said "glamping" options like safari tents and luxury cabins catered to the growing market of holiday-makers seeking value-for-money getaways.



# Novel view for tourists

## Farmgate Mate launches in state

AGFEST 2016

BY CAITLIN JARVIS

**A**BOUT 30 farms and agri-tourism businesses in Tasmania have signed up to a new national initiative that offers a new way for farmers to connect with tourists.

Farmgate Mate is a tourism membership community that was launched in France 25 years ago. The service has also extended to the UK, the US, Italy and Spain.

Tasmania is the first state in the country to sign up for the national initiative, that was launched at Agfest in May.

The Farmgate Mate program offers both farmers and tourists a chance to connect with each other in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Self-contained motorhome drivers sign up to be a member of the community with an annual fee that gives them access to the farms that have also agreed to be part of the program.

Farms set aside a part

of their land for use by the motorhomes and members are expected to purchase products from the farmers.

Farmgate Mate was launched in Australia by family members Hans Kerkvliet, Vicki Fox, and Sandie and Gerry Kerkvliet after seeing the success of the program overseas.

"It allows people in

self-contained motorhomes to plan their trip around the people who have signed up to the program, we say it means they can travel further and stay longer," Farmgate Mate co-owner Vicki Fox said.

It means that tourists are fully immersed in the culture of a region and interact at the farmgate with farmers who can offer tourism experiences.

The group behind the successful launch in Tasmania contacted local councils, state government and the state planning authority to ensure their venture was able to succeed.

"We thought it would be well suited to Australia and Tasmania and were surprised that it hadn't been established here yet," co-owner Hans Kerkvliet said.

Farmgate Mate avoids breaching overnight camping legislation because

the transaction between farmer and member is a commercial one, rather than an accommodation one.

As part of the program host farms agree to offer free parking of up to 24 hours for RVs and motorhomes exclusively to Farmgate Mate members.

The vehicle can be a motorhome, campervan or RV; (it must be self-contained) tent camping is not permitted.

As long as there is a commercial transaction involved it does not breach overnight camping legislation.

"The farmers could offer a meal, a tour of the farm or some of their products, it doesn't matter as long as there is a commercial transaction," Ms Fox said.

It costs nothing for farmers to join the program and they have complete control over how much or how little they would like to be a part of it.

"As a host you are in total control, you can decide what days, weeks or time of year you are available to accept vans, you decide how many vans you can accept at one time, any requirements or any exclusions," Mr Kerkvliet said.

Mr Kerkvliet said he believed Tasmania would be perfect for the membership program because it had

an abundance of farmers and self-contained motorhome tourists.

"In Australia there are more than 100,000 motorhome tourists on roads at any one time, that's not the

same in Tasmania but we'd like to improve the number," Mr Kerkvliet said.

Farms that have already signed up to the program include Seven Sheds Brewery at Railton, Christmas Hills Raspberry Farm at Deloraine, Turners Beach Berry Patch, Westerway Cherries and Tasmanian Natural Garlic and Tomatoes at Selbourne.

Mr Kerkvliet said the stall at Agfest had certainly helped boost the profile of the organisation and there had been plenty of interest from both farmers and tourists.

Since the launch at Agfest, Mr Kerkvliet said Farmgate Mate had received a lot of attention, from

Tasmanian farms and from the mainland.

"We recently attended the Women in Agriculture Gathering. We received a good response from the attendees to the program and enjoyed a great weekend with the ladies to boot," Mr Kerkvliet said.

He said he was buoyed by the enthusiasm and response the program had received and believed this summer would be the biggest for RV and motorhome travellers to the state.

"The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) is holding its annual gathering in Tasmania this summer so we believe the coming season will be a busy one; also TT-



## Tasmanian Farmer, Launceston

26 Jul 2016, by Caitlin Jarvis

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Line have reduced the cost of fares for RV travellers," Mr Kerkvliet said.

Mr Kerkvliet said a new dimension to Farmgate Mate will be launched soon, an initiative that would help assist farmers in their time of need. The "Feed the Farmer" program will see Farmgate Mate donate \$200 worth of groceries from the closest regional IGA supermarket for every 100 members that sign up to the Farmgate Mate program. The recipient of the groceries will be a farmer in need who has been nominated by members on the Farmgate Mate blog page.

Farmers in Tasmania have experienced a tough start to the year, with a record breaking number of bushfires, a prolonged dry season, two rounds of flooding and a crash in the farmgate dairy prices. Dairy prices have plummeted twice, the first time in May and the second for the upcoming season.

For more information on Farmgate Mate check out their website or search on Facebook.

### SIGNED UP

#### Places to stay as a Farmgate Mate in Northern Tasmania:

- Wynyard
- Burnie
- Turners Beach
- Sheffield
- Railton
- Deloraine
- Hagley
- St Helens
- Scamander
- Pyengana



## RV FRIENDLY ARMIDALE

ARMIDALE has opened its arms to travellers, with a declaration as an RV Friendly Town. Armidale Regional Council has welcomed the news from the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, after an application was submitted at the end of last year.

To receive the title, the council had to show the city had the likes of easy access to shopping centres, appropriate low cost overnight parking and access to potable water and free dump point.



# Kingston RV park review

KINGSTON District Council discussed the RV Park in their latest meeting last Friday, reflecting on the past 12 months since it resolved to close the Wyomi Beach RV Park.

12 months ago council resolved allow 24 hour access to the park adjacent to the Lions Club to caravans, campervans, RV's and other vehicles. CEO Andrew MacDonald said the feedback from users of the park had been good over the past year.

"The last 12 months have been very successful for the RV park - I've received a lot of positive feedback," he said.

Cr Christopher England suggested that a location where people could stay more than 24 hours for free might be something that the council could consider.

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"[If people] can stay an extra night there might be more

people around the town." Cr England said.

Mr MacDonald said there was room to explore the idea. "There's certainly been feedback from RV users asking if they can stay another night, and it would see them spending more money in the township."

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"My only concern is the caravan park would be negatively impacted," he said, but reiterated that he could see the benefits from both sides.

Cr Kay Rasheed agreed that allowing tourists to stay two nights could benefit the town.

"Caravans get there on nightfall and don't stay 24 hours, because they pack up the next morning," she said. "If they stay two nights it's

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be better."

Manager of Planning and Regulatory Services Milan Hodak pointed out that hav-

ing people stay for more than 24 hours could push away other users.

"There can be up to 20 caravans per night, so if its extended for two nights, you're pushing other people away. Something to consider," he said.

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It was decided that council would continue to explore options before the summer period and to consider long term parking, and that the area at Pinks Beach remains in place as the long term parking solution for RVs under current conditions.

A report will be brought back to council prior to the 2016 summer period for consideration.

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## Christmas in July

### Mareeba

GREY nomads will roll into Mareeba this week to take part in the town's 19th annual Christmas in July celebrations.

The four day event, hosted by the Far North Nomads Chapter of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, attracts hundreds of visitors from across Australia. An open day will be held at Davies Park on Sunday from 9am. Entry is a gold coin donation. Contact millyv@outlook.com or 0427 126 240.



## Australians holidaying at home

**Australians are reconnecting with domestic holidays with tourism forecasts showing the domestic holiday segment is growing fast and domestic visitor nights are set to grow solidly over the coming 10 years.**

These figures, released by Tourism Research Australia (TRA), reflect strong growth in the caravan and camping sector which in NSW has seen 16% growth in visitor nights in the past 12 months.

"With the lower Australian dollar, and what we know is a growing nostalgia for the traditional caravan and camping holiday, it's no surprise these figures are

reflecting what our members have seen in their businesses for the past year," Caravan & Camping Industry Association (CCIA) NSW, CEO, Lyndel Gray said.

"Australians spent a massive 15.7 m visitor nights caravan and camping in NSW last year and this data suggests the demand will continue to grow. "It also reveals that the holiday travel segment is growing at a much faster rate than Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) as Australians recognise the value of domestic holiday options."

Ms Gray said domestic tourism remains the largest component of Australia's tourism

industry and visitor nights are expected to grow 3% on average over the coming decade.

"NSW has just recorded one of the strongest quarters of growth in the country for the caravan and camping sector, and we are confident this growth will continue as our industry has worked hard to provide products that meet the needs of today's visitor.

"On a national level, caravan and camping is the fastest growing commercial accommodation type outside of private rental accommodation being offered for holiday use - we are truly seeing a return to the great 'Aussie' holiday."



# Nomads bring festive cheer

## CELEBRATIONS | Andrea Falvo

A RECORD number of grey nomads from across the country are anticipated to roll into Mareeba for the town's 19th annual Christmas in July celebrations this weekend.

The four-day event (July 28-31) held at Davies Park is hosted by the Far North Nomads Chapter of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia and is a significant event on the region's calendar.

Far North Nomads Chapter president Len Hine expected the number of CMCA members attending this year's rally to surpass last year's crowd of more than 300 units.

"We're going to have a real-

ly big one, we reckon," he said.

Mr Hine said events running throughout the weekend include a talk from the Transport Department, a pet show, Christmas dinner catered by the Mareeba Leagues Club on Saturday and an open day for the public on Sunday, running from 9am to 4pm.

The open day will feature information stalls from local businesses and tourist destinations, market stalls, live entertainment, a free jumping castle for the kids and food.

Mr Hine said a car and motorbike show will also run in conjunction with the open day for the first time.

Mareeba Shire Mayor Tom Gilmore said the event is al-

ways eagerly anticipated.

"Mareeba has a great reputation with the travelling public and we welcome them with open arms," he said.

"People from all over the country are coming here and visiting our community and I think that in itself is a marvellous thing."

Entry to the open day on Sunday is by a gold coin donation and proceeds will be split between the Mayor's Christmas Appeal and the Mareeba SES.



Far North Nomads Chapter co-ordinator Milly Virtue and president Len Hine, together with Mareeba Shire Mayor Tom Gilmore are expecting a blockbuster attendance at the town's 19th annual Christmas in July celebrations this weekend.  
Picture: Andrea Falvo