



Caravan plan to lure grey nomads to town

Chris Holmes

A NEW proposal to turn Innisfail's showgrounds into a recreational vehicle park to lure grey nomads to the Cassowary Coast will be on council's agenda next week.

Division 4 councillor Mark Nolan said he will table a notice of motion to allow visitors to use Pease Park as a temporary RV park at Thursday's Cassowary Coast Regional Council meeting in Tully.

"It's time to enhance our reputation and tap into the growth industry of retirees who are cashing in their retire-

ment nest eggs and exploring our great country, including the Cassowary Coast, in RVs," he said.

"Baby Boomers are retiring and swelling the grey nomad population and our region isn't currently regarded as 'RV friendly' which will cost us plenty of dollars going forward.

"There's a huge amount of interest from community groups who are keen to tap into the presence of these southern visitors when they have the welcome mat rolled out by council."

Cr Nolan said Pease Park had all the facilities that attracted RV tourists including a dump site for grey water, undercover facilities, several toilet blocks and hard stand parking.

It was also close to shops, the PCYC and golf club, and an ideal base for day trips to Par-

onella Park, Mission Beach, ETTY Bay, Flying Fish Point and Kirrama Range Road, Cr Nolan said.

"Tourism is our third biggest industry and this proposal, which is fully supported by council staff and seven councillors, is value adding to what the Cassowary Coast can offer," he said.

Cr Nolan said a similar proposal he put forward last year ran into muddied waters with debate raging over "free camping".

"Staff and councillors were heavily lobbied and the proposal was shelved," he said.

"This proposal is 'stay and pay' and ratepayers are not subsidising the RV tourists as was suggested last year with free camping at Fred Drew Park.

"Council will install a re-

ceipt box where the tourists can place all their transactions while in our region and that will be a good tool to measure the economic benefit this proposal delivers."

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Councillor Mark Nolan



Caravan 'subsidy' opposition

PETER BANNAN

A KERANG caravan park has urged the Gannawarra Shire Council to put the brakes on any plans for the town to become a Recreational Vehicle (RV) Friendly Town.

RV sites, which provide self-contained travellers with a motor home or caravan appropriate parking for up to 48 hours, with access to potable water and a dump point, are currently operating at Cohuna, Leitchville, Murrabit and Reedy Lake.

In an e-mail sent to mayor, Cr Lorraine Learmonth, chief executive officer, Eric Braslis and economic development manager, Roger Griffiths, and obtained by the *Gannawarra Times*, Ibis Caravan Park owners, Heather Campbell and Ross Richards raised strong objections to the possibility.

"There are already two caravan parks in Kerang. We do not believe council should be providing free camping services in direct competition with the commercial sector," the duo wrote.

The pair said they already offer a "very competitive" self-contained rate of \$10 per vehicle per night.

"Why should council and council ratepayers (of which we are one of many) be asked to bear the extra burden of the cost of providing overnight sites and services for free and in competition with our business," they said.

"Ratepayers should not be subsidising other people's holidays and council should not be undermining existing businesses such as

ours which already provide accommodation."

"We have to comply with business costs associated

with maintenance, staffing, electricity and sewerage services and compliance with government regulations. With the park upgrades we are doing we have put thousands of dollars back into the Kerang economy."

Cr Learmonth said there have been no formal discussions regarding Kerang becoming an RV Friendly Town.

"Let me make it clear that talks about where and if have not occurred, but there are positives for communities, such as Cohuna. Businesses that are enduring tough times have reaped huge benefits from short-stay tourists," she said.

"Amenities are also not provided, self-contained visitors are totally independent and councils just provide the land.

"No decision has been made."

The estimated value that RV brings to Cohuna is \$43,000 per year - an average of \$80 per camper per day - according to council figures.

Also, during the past six months, close to 300 campers have utilised the RV site at Lions Park.

Ms Campbell asked council to instead consider the VicParks Community Welcomes Recreational Vehicles program, which doesn't offer free camp sites in towns, but does provide for councils to offer sought-after short-stay/long bay parking near shopping and other facilities.



Petition for Proposed Free RV Park

As reported in last week's *The Lakelander*, Syd Greig who recently moved back to Meningie, is investigating the possibility of creating a free Recreation Vehicles (RV) park in Meningie.

Local support for the park has been overwhelming and Syd has drafted a petition to be presented to the Coorong District Council at their next meeting which will be held at Tailem Bend on Tuesday, 19 April. The petition is available to sign at the Lakeside Quality Butcher and Raine and Horne and interested people are asked to sign the petition before that date.

Several sites have been suggested including some privately owned pieces of land.

Syd said that Meningie businesses are missing out significantly with these vehicles passing through Meningie to camp at other free sites at Narrung,

Langhorne Creek and Kingston. People enquiring locally are directed to the nearest free camp which is Narrung and literature in free camp books direct people to North of the Waterfront Motel as free camping, but the current signs say 'no camping'.

He added that a free site near the CBD of Meningie may also alleviate the problem of large numbers of vans parking in the main street.

Syd welcomes feedback from anyone on suitable sites to accommodate large numbers of RVs in or near Meningie with consideration to turning room and being close enough to the shopping precinct.



RV response

REGARDING "Free Camping hurts business", *The Star*, April 5, 2016.

The author's reference to the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia CMCA and the club's Leave No Trace scheme LNT is in no way applicable to the camping rules currently in place at Franklin River Reserve.

CMCA members who have signed a code of conduct agreement to become part of the LNT scheme would naturally apply the LNT code of practice that is to "upon leaving any park or camp site, no evidence that anyone has been there should remain, other than perhaps some 'footprints in the sand'".

The CMCA can in no way be held responsible for the conduct of the RV touring public.

South Gippsland Shire Council is to be commended for offering a small number of non-commercial low cost/free overnight stops through the shire.

Caravan parks are an important key element in the overall tourism package that South Gippsland Shire has to offer the RV tourist, however they only make up a small part of the total business community.

By offering limited non-commercial low cost/free, RV

accommodation the shire is:

- satisfying the accommodation demand for all RV tourists;
- sending a message that South Gippsland Shire welcomes RV tourists no matter where they choose to stay: in caravan parks or low cost self-contained camps;
- all businesses in the shire will share in the tourist dollar spend, not just the caravan park; and
- even the 16 percent of RV tourists who never use caravan parks will be visiting.

Research shows, of the total RV tourists, 30 percent stay exclusively at caravan parks (mainly families, not self-contained).

Sixteen percent stay only at non-commercial accommodation (larger RVs and these are mainly occupied by 'grey nomads').

Fifty-four percent enjoy a mix of commercial and non-commercial accommodation.

Caravan parks satisfy around 50 percent of RV travellers' requirements on any one night.

**Rex Breen,
CMCA State
Representative Victoria.**