

Council happenings . . . with Mayor Cr Harold Johnston

Don't kill your dog

With the approach of summer and very hot days our dogs are at risk of dying from heat stress by their owners leaving them in cars while they shop, chat and pay bills.

Ute trays also become extremely hot, so even those working on building sites with their dogs on the back need to pay particular attention to their animals.

Dogs can die from heatstroke very quickly. In warm, sunny weather cars become ovens and even if it's cloudy, the temperature inside a car can become dangerously hot for a dog.

When it is just 30 degrees outside, the temperature inside a car can soar to 40 or even higher in just five minutes.

Keep in mind:

- If a dog left in a car is panting for breath, it may be starting to suffer from heatstroke. This can kill a dog quickly (in just six minutes).

- Leaving the car window open or putting a bowl of water inside does not help.

- Temperatures in airconditioned cars can reach the same temperature as the outside within just five minutes of the airconditioning being turned off.

- Do not exercise your dog in the heat of a summer's day. Dogs can die if their temperature reaches 40 degrees. Cool them down with water and ice and rush to the vet.

- Provide plenty of shade and at least two containers of water (in case one gets knocked over) for

your animals.

Each year the RSPCA and Dungog Council receive numerous calls from members of the public concerned about an animal that has been left in a car on the street, in a supermarket car park or at a public event.

For this reason, the RSPCA advises that animals are never left inside cars.

Owners who put an animal at risk by leaving it locked inside a car can face prosecution.

Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, there are serious fines and even prison sentences for

people if their pets suffer heat stress from being locked in a hot car.

If an animal suffers as the result of being left in a car, the maximum

penalty is \$5,500 and can carry a six-month prison sentence.

If an animal dies as a result of being left in a car, the maximum penalty is \$22,000 and can carry a two-year prison sentence.

On October 10, Dungog Council accepted an invitation from the above organisation to attend a Local Government presentation at their 29th national rally at Port Stephens.

The focus of the event was towards highlighting the potential of attracting the recreational vehicle market at a low cost to

communities by offering a freedom of choice of camping facilities.

As the major change in industry development is the growth of the self-contained vehicle, low cost options must be looked at to capture this market.

It was considered that attendance at the presentation was important at this time as council is in receipt of the draft feasibility study for low cost, short term visitor accommodation in the Dungog Shire which is intended to be placed on public exhibition for two weeks from Wednesday, October 29 to Wednesday, November 12 and receiving written comments from interested parties until Friday, November 14.

Caravan and motorhome club of Australia



Firm stance on RV issue

I was astounded by the reaction to my letter in the *Mid West Times* (October 9) by Messrs Gray and Turvey in last week's *Mid West Times* (October 16).

Astounded yes, but also grateful as their letters clearly underline the main issue surrounding Recreational Vehicle Friendly Towns.

RVFT accreditation appears to solely concern a specific (elite) section of the caravan fraternity, namely self-contained vans and motorhomes — vans that do not require the services of caravan parks.

This group backed by the Campervan & Motorhome Club of Australia seeks to break away from long-standing local council regulations that require them to use authorised caravan parks and camp sites and get special treatment from local councils to access public carparks and reserves at low-cost or no-cost.

To this end the CMCA offers RVF status providing that councils comply with the CMCA essential criteria (one of which is access to low-cost or no-cost short-term stays of 48-72 hours).

Once accredited as a RVFT then CMCA assert 'thousands' of extra free-spending caravaners will flock to that area annually.

However, if a local council opts not (or is unable) to become RVF, then they risk

being adjudged an RV unfriendly area which will result in the area being bypassed and/or boycotted by these same 'thousands' of caravaners.

This position is clearly backed by Messrs Gray and Turvey.

It was interesting to read in an article in the Motoring Section of Saturday's *The Weekend West* (October 18) concerning the regulation of the Caravan Park Industry, that the CMCA is going to great lengths to push for low-cost and no-cost camping grounds for self-contained caravans, even seeking the opportunity to establish its own member-only camping grounds across WA.

So what's in RVF status for local ratepayers?

We offer several of our public carparks/reserves for short-term three-day stays, put in dump and water access points and in return we are assured of a revenue increase in \$9.4m/pa — local traders, I suggest you don't hold your breath.

What's in it for SCV owners? Access to several

public carparks/reserves for short-term stays, dump and water access points, not much there that would persuade 'thousands' to stop here rather than drive on past.

This whole RVF issue really appears to be more about the CMCA persuading local councils to remove the regulations which govern in town stays, than making the whole of the caravan fraternity more welcome. Once these regulations are removed I doubt whether we would ever get them back.

John Gaze



Works to open

CARAVANS, campervans and motorhomes will start rolling through the gates of the Bridgewater Public Caravan Park next week.

Locals are thrilled with the announcement that the restored park will officially open on Sunday.

The caravan park will start taking bookings, with the first night open to campers on Thursday, October 30.

Campers will have the option of both powered and non-powered sites.

The caravan park has had its park managers appointed, with Deb Sturgess and Harry Huebnre taking the post.

The duo has worked as managers around Australia, including in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia.

To book a site at the Bridgewater Public Caravan Park, call 5437 3086.



TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE



16,400 campers stayed in Gympie's national parks last school holidays, making us the camping capital of Queensland

THE simple life is big business for the Gympie region, with new figures indicating campers spent up to \$5 million here during the recent school holidays.

Natural beauty and fabulous weather have combined to make gold for the whole region,

from Borumba Dam and Goomeri to the Cooloola Coast.

The additional \$700,000 believed to have been spent by Fraser Island campers mostly found its way into Gympie region businesses, as campers passed through Gympie and Rainbow Beach.

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PHOTO: PATRICK WOODS



Nature is our biggest tourism treasure chest

Sherele Moody
APN NEWSDESK

GYMPIE region has more desirable camping and caravanning options than almost anywhere else, according to Destination Gympie Region tourism development manager Andrew Saunders.

This year, the region has been one of the most sought after national parks for families wanting to live on the wild side.

And the contribution to the regional economy has been "substantial", Mr Saunders said yesterday.

"It's got wonderful and diverse experiences: the bush and the beach and all within a couple of hours' drive of Brisbane," he said.

In our national parks and government-operated recreation areas alone, more than 16,334 people pitched a tent or parked a caravan or recreation vehicle during the September-October school holidays.

They stayed an average of about three nights each and spent \$73 a day each on average.

Another 9290 campers drove through and shopped here on their way to Fraser Island.

And these figures, amounting to more than \$3.5 million during the September-October school holidays alone, do not include the spending of Fraser Island campers on their way to and from the is-

land.

Nor do they include the thousands who camp at events like the Muster and all the private camp grounds from Imbil and Goomeri to the coast.

Gympie Regional Council tourism portfolio councillor Julie Walker said an additional and often unnoticed facet of the region's visitor industry was the camping people did on private properties, especially in the Mary Valley at places like the Deer Park.

Camping figures this year are higher than 2013.

The Gympie region scored second, third and 10th position on the Queensland-wide top 20 national park camping spots ladder for the September/October school holidays.

Our neighbour Fraser Island, with 9290 campers, was the top Queensland destination.

There are 305 national parks across the state.

The 16,334 campers in the Gympie region spent about three nights on average in the parks.

Neighbouring Sunshine Coast also performed well, with more than 4000 people pitching a tent in Bribie Island Recreation Area, Conondale National Park and Jimna State Forest during the same school holidays.

Mr Saunders said increasing Amamoor numbers was possible.

"Most definitely there is

opportunity to improve position (of Amamoor) – part of that is working with operators and people in the Mary Valley and understanding what an asset that park is," he said.

Recreation Minister Steve Dickson said upgrade and maintenance work helped attract more visitors to the parks.

OUR RANK

National Park camping visitors and nights spent for the

September/October holidays in 2014 and 2013

2nd – Cooloola Recreation Area

2014: 8373 campers, 24,270 camping nights

2013: 7856 campers, 22,867 camping nights

3rd – Inskip Peninsula Recreation Area

2014: 7043 campers, 22,741 camping nights

2013: 7284 campers, 25,721 camping nights

10th – Amamoor State Forest

2014: 918 campers, 2440 camping nights

2013: 634 campers, 1753 camping nights

Source: State Government



A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: Grace Christoffels, Charlise Sorrensen and Amelia Axtell at Inskip, which has helped make the Gympie region the number one camping destination in Queensland.

PHOTO: TANYA EASTERBY



COMMENT

Industry in WA at a tricky crossroad

Conflicting interests will prove challenging to navigate



PETER POAT

IT IS 50 years since the legendary Bob Dylan released his enduring hit *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. It begins "Come gather around people wherever you roam and admit the waters around you have grown".

Dylan's perceptive lyrics could easily set a theme for those entrusted to wade through the pile of submissions the State Government has received for reframing WA's Caravan and Camping Grounds Act.

While once caravan and campgrounds — as caravan parks were called 50 years ago — relied on each other, it is certainly not the case today.

Coming to grips with this reality will be a major challenge for legislators.

It is worth reflecting that in the half-century since Dylan calculated the inevitable, the caravanning and camping manufacturing industry has been a pacesetter with innovation.

During this time we have also witnessed the emergence of motorhomes, which for all intents and purposes are a tow-vehicle and caravan merged into one.

Motorhomes and caravans — both now commonly referred to as recreational vehicles — can be fitted with solar panels, fridge/freezers, stoves, ovens, air-

conditioners, toilets, barbecues, showers and satellite TV; some have incredible off-road capability.

Such RVs hadn't even been dreamt of when Dylan's ballad hit the charts in 1964, and this has created a divergence between the once-essential pairing of caravan park and RV.

Some people, commonly referred to as freedom campers, are now spending extraordinary amounts on self-contained caravans and motorhomes and want to get the most out of their purchase.

This has led to overwhelming support for low or no-cost camping alternatives, which is resulting in a big decline in caravan-park patronage.

To meet the challenge, a number of caravan parks have spent big bucks keeping up with changing trends and modern

expectations. Offering state-of-the-art facilities, these parks have gone way beyond the basics to enhance the holiday experience.

These properties, which primarily attract families, are the ones I call holiday parks as opposed to caravan parks.

There are basically three types of RV travellers.

Grey nomads are primarily retirees who spend the longest

periods on the road. The majority of this group use a mix of freedom camping and occasionally basic caravan parks to be able to afford to travel. Among this group are some who have a preference 100 per cent either way. Cost is a big factor for this group.

Then there are families, primarily those with young children. This group favours well-equipped holiday parks, some mixing them with a little off-road adventure and freedom camping.

Last is the off-road and nature lovers of mixed age groups with no desire to use caravan parks, having a preference for the bush.

Earlier this year the State Government announced it was spending \$40.7 million of Royalties for Regions money over four years to implement its Action Plan and Parks for People. It would provide up to 450 caravan sites in national parks and reserves, as well as other enhancements.

It also proposed five new commercial caravan parks in high-priority locations.

The industry body is not happy with the proposal. It claims there are enough caravan parks and average occupancy rates are a little over 50 per cent.

In predicating this figure, however, the industry body seems to have given scant consideration to seasonal trends. Holiday



seasons differ dramatically from north to south.

In the past decade a big number of caravan parks have closed.

Minister for Tourism Lisa Harvey said earlier this year that the State Government was committed to increasing WA's reputation as a caravan and camping destination of choice.

There is no doubt there is a great opportunity to do this, especially by attracting those from other parts of the country. Tourism WA estimates only 10 per cent of RV travellers last year were from outside WA.

Legislation which will please all interest groups will be a big challenge as many of the views expressed in the submissions — including overall caravan park governance — are poles apart.

Some people are now spending extraordinary amounts on self-contained caravans and motorhomes . . . This has led to overwhelming support for low or no-cost camping alternatives.



Some holiday parks have spent heavily on providing family attractions.