



Shire explores free camping

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Victorian Caravan Parks Association chief executive officer Elizabeth White was invited to discuss the issue at council level last month.

Central Ward councillor Ruth Gstrein said a number of local progress associations had raised the idea of setting up free camps in their townships.

"It's not just a matter of erecting a few 'RV Friendly' signs," Cr Gstrein said.

"There would be a number of other considerations, such as the capital cost of installing dumping points and maintaining them.

"Then we would probably have to put rubbish bins at those points which would also have to be maintained.

"It could then easily escalate into there needing to be tables and chairs provided."

Cr Gstrein said Ms White gave council a thorough understanding of the issues involved.

Ms White said the Victorian Caravan Parks Association had more than 380 members (caravan park operators) who were faced with unfair competition when councils allowed free camping in their towns.

"Our members pay taxes, insurances, rates and have to meet all kinds of regulatory requirements like having appropriate fire safety equipment," she said.

"They are doing everything right and should be supported."

However, she said free camping for overflow accommodation was fine.

Ms White said a national association actively advocated for free camping and for towns to declare themselves as 'RV (recreational vehicle) friendly' and threatened to direct members to by-pass those towns if they did not.

"What town wouldn't welcome RVs?," she said.

"But the towns don't want the cost of setting up for free camping and maintaining it, such as tree clearing and trimming and rubbish

collections."

As an alternative Ms White said the Victorian Caravan Parks Association had an active branding project for towns, which stated for example that 'Camperdown welcomes RV travellers'.

"Such towns would offer a few basic requirements like easier access in the form of long-bay parking spaces close to the shopping centre," she said.

"Caravaners would also be offered a list of commercial parks in the area as well as free parks out of the town, away from existing commercial parks."

Arrangements could also be made for convenient 'dump points', such as payment of a \$5 fee at existing caravan parks to use their service.

"We don't want to discourage people from coming, but not at a cost to ratepayers or at an increased liability risk," Ms White said.

"What we offer is 'medium ground', a starting point for councils."

Ms White said there were two main 'free' caravanning demographics:

- Retirees on a limited fixed income who had put a lot of money into buying their 'rigs', but had failed to factor in the cost of staying each night; and
- Younger people in rentable RVs like 'Juicy' and 'Wicked' vans.

She said families tended to gravitate to the security and amenities offered by established caravan parks.

Ms White said the number of RVs on Victorian roads increased by about nine per cent each year.

Cr Gstrein said service stations at Timboon and Cobden were both considering the installation of dumping points.



Shire backs RV friendly Avoca

Pyrenees Shire Council has backed the bid by local people to have Avoca maintained as an RV Friendly Town.

Subject to certain conditions, the council will not move to prevent overnight camping on the riverflats between the Pyrenees Highway and football oval.

The overnight camping on the riverflats issue had divided the local community, with some locals claiming caravans and vehicles parked on the riverflats made the area look untidy.

Campers complained to local businesses that some local people were telling them they couldn't stay overnight on the riverflats and that they had to move on.

This resulted in unflattering

comments about Avoca being an unfriendly town which campers should avoid, being posted on social media and internet sites used by recreational vehicle tourists.

The community responded with a petition signed by about 350 local people, asking the shire to research the benefits of RV tourism to the community.

Local retailers advised the council that they received significant income from RV tourists.

The council at its last meeting resolved to confirm Avoca as an RV friendly town which encouraged RV tourists to stay overnight

It will promote that there is a designated RV free camping spot with a dump point at the Lions Park in Liebig Street.

It decided that it had no

objection to campers staying overnight on the riverflats, an area which is not under council control but under the management of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

The council also will reinstate RV Friendly Town signage at the entrances to Avoca. The original signs were ripped down when the RV dispute was raging in the town.

The council resolved to promote Avoca as an RV Friendly Town; write to DELWP to recommend the installation of signage at the river flats to inform free campers of the risks associated with flooding and falling tree limbs and to install similar warning signs at the Lions Park.



Yass an RV friendly place

Our country charm and warm welcome is well known among travellers who have been lucky enough to visit the Valley, and with Yass being declared an “RV Friendly Town™” we look forward to opening our doors to many more visitors.

“Being declared an RV Friendly Town is fantastic promotion for Yass and continues to boost tourism in our smaller towns and villages,” said Yass Valley Council’s Economic Develop & Tourism Manager, Sean Haylan. “Our Caravan Park is running close to capacity most of the year and allowing self-contained RV’s additional options for camping increases our ability to accommodate more visitors.”

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) officially declared Yass as an RV Friendly Town™ earlier this year, a program that requires Yass to satisfy criteria including:

- Access to a general shopping area
- Provision of appropriate low cost overnight parking
- Access to potable water and a free dump point

- A friendly and welcoming attitude from the local council and community

Shirley Martin from North Queensland recently used Yass’ RV parking area on Lead Street and enjoyed the experience so much she felt compelled to write about her experience in a “Letter to the Editor” in the Yass Tribune. “We were only in Yass for 12 hours, passing through from Queensland to Melbourne, but thoroughly enjoyed our time in this beautiful and friendly town. In the short time we had in Yass we shopped at five local businesses and even had a pizza delivered to our van door. We will definitely return to this beautiful area in the future.”

Free self-contained RV or caravan parking, for a maximum of 48 hours, is available below Joe O’Connor Park next to the picturesque Yass River or at the Park ‘n Ride on Lead Street. Only campers who are completely self-contained are allowed to use these area, as no facilities (toilets, showers or power) are provided.



Margo takes a tilt at Council over RVs

THE Goondiwindi Regional Council is reviewing its RV and Caravan parking policy. Prior to the recent election most on Council were adamant it was doing enough to balance support for local caravan parks with the burgeoning need and requests for a friendlier RV environment in Goondiwindi. One of those who suggested a review was necessary was Goondiwindi resident, **MARGO HANCOCK**. She explains why...

IN the Argus dated June 29 you asked, "So what does it mean to be RV Friendly?"

Councillor Rick Kearney replied, we already are. Was he joking?

At the last election the people were saying we want "Tourism" including an RV Centre and not to destroy the Visitors Centre's location.

Why didn't the Council incorporate the Visitor's Centre into the new building in Bowen Street where it was instead of poking it down the back of the new Civic Centre building?

Is there somewhere in this building that it could be relocated to? This would go some way towards fixing the problem especially for those people trying to get a park at the Medical Centre which now is where the caravans seem to park.

To say we are RV Friendly is a myth and I believe that if Council really wanted to be RV friendly it could have got some place up and running even if temporarily for this season.

The number of caravans passing through Goondiwindi at present is

amazing, it seems that this year is a bumper year for caravan holidays and we are missing out.

This may well be due to low interest rates to buy a caravan and low fuel prices. We do get some benefit from the ones staying in the caravan parks and Showgrounds and those passing through but not nearly as much as when these people assimilate in a RV Area and stay for two or three days.

It is a new way of life for some retirees and they meet friends from elsewhere in Australia at a designated RV Centre around 4 pm, in time to get together for "Happy Hour" and discuss which RV Centre they will meet at the next day.

The Caravan Parks in Goondiwindi will not lose business as not all people want the RV Areas and prefer the security and also the showers and toilets. In fact if we change Goondiwindi RV Unfriendly to Goondiwindi RV FRIENDLY we will most likely get more people and caravans.

The RV friendly caravanners are going on to Moree if going south or to Inglewood and Texas if going north just because we just don't seem to be listening and treating this as a serious issue.

Texas is a prime example of - if you promote your area the people come.

RV tourism is now big business. It isn't just a few caravans anymore as you will see on television with the advertisements for RV home complexes with special annexes for their caravans. What is this telling us?

Any town that does not acknowledge this is just sending massive dollars elsewhere. We do not need to

spend \$12,000 (on a consultant) to tell us what we already know.

My other question to Council is that thousands of dollars has been spent on the new edition of "Talking About Goondiwindi" promoting the river with a boat on the front which is beautiful and then inside it promotes fishing.

One can only fish by hand at the boat ramp which is too busy when

the fish are biting and unless you are a mountaineer you cannot access the river by foot.

There are a lot of people who would love to throw a line in but the banks are just too steep to access the river.

With all the millions of dollars worth of machinery and manpower the council has, one would not think it would take too much to restore the fishing club area behind the bowling club and put a decent sized pontoon with a walkway in so anglers could walk down and fish. Also put one up at the Customs House area.

Floods are not an excuse, as so many private houses along the river have built their own pontoon and they just restore them if damaged by floods.

This is something the Gold Coast has done along some of the canals and I used to fish at one in Mermaid Waters; it was great.

Goondiwindi has enormous tourist potential, particularly if some of the properties do "Farm Stays" and more "Bed and Breakfasts" and the river is opened up for visitors to enjoy.

We have fabulous clean air and so many overseas and Australian visitors would love the climate, the air and the magnificent sky and stars at



night but we are not promoting it.

Overseas people would die to just
breath unpolluted air as Cairns
Tourism is discovering. W

ho would have ever thought you
could sell clean air?

I am not writing this to have a go
at anyone but my experience with
Tourism Longreach and the build-
ing of the Stockman Hall of Fame,
The Board of Tourism Mackay and
as a Community Liaison Officer for
the NT Government in Katherine
has given me insight into tourism
that I might not otherwise see.

I just don't want us to miss out.





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Camper boom for Kandanga

| Scott Kovacevic

KANDANGA is seeing a huge boost from motorhome and RV campers, with an estimated \$246,000 being injected into the region this year.

The town has seen a continued increase in visitors staying in the area, with almost four times as many campers on average staying in the area than there were in 2010.

According to Kandanga Country Meats owner Mitchell Perkins, the continued influx is a boon for a struggling economy.

Mr Perkins has owned the business for 16 months, and says even in that short period of time he has seen a

significant increase.

He estimates 20% of his business comes from people staying in the RV park, and he hopes it continues to grow.

"We don't get a lot of customers, it's mainly just the locals and the caravanners," he said.

He said Kandanga was an ideal location for people looking for a relaxing break.

"I think just because it's a free camping spot and it's sort of pretty quiet," he said.

While he would like to see the size of the space

available for RVs increased, he said it would be difficult because the Country Club was located directly behind the camp site.

He would also like to see

other activities and festivals brought to the area, as the number of visitors increased dramatically at those times.

"Usually around August it's flat out when the Muster is on," he said. "You're lucky to get a spot down there. As soon as someone leaves, someone else is in there."

"I think once the pub rebuilds, that will reboot the town a bit more as well. It used to attract a lot of people on the weekends."



BOOMING BUSINESS: RVs and motorhome visitors have almost quadrupled in Kandanga since 2010.
PHOTO: SCOTT KOVACEVIC



Complaints hurting tourism

Domanii Cameron

THE operator of Australia's first RV-only park in Ingham says unfounded complaints being made against its visitors to the sugar town could jeopardise the region's tourism market.

Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia CEO Richard Barwick said a number of complaints had been made to Hinchinbrook Shire Council since the park opened earlier this year.

Council last week investigated and dismissed a complaint that alleged the RVs on site were dumping grey water.

Mr Barwick said it was causing 'a bit of grief'.

"I believe that there could be two commercial operators who could have brought several issues to council's attention," Mr Barwick said.

"They haven't contacted us personally though."

Mr Barwick said commercial operators in the region should be concentrating on the market that was available for

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them. "At our park in June 93 vehicles which was 177 people and that contributed \$30,000 to the local economy," he said.

"There is approximately 600,000 registered RVs in Australia and CMCA only has seven per cent of that market which these operators aren't catering for.

"They should be concentrating on the market that is available to them."

Mr Barwick said the operators were holding the development to ransom.

"We're not in competition with these guys, we're putting money back into tourism," he said.

"If any harassment is to come to our members they have been told to go directly to the police."

Mayor Ramon Jayo said council had only received one formal complaint.

"There is a lot of whingeing

going on though," Cr Jayo said.

Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce president Mary Brown said she had not received any complaints from commercial operators.

"I was aware that some people had some concerns but I had hoped that with the advent of the park's first year that the concerns would have been overcome," Ms Brown said.

"If the issues had of been raised I certainly would have spoken to the CMCA to see how we could address them.

"The economic benefits from the RVs are undeniable and the fact is money is coming into the community."

CMCA spokesman Colin Balfour said a verbal complaint had also been made about some of the park's visitors allegedly walking across private driveways.

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Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia Ingham park custodians Nell and Vernon Crabb are concerned that local residents are wanting to close the area down. Picture: DOMANII CAMERON

