



Drive-by dollar costs dearly

Mayor keen to see RV campers on rural stays

MILLIONS of tourist dollars are driving past Noosa every year in the form of recreational vehicles looking for “home stays” on the sort of hinterland properties we have in abundance.

And Mayor Noel Playford is keen to apply the brakes on this grey nomad-led bypass by supporting local changes to the Noosa Plan, which will allow self-contained RV campers to stay on private rural land.

“One of the things we’re looking at doing is introducing the capacity for overnight stops for self-contained recreational vehicles,” Cr Playford said.

This is apart from the push to accommodate travellers in local showgrounds.

Cr Playford said what the council had in mind was self-contained vehicles being “home-stayed” in rural areas for “a night or two”.

“We’ve been getting some Wicked vans in some of the places we don’t want them, but here’s a completely different section of the market completely

bypassing us every year.

“We’re just talking about using private land – say if people have got a nice paddock,” the mayor said.

“There’s tens of thousand recreational vehicles heading down the highway every year, and they can bring significant money into

the town but currently we don’t have that definition in the planning scheme.

“It’s like caravan parks or nothing.

“They don’t need the (caravan park) facilities – they’ve got them all on board, so our local economy can really benefit from that, especially in the rural areas. It’s something we can make a little bit on the side from.”

Cr Playford said this style of stay was strongly supported by the State Government.

“They commissioned and paid for a strategy study some time ago and that market is worth billions and billions of dollars to the Queensland economy,” he said.

“They don’t want to stay in caravan parks even if they can find a slot but they’ll stay up in the rural areas because that’s the sort of experiences they’re looking for.”

He said council staff were looking at the technical issues needed to accommodate this market.

The council is also looking at other relaxations for accommodation on rural

land but, according to Cr Playford, “I don’t think we’re going to be over-run.”

– PETER GARDINER

See accommodation concerns in Perspective on page 24.

It’s something we can make a little bit on the side from.

– NoelPlayfdr



MOVE ON: Noosa Mayor Noel Playford wants these vans replaced by recreational vehicles on rural properties.

PHOTO: GEOFF POTTER



Free camping debate continues for Cobar Shire Council

Cobar businessman Ian Settree presented his views on 'freedom campers' in the Cobar region to Cobar Shire Council at last week's meeting.

Mr Settree defined freedom campers as having the freedom to choose where they want to stay.

He expressed his frustration after attending the last council discussion about the 'free camping' issue.

"For years people have been free camping around Cobar and we have had no problems, and they always keep the area clean.

"There are facilities here for free camping that have been in place for many years and, apart from maintenance, council don't have to spend any money on them," Mr Settree said.

"When Mr Dineen [Cobar Caravan Park manager] came to Cobar he wanted to maxim-

ise his business and I understand that.

"I am all for free camping but can see Mr Dineen's view," he said.

"I understand that council have an interest in the caravan park, as they own it," Mr Settree said.

Mr Settree said he had interviewed a number of tourists in the main street, rest areas and around the Newey and received both positive and negative feedback about Cobar.

All the feedback received about the Newey was positive with most freedom campers finding information about the Newey on the 'Wiki' online application.

"On average they will spend \$222 per vehicle in Cobar and stay for about two and a half days," Mr Settree said.

He said that most freedom campers said they would have moved on from Cobar if free camping had not been available.

Mr Settree also urged councillors to speak to both the retailers and tourists before voting on the issue at the next council meeting.



Cobar businessman Ian Settree presented his view on 'freedom campers' to Cobar Shire councillors at last week's council meeting.



Freedom's another word for towns with lots to lose

CUNNAMULLA

LIKE MANY bush businessmen, Don Simpson was mildly hostile to nomads angling for a free camping spot. His attitude was why couldn't members of the professional holidaymaker class, who'd spent \$90,000 to \$500,000 for a humpy on wheels, cough up \$20-\$30 for a slot in a caravan park? After all, the operators had invested heavily in facilities for their ilk.

That was until Don and his wife Sonia took to the highways five years ago. Since then they've traveled 110,000km, crisscrossing the country and even traveling to most of Tasmania's nooks and crannies. "There aren't too many roads we haven't been up and down," said Don, 75, flicking through the pages of a road atlas with roads highlighted in texta, a different colour for each year.

The couple freedom camped all the way, first in a Toyota Hiace before upgrading to a Mercedes Sprinter, and stopped briefly in just two caravan parks during their entire Tasmanian sojourn. "We had a fire every night although there's no heat in the wood down there," Don said. "You could have a fire big enough to cook a bullock and only enough heat to cook a chop."

The couple came to the conclusion that the nomadic tribe is composed of freedom campers who will do anything to avoid paying for a parking spot and those who are happy to pull into caravan parks. The free crowd tended to be motorhome travellers whose rigs had solar panels, toilets and showers, and who felt they had little need for park facilities.

Don said Paroo shire council was on a hiding to nothing trying to discourage nomads freedom camping at the Allan Tannock weir on the Warrego river 5km south of Cunnamulla. If the council persisted in

erecting signs forbidding camping, the nomads would bypass the town in favour of others considered more RV friendly, he said.

Towns such as Home Hill in north Qld, had turned around moribund

economies by embracing nomads, free campers and all. "The town was

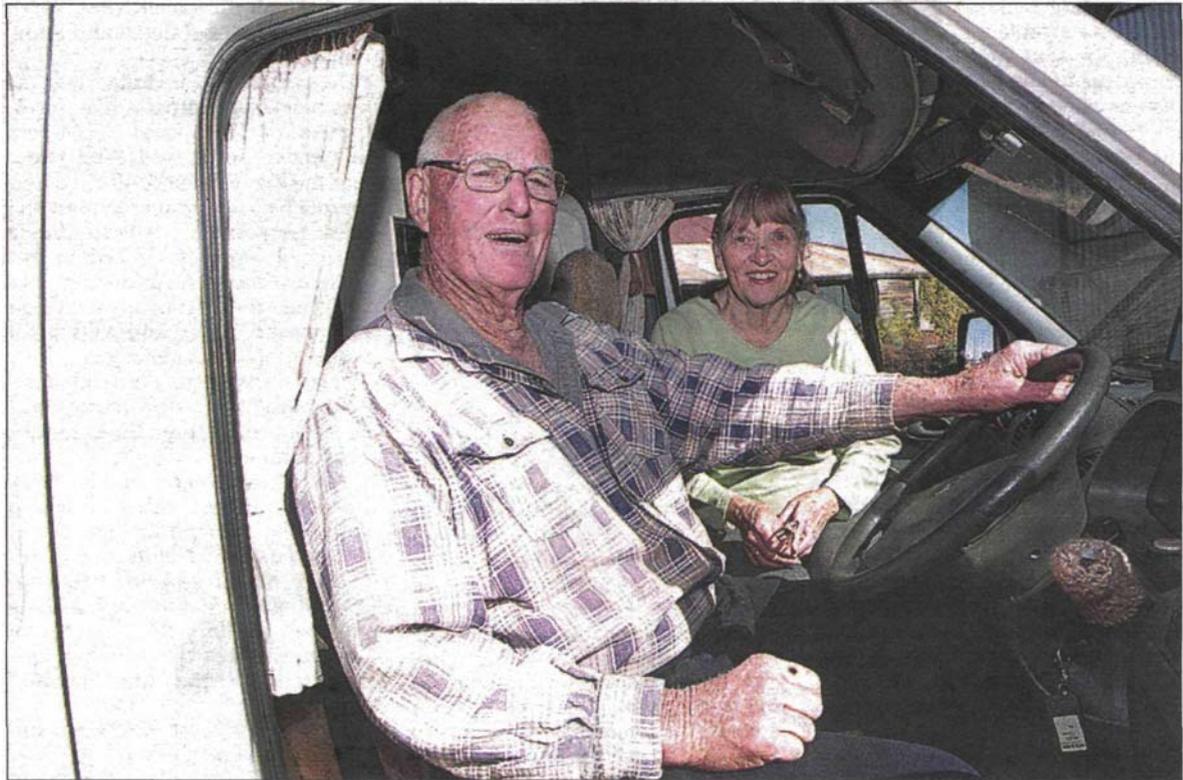
on its knees, shops closed everywhere, when the council decided to open free parking beside the railway line," Don said. "They put in a beautiful camp kitchen. It's unreal! Stainless steel bench with a stove at each end. The council got a \$50,000 grant and spent \$100,000 on it. Now there's an IGA that's taken over seven shops, two joineries making kitchens, two engineering shops, four hairdressers and I don't know how many garages."

The Campervan motorhome club of Australia in July 2010 commissioned a survey that suggested travellers spent an average of \$572 a week on the road, mostly on fuel,

vehicle maintenance and groceries. Respondents said they spent about \$125 when staying at free rest areas for at least two days, while three-quarters said they'd be prepared to pay \$6 per night for a town site with toilets and water. A third said they avoided caravan parks because of overcrowding, location, lack of space for large vehicles or because they didn't allow pets.

Graham Reid's Charleville bush caravan park has tapped into the disaffection with a bush camp charging \$5 a night. "We don't provide anything except a dump point, water and a camp fire," he said. "Security is what they want."

'We don't provide anything except a dump point, water and a camp fire.'



Cunnamulla nomads Don and Sonia Simpson argue bush towns will miss out if they don't offer free camping.



Eubenangee firm awarded Cooroo Lands Road tender

LINDA TIMMS

Cassowary Coast Regional Council voted unanimously in support of Manager of Major Projects and Fleet Tony Rooks' recommendation to award the tender for road stabilisation works at Cooroo Lands Road to O'Connor Excavations at a cost of \$174,325.

Mr Rooks said the tender was for design and construction of the works, which was not a standard contract.

"The works will be a gabion type wall very similar in appearance to the wall constructed in 2011," Mr Rooks said.

"This (the landslips which necessitated the works) will keep happening. It (soil etc) will keep falling into the creek."

Six tenders were received, from Geo Stabilise (\$171,622), O'Connor Excavations (\$174,325), IMEC \$498,136, Civil Team Engineering (\$590,729), LDI (\$712,531) and AllCiv (\$999,942).

Councillor Ian Rule said the variance from the lowest to the highest tender was more than \$800,000.

"It's an amazing variation," Cr Rule said.

"Is the highest tenderer proposing a whole different concept?"

Mr Rooks said the highest tender was also using the gabion nail construction method.

"The spread in tender amounts was not expected," Mr Rooks said.

"We would have expected amounts up to \$400,000. When I opened the tenders I thought there was something wrong.

"I might add though that the high tender (\$999,942) was not from a North Queensland company."

RV PLANS

During the general business section of last Thursday's Cassowary Coast Regional Council meeting, Councillor Ian Rule spoke on attracting RV (recreational vehicle) users and grey nomads to Innisfail.

"In the time I had off (annual leave) I went to as many van parks, and spoke to as many grey nomads, as I could," Cr Rule said.

"In my conversations I found that Innisfail and surrounds don't have a really good record for van parking etc, which prevents them from stopping in the town.

"Council's done a great job near the baths (Innisfail Pool) with providing some parking, and I saw two or three RVs parked there, but others parked along the roads because there were not enough RV parks available.

"I've been looking at the area behind the baths to see it's feasible to provide a parking area for RVs and vans there.

"The reason is that if these travellers can't pull up and park, they just drive through to the next town and no money gets spent here."

Cr Kylie Farinelli said she loved Cr Rule's idea.

Cr Mark Nolan said the suggestion had reminded him that the project manager of the new IGA supermarket being constructed at Goondi wanted to offer parking for RVs at the Goondi combined sports complex.

SULLIVAN'S TRACK

In general business, Cr Glenn Raleigh asked Chief Executive Officer Terry Brennan about a request for a letter of support for the Kirrama Range Road Support Group regarding the clearing of Sullivan's Track.

"Girringun Aboriginal Corporation and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service have written letters of support for the clearing," Cr Raleigh said.

Mayor Bill Shannon asked if there was a time limit for the letters of support, and Cr Raleigh replied it was the following week.

Mr Brennan said he had not prepared a letter and had asked Council officers to clarify the situation.



Free campsites gain support

REGARDING the article in *The Pennant* on July 16 on free camping, I don't think Henk Bruins quite gets it when it comes to free camping.

Free campers are not going to stay at his caravan park anyway so he is not going to lose anything.

Free campers have at their disposal several publications that list thousands of free camping sites around Australia.

Free campers will travel from one free campsite to another, rarely staying in caravan parks.

Most of these rigs are fully self-contained and will move on, leaving no trace that they have ever been there, other than the money they leave behind in the towns wise enough to have free camping sites nearby.

Mr Bruins is like many caravan park operators who would limit the choice other people have to park overnight.

And with fully self-contained vans, that is what it amounts to, parking, not camping.

Backpacker type vans are a different story, but you cannot tar everyone with the same brush.

As for Mr Bruins building a \$5000 fence to keep

backpackers from using his showers, why not do what many caravan park operators do - issue keys with a \$10 deposit to his toilets and showers for his guests.

It would be a lot cheaper and work even better than the fence.

Mount Gambier City Council should be looking at becoming an RV Friendly City providing at least one free camping site near or in the city area.

It does not need much, simply a place to safely park, water and a blackwater disposal site.

It would mean a great many more people would stay a day or two longer in our fair city and leave behind a great deal of money when they left.

To help the council become an RV Friendly City they can get a great deal of advice and help from the Caravan and Motor Home Club of Australia (CMCA), which has a great website with lots of advice on free camping and much more.

But I implore the Wattle Range Council to stick to its guns.

Mr Bruins will not lose anything and Penola as a whole will gain a great deal by becoming an RV Friendly town.

**Thomas Foster,
Mount Gambier**



48-hour RV parking trial impacts local caravan park

RACHEL RILEY

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THIS should be the busiest time of the year for Palm Tree Caravan Park owner's Kate and Craig Parker.

But since the Hinchinbrook Shire Council approved a six-month trial of a 48-hour recreational vehicle parking site at the TYTO Wetlands their business has dropped nearly 50 per cent.

"The numbers are definitely down and the trial is definitely having an impact on us," Mrs Parker said.

"Normally at this stage of year between July and August we will have two or three empty sites each night.

"But at the moment we are getting 16-20 of our 52 sites empty each night."

Mr and Mrs Parker said in the seven years they had owned and operated the park, the business had grown significantly, but this new free facility had really "knocked them around".

They said they have always thought of Ingham as an "RV Friendly Town".

But didn't understand why the new Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia's "RV Friendly" tag had to mean the region was now also "RV Free".

"We are now competing with two free camps that we are in the middle of — Frances Creek and now TYTO," Mr

Parker said.

"We didn't mind competing with Frances Creek because its only 24 hour and out of town but the TYTO one is right in the centre.

"So now with the 48-hour permits, people have the potential for a free five night stay if they stay at TYTO, go to Frances Creek and then go back and get another two nights."

Mr Parker said he and other local caravan park operators successfully fought council on the same issue last year, but he conceded "we weren't going to be able to fight it off forever".

"We tried to tell the council that there is a lot more to running a caravan park like that than just opening it up and letting people in," he said.

"They are expecting the volunteers at the TYTO Information Centre to manage and police it but they go home at 5pm, so then it's free for all for anyone else who wants to come.

"Whether its morning or night you can pick something wrong in there because we know what to look for and we have a pretty good idea what vans are compliant or not."

Mr Parker said he understood council's intention was to bring more business to town.

But he said he believed the people being attracted by the new facility "aren't necessarily going to go and support local business".

"The freebie travellers aren't going to bring in the big money," he said.

Mr and Mrs Parker said at

the end of the six month trial, they hope council will close the facility for good.

If not, the Parkers said they will have to look at restructuring their tourism business model.

"We will have to look at cutting costs to compensate our losses which could impact on other local businesses," they said.

"The council think they might be winning on one hand by getting other business to town, but they are going to cut the throats of others."



Craig and Kate Parker.