



# Unfriendly welcome

## Call to support grey nomads

### TOURISM

By **EVERARD HIMMELREICH**

THE south-west is at risk of losing millions of tourism dollars if it does not take a more welcoming attitude to “freedom campers,” an advocate for the growing holiday trend says.

Arthur Bugden, who administrates the [www.freechoicecamps.com.au](http://www.freechoicecamps.com.au) website, said Warrnambool and the Great Ocean Road had a shocking reputation with recreational vehicle travellers due to constant bad reports on social media and internet chat sites.

Mr Bugden, of Queensland, said the region’s reputation as unwelcoming to freedom campers who camped for free on public land was deterring many cashed-up grey nomads from staying in or visiting south-west coastal areas, including the Warrnambool district.

He said much of the unfriendly attitude towards grey nomads was due to a perception that confused them with those camping for free on public land because they were travelling on a shoestring budget.

Mr Bugden said they often travelled in recreational vehicles costing from \$100,000-\$400,000 that had their own toilets and showers and chose to stop on public land away from urban areas as a matter of choice rather than cost.

Freedom camping by grey nomads and backpackers were two different markets, he said.

Mr Bugden said grey nomads often chose that method because it offered a better experience than staying in a caravan park.

Mr Bugden said fears that freedom camping by grey nomads would take business away from caravan parks were mostly unfounded.

“Most of the people who stop in a freedom camp do it because of what they want to do and would not go to a caravan park,” he said.

Mr Bugden said caravan parks who wanted to tap into the growing holiday trend could provide low cost sites that did not need access to toilets and showers.

The economic benefits that areas could gain by welcoming these campers was exemplified by the gains that Murray Bridge in South Australia was presently reaping by hosting the 2015 Australian Campervan and Motorhome Club rally.

The club had 66,000 members and the rally had attracted people in about 750 recreational vehicles who were contributing a lot of money into Murray Bridge’s economy, Mr Bugden said.

Moyne Shire mayor Colin Ryan said freedom camping had been a mostly positive experience for his shire.

Cr Ryan said the council had taken a low-key approach to it, such as providing a dump point in Macarthur’s main street so people in motorhomes could offload their sewage.

A popular freedom camping site in Moyne Shire is by the Mount Emu Creek at Panmure and Cr Ryan said it had so far been a very positive experience for the local community.

The camping site was kept very clean by campers who also spent money in the township, he said.

[ehimmelreich@fairfaxmedia.com.au](mailto:ehimmelreich@fairfaxmedia.com.au)



# \$2m injection

By **Elle Vince**

MORE than 800 motorhomes will roll into Murray Bridge's Unity College on Sunday for the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's (CMCA) 29th Anniversary Rally.

The week-long event is expected to attract more than 1400 visitors from around Australia and inject an extra \$2 million into the rural city's economy.

About 30 per cent of the anticipated 800 motorhomes have already arrived in the region, including

CMCA rally managers David and Lyn Fricke, who have been based in Murray Bridge for the past two months.

Mr Fricke said details of the event had been finalised and local businesses, clubs and tour operators were eager to get the rally underway.

"Local business proprietors are looking forward to the influx of some 1400 visitors to the city," he said.

"Say there are 800 motorhomes and we are here for a week, that's 800 extra households spending here.

"The other thing it does is it puts money into the Lions and Rotary clubs and the school."

While Murray Bridge businesses will reap the direct benefits of rally-goers' grocery, restaurant, and mechanical spending, Mr Fricke said tours had also been organised for main attractions across the Murraylands to disperse expenditure even further.

Unity College community relations officer Wayne Gehling said the school community was honoured and excited to be able to offer their facilities to the CMCA and attract

visitors into the Murraylands.

"As a college, we want to be part of the community and by hosting events like this we can do that," he said.

"If it attracts people to Murray Bridge, and Unity can help with that, then why not?"

"It's going to create a huge amount of revenue through the local Murray Bridge community."

Murraylands residents are invited to check out the motorhomes at the rally's open day, which will be held from 10am to 4pm on Saturday, April 25.



**Welcoming party:** Unity College community relations officer Wayne Gehling, Murray Bridge Motorhome Rally managers David and Lyn Fricke, and Unity College principal Julian Denholm meet at Unity College to finalise plans for the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's 29th Anniversary Rally next week.