

No-pay stay

Anger over illegal vanpackers

CAMPING
By **ALEX SINNOTT**

CAMPERVAN tourists are lining Warrnambool's foreshore roads and car parks, enjoying free parking and infuriating the city's accommodation sector.

Photographs obtained by *The Standard* show lines of 10 campervans or more along Viaduct Road near the breakwater, while Point Ritchie, Thunder Point and other scenic spots are also popular.

The trend has been witnessed throughout the summer holiday season but business figures suggest vanpacking has increased compared to last year.

Warrnambool Holiday Park owner-operator Steve Moore said many accommodation operators were annoyed tourists

were bypassing their sites in favour of free spots.

"We really need to clamp down on these people illegally parking in Warrnambool, using local facilities but not contributing anything," he said.

"There were about half-a-dozen vanpackers at Point Ritchie the other night, 11 were lined up at the Viaduct Road car park near the footbridge and there's a few extra on the road leading up to the breakwater.

"Of course businesses and caravan parks like myself miss out.

"But we've offered discounted rates because the summer season is coming to an end. There's no real excuse."

Several other accommodation providers also contacted *The Standard* to express their

concerns about the number of vanpackers.

However, the campervan crowd does have some south-west support. Warrnambool Beach Backpackers owner Geoff Morris argued last year that the budget trend should be accommodated.

Warrnambool City Council local laws officer Ian Fitzgibbon said camping was not permitted along the city's roads or in its parks and reserves.

"The council's local laws officers have a range of responsibilities and duties to cover including the enforcement of laws governing illegal camping," he said.

"Where possible, officers will advise those who appear to be considering camping illegally to move on."

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Campervans parked among other vehicles along Warrnambool's Viaduct Road.

Picture: SUPPLIED



Anger over 'freedom parking' places

By **DOUG DINGWALL**

COUNCIL-backed motorhome parking spots in the North-West were undercutting business and had reduced patronage, one caravan park owner says.

The park operator, who asked not to be named, said in four years since recreational vehicle spaces increased in his council area, patronage at his business decreased by 30 per cent.

"Mobile home tourism is adding to our visitation numbers, but it's not adding to our economy," he said.

Councils should not compete with businesses by having free parking spots for motorhomes, the business owner said.

He objected to the public-

relations term for free motorhome parking, "freedom parking".

"If we're going to promote tourism as a viable income, where are we going to get the income from?"

Cradle Coast Authority regional tourism manager Ian Waller said that while he understood caravan park operators' difficulty, motorhome users still spent money locally.

"They still eat, they still buy fuel," he said.

"We can't say we don't want that market in the North-West. If they go away and had a good time, they're still ambassadors for our region."

Mr Waller said the issue was a nationwide one, and could not be dealt with on a council-by-council basis.



The Advocate EDITORIAL

VETERAN caravanner and 92-year-old Ray Atley's story is a unique one, having reached 67 years visiting the same park at Bluff Beach.

Not everyone will be so loyal to the one spot and the urge for something different will take them elsewhere.

Caravan park owners have to compete for patronage and need council support.

A local operator's concerns about council-backed motor home spaces is a legitimate one to raise.

Operators have invested money in a business and having a council compete with them would be frustrating.

Cradle Coast Authority regional tourism manager Ian Waller rightly points out that motor home users still contribute to the economy.

There is a market of motor home users seeking free accommodation, so why ignore it?

Having them here might not directly benefit many businesses but the value they have for the region comes mainly when they tell friends about the North-West.

Some of these friends may decide to pay for their accommodation if they visit. It's an indirect benefit and effective marketing.

Whether it should happen at caravan park owners' expense is up for debate.

– DOUG DINGWALL



Dongara offers free stay

■ **Alexia Parnzee**

Grey nomads and foreign tourists caravanning their way around the Mid West can now enjoy a Dongara freebie.

Thanks to a recent upgrade, the beach town now boasts the label “RV-friendly town”, meaning caravan drivers can stay for a night, free of charge.

Shire of Irwin CEO Darren Simmons said the town’s location was a real asset to travellers, especially those looking for a place to park overnight.

“We undertook some investigations and formed a view that a 24-hour rest stop would be appropriate in the centre of town,” he said.

“Travellers come from the north, east and south, so it’s a pivotal point for travellers but we’re also trying to extend their stay here.

“By providing an overnight place for travellers to stay, they have more opportunities to explore the town the following day and that could lead to them staying for an extended period at one of our commercial caravan parks.”

Mr Simmons said the upgrade was in-line with a program provided through the Caravan and Motorhomes Association, which enabled caravanners to locate cheap or free rest spots across the country.

He said he hoped the move would create a more appealing tourism climate for the town.

“For many travellers, they are not going to stay in paid tourist parks when they first arrive in town and are more likely to look at overnight locations out of town,” Mr Simmons said.

“This way people are encouraged and invited into our town and

can park right in the centre, where everything is a short walk away.

“We hope this encourages people to come off the highway, put their feet on the ground, look around and hopefully stay longer and take advantage of everything our town has to offer.”

The rest stop also provides a waste water dump site for travellers.

“**By providing an overnight place for travellers to stay, they have more opportunities to explore the town**”
Darren Simmons



Not enough parking for Port

THE Wellington Shire Council is considering alternatives for campers who flock to the seaside village of Port Albert during holiday periods.

The area designated for RVs and campervans is often declared as inadequate by locals, while boat trailers often have no option but to park on the street.

Port Albert Progress Association president Saul Stainer said the town has been pretty busy recently, but hasn't noticed any serious problems at the car park.

"There has been a lot of RVs parking as usual and the boats trailers have also been overflowing from the car park and parking on the road," he said.

Mr Stainer said the amount of space allocated to RVs and caravans remains inadequate.

Wellington Shire Council CEO David Morcom said during a very productive meeting last October with the progress association, it was agreed council staff would develop an options paper to investigate new camping alternatives for Port Albert.

"We understand that no long term camping and RV parking options are available within the town boundary. Short term RV parking spaces are occasionally in short supply; this primarily occurs over a small number of key annual public holidays," he said.

"We are therefore look-

ing at convenient, available public land within the

town boundary to cater for overflow RV parking."

Mr Morcom said the council is currently talking with public land managers and private land owners to find possible practical

alternatives that might provide for longer term camping.

"Part of this work includes understanding the business case associated with a development of this

type in Port Albert," he said.

"Council would also welcome private sector investment in the form of a caravan park within the town boundary, should an interested party be forthcoming."

Rob Killury from the Port Albert General Store said the car park has been full to overflowing several times during the busy holiday season.

"A few fishermen have complained that it's overflowing, but nothing too serious. It gets tight down there with the fishermen and half a dozen vans," he said.

Mr Killury said the season started off a bit quiet but has picked up now,

with quite a few fish being weighed daily.

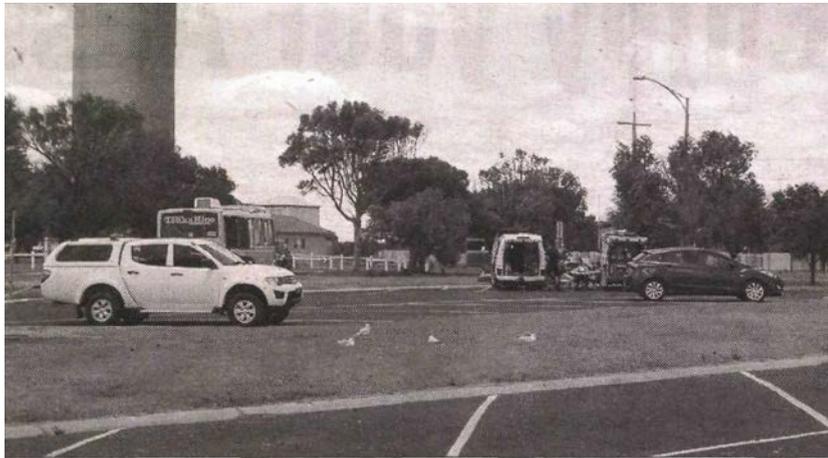
"I think there are probably more people around than last year, back up where it should be. The weather has been good and we have seen heaps of people," he said.

Australia Day at Port Albert will feature a picnic in the park, full of free, fun family entertainment from

11.30am to 5pm at Rutter Park.

Activities will include a jumping castle, zorb balls, a giant slide and laser tag (at a cost). Local band 'The Party' will also be playing on the day.

A market will be held at the Port Albert Hall on Australia Day from 9am to 1pm.





Caravanners reject free parking criticism

By DOUG DINGWALL

A MOTORHOME owner has rejected claims from a caravan park operator that caravanners using council-backed free parking spots do not spend enough locally.

Penguin's Bev Williams said using free motorhome parking spots encouraged her to stay longer at places and spend more money there.

"There needs to be a balance between the two," she said, referring to caravan parks and free parking spaces.

On a trip to Port Macquarie in New South Wales last year, she stayed four nights, longer than if she had paid to stay in a park, she said. Ms Williams said that on a recent trip to Hobart, she spent money on groceries.

It was important for motorhome owners to have the option of staying in a caravan park or in a free place, Ms Williams said. There were times she wanted to stay in caravan parks, she said.

A Coastal caravan park owner, who asked to remain anonymous, said on Wednesday that council-backed parking places for motorhome users were undercutting his business.

Patronage decreased by 30 per cent in four years since more free motor home spaces



FLASHBACK: Yesterday's Advocate.

emerged in his area, he said.

Latrobe Mayor Peter Freshney said yesterday that motorhome users had a positive impact on the community and businesses. "As a council we want to encourage and be open to that type of tourist."

The money motorhome users spent locally justified the space council provided them, he said.

But Latrobe had not provided free spaces since October 2013 due to state government-enforced compliance with anti-competition policy.

Circular Head Mayor Daryl Quilliam said while he understood the caravan park owner's concerns, the municipality did not want to be avoided by motorhome users.



Pitch for happier campers

\$1m overhaul to make Showground site most wanted

DAVID BENIUK

A MAJOR overhaul of the Royal Hobart Showground camping area is set to make it one of the state's most sought-after.

The Royal Agricultural Society is in the final stages of having the new facility approved after the Bunnings development at Glenorchy forced a reorganisation of the site.

New landscaping and amenities will transform the Showground's motorhome park into a destination also for caravan owners and campers.

"It's a full-on campground and motorhome park now," society chief executive Scott Gadd said.

"The difference will be there'll be a mix, there'll be some camping facilities available as well."

The Showground would continue to offer about 200 sites after an overhaul costing around \$1 million, Mr Gadd said.

The campground side of the Showground business is growing fast, increasing around 15 per cent to 3800 bookings in 2013.

Profit was up more than 80 per cent and Mr Gadd said there was huge potential to build on the \$60,000 the business now makes annually.

"It's got huge potential and what's held us back has been the amenities," he said.

"They're tired."

He said the site's popularity was due to its proximity to the city and MONA and also because it could accommodate motorhomes of any size and those travellers towing boats and trailers.

"Just the increase in those sorts of vehicles, our location

and the fact that there's few other parks with that flexibility are driving the increase," Mr Gadd said.

"This is about trying to capitalise on that by improving the services and making it a better place. The new campground has got magic views looking straight at MONA across the water."

Bunnings leased land from the Society to build a \$38 million store, expected to open mid-year. The campground would be completed by around April, Mr Gadd said.

Earthworks have begun on the project, which will include powered and unpowered sites, two new toilet blocks, a shower block and disabled facilities.

The society expects numbers to grow by 5-10 per cent in the next two years.

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