



Council backs stance against offensive vans

Blue Mountains City Council and the region's peak tourism organisation have applauded a successful community camping calling for Wicked Campers to remove offensive slogans from their vehicles.

Sydney high school teacher Paula Orbea launched an online petition on July 13 to "eliminate misogynistic and degrading slogans and imagery" from Wicked Campers, a Brisbane-based car rental company. The mother launched the petition after seeing a Wicked campervan in the Blue Mountains that said: "In every princess, there's a little sl*t who wants to try it just once".

Within four days of launching the online petition, Ms Orbea had secured more than 110,000 signatures and the support of the Upper House of Federal Parliament.

Despite defending their signature graffiti-style artwork and refusing to respond to community demands in the initial aftermath of the petition, Wicked issued an apology on July 16 and have committed to changing slogans of an insensitive nature over the coming six months.

"I was in the process of bringing this matter to the attention of the Council on July 22, asking for their support of this campaign and upholding community standards," said Blue Mountains mayor Mark Greenhill.

"I am very pleased to see the success of the community campaign meant I no longer needed to take this action.

"Clearly, it is a widely held view that this slogan, and the many other equally offensive slogans, are, at best, degrading to women, and at worst, condone and normalise sexual assault and rape culture. The use of slippery advertising tactics and the argument that sexual objectification or racial vilification is merely cheeky self-expression and colourful artwork does not, in my view, meet with community standards."

Blue Mountains Lithgow and Oberon Tourism (BMLOT) chairman, Daniel Myles, said BMLOT and the council have a role in protecting the integrity of the Blue Mountains brand.

"As a high-profile tourism destination, we recognise the importance of tourism to the regional economy. Aside from being grossly inappropriate and distasteful, the slogans and imagery displayed on many Wicked campervans are an unwanted souvenir for visitors to the Blue Mountains," said Mr Myles.

"I'm all in favour of free speech, but I also defend the right of the public to choose the information, advertising and branding they consume. Mobile advertising such as Wicked campervans deny people this choice to be spared from advertising that is demeaning and offensive."

The mayor and Mr Myles agree with the strong public view that such artwork should be classified as a form of outdoor advertising and subject to the same rules and standards as commercial billboards.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Welcome 'grey nomads'

Dear Sir,

I recently spoke to campervan visitors at Lake Lascelles in Hopetoun and they asked me why they, as a group, are not welcome in Warracknabeal.

They told me that they bypass Warracknabeal to get to Hopetoun and many other welcoming towns.

They showed me the "Budget Rest Areas Australia", listing all sites under \$20 per night booklet, where it clearly shows the boat ramp area as suitable for large caravans and motor homes, with the rest area suitable for day use only.

The Hopetoun campers question was "why do you exclude motorhomes from the area to the north of the boat ramp and the eastern side of the creek".

"We can camp on this beautiful lake for a donation and we have the town to service our needs for papers, food, fuel, medical services and so on".

The Charlton community, through a variety of funding sources which incorporate significant philanthropic, government and local input, has contributed \$250,000 to erect a manager's residence at

the Charlton Travellers Rest to encourage travellers to stay, and thus contribute to the community.

Through publications such as "Campervan" and Motor Home Club of Australia magazine "The Wanderer", there is potential to reach up to 66,000 members of that organisation alone.

The chair of the committee noted "This has the potential to create a significant economic flow on effect for Charlton".

I note also that the Hindmarsh Shire has received financial support from State Government to upgrade Hindmarsh tourism sites; total funding of \$154,000 will include \$42,000 from the Shire, with most of the money to be invested in the Dimboola Caravan Park.

The manager commented: "There are a lot of grey nomads travelling around who look to see what facilities are available online". The Rotary Club of Warracknabeal is hopeful of building a wayside stop for caravans/campervans on the Henty Highway and incorporated in this would be a sign directing people to various facilities within our town.

Our picturesque creek will certainly be one of these, but "sorry you cannot stay overnight in the most attractive area".

Community members observe campervans in roadside stops near our town and when asked why they do not stop in Warracknabeal their response is "are we allowed to stop in the town".

The Yarriambiack Creek is a natural attraction for visitors and we need to capitalise on the same.

The campervan industry is much bigger than many realise and proactive communities across Australia are taking advantage of the same.

A recent report reveals that travellers using campervans contribute half a billion dollars to the New Zealand economy.

The report also highlights that domestic travellers who hire campervans spend \$38.1 million outside their home region.

Given the natural landscape of Australia, one can only guess the translation factor.

Can we develop the area to the north of the boat ramp and the eastern side of the creek to be suitable for campervans.

Maybe we do not need to do anything, just encourage campervans to this area as many are self sufficient.

This would not detract from patronage to the council caravan park as many campervan travellers are looking for space, privacy and water views, and it would attract additional visitors and thus more dollars to enhance our community.

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Thumbs up for camp sites

TWO sites around the base of Merredin Peak have been endorsed by Merredin council as 24-48-hour stopover locations for self-contained caravans and motorhomes.

Councillors last week agreed to the former Merredin Golf Club clubhouse site off Telfer Ave and the Njaki Njaki Reserve off an extension of Benson road being used for short-term tourist free camps.

However, Cr John Flockart suggested council should consider erecting an “honesty box” at each location so visitors who appreciated the stops could make a financial contribution.

“It’s been my experience that people will put money in an honour box but they’ll try and duck out on paying a fee,” he said.

Chief executive officer Greg Powell said providing a short-term parking area for self-contained RVs was the final criteria Merredin needed to meet before it could apply to become an approved RV Friendly Town.

“We only have to provide an area, there’s no obligation to provide facilities because the people who use it are supposed to be self-contained,” he said.

However, shire staff are looking at how toilets at the Njaki Njaki Reserve could be brought back into service, because of the potential to establish Aboriginal cultural tours at the reserve, and the possibility of retaining the toilet block when the former golf clubroom is demolished, he said.

“I did have a concern that travellers (at the former clubhouse site) might get golf balls bouncing off their caravans at 6am but I’m assured that can’t happen,” Mr Powell said.

Westonia has now been granted RV Friendly Town status by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia which has more than 66,000 members and is the

largest RV club in the southern hemisphere.

The shire has completed installation of a CMCA-provided “dump point” for toilet waste and a parking area in woodland just off the Westonia-Carrabin Road a kilometre north of the town centre.

The aim of the CMCA’s RV Friendly Town scheme is to encourage tourists to visit small towns to boost their economy.

In order to qualify for the scheme, towns must meet the needs of RV travellers and satisfy criteria including access to medical facilities, a pharmacy, a dump point, a general shopping area, provision of appropriate parking, vehicle service centre and a visitor information centre.

In return the CMCA provides RV Friendly Town signage and promotes the town in its members’ magazine and on its website.



Signposts to nowhere give place a bad name

Tourists say they're left in the lurch

Reports by
JASON GORDON

WELL might the "grey nomads" ask as they roll into Newcastle: "Where the bloody hell are we?"

Tourist information signs direct visitors to places where there is no tourist information, the tourist hotline is out of service, the city's main tourist information centre is only open for six hours a day and closed on Mondays, and when visitors find it they can't park their motorhome or caravan anyway.

For some, encountering the city's midweek car hoons on Wharf Road is the last straw.

As one disappointed traveller told the *Newcastle Herald* this week: "It's not a good look for Australia's sixth biggest city."

John from Sydney said: "We drove into Newcastle from Cessnock and were planning on staying overnight.

"We followed the tourist information signs along Hunter Street, but they don't lead to the information centre. By the time we found it, they'd closed.

"We rang the hotline num-

ber, but it's been cut off.

"So we bought some fish and chips and wandered up to the lighthouse, which was nice. But then we found the public toilets closed, and then we parked on the harbour-front for a rest but our van got punched by hoons.

"My wife just freaked out so we headed back to Sydney.

"A lot of people we talk to have similar stories about Newcastle. That's why I'm calling, because you're getting a bad reputation - which is sad."

Caravan, camping and motorhome web forums are littered with similar stories. Most conclude that their overall experience was good, but the city is lagging well behind in welcoming tourists.

Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia boss Richard Barwick said directional signage into Newcastle has long been a problem for many of his club's 66,000 members.

"The biggest problem is parking near the visitor centre - you can't park a caravan or motorhome anywhere near it.

"Newcastle is a fantastic city and more and more peo-

ple want to visit it. We're having a major event at Port Stephens in October which will attract more than a thousand motorhomes. A lot of those people want to migrate through Newcastle, but there is nowhere for them to stop - only at Stockton, Wallsend or Swansea."

Newcastle council said it was "aware of the issues" relating to tourist information, but fixing them was complicated because numerous other organisations were also responsible for providing tourist services. A co-ordinated strategy across those organisations needed to be developed.

The road signs that lead to nowhere are the responsibility of Roads and Maritime Services and are being removed.

The council said it had installed 14 plinths throughout the city that offered information and directions to visitors on foot. It also confirmed that the visitor information hotline had been disconnected, mainly because staff at the Maritime Centre were without the resources and training to staff it.



Still top of the pops

Atlas pop-top a fine choice for newbies and grey nomads



PETER POAT

DESPITE a falling off in sales in some areas, pop-top caravans still have an important place in the overall assortment available to recreational vehicle enthusiasts.

While many people, particularly first-time buyers, are turning to regular full-height vans, there are still those opting for pop-tops.

A more comfortable towing height, lighter weight to tow, less wind resistance, easier storage, price and better fuel economy are among the motivating factors.

In recent times there has been an increased availability in the second-hand stocks of these vans but this hasn't stopped manufacturers continuing with the development strategies.

One example is a new range produced by local manufacturer Coromal.

Known as the Atlas, there are 12 layouts in five sizes, with three models having showers and toilets.

There are other variations to suit every demand in lengths from 14ft (4.3m) to 20ft (6.1m). Both layouts in the biggest version have a shower and toilet and vary only in an option between two single beds or a queen.

Among the other 10 layouts there is only one with these facilities. It is one of two versions in the 18ft (5.5m) size, known as the A552S.

This model is already scoring points with customers and has excellent potential for the grey

nomad set.

Many are keen on the idea of fully self-contained vans to avoid having to wander off to caravan park amenities blocks during chilly nights.

Also, the lower weight means they won't have to trade up their current vehicle. These factors will also influence first-time towers.

To accommodate the bathroom, which is cut off from the living zone by a curtain, the galley bench space has been compromised. But by only having to cater for two people it probably isn't a big problem because a decent-size dinette table can be used for meal preparation.

The double bed's innerspring mattress is 1500mm wide and sits on a slatted base. An air-conditioner is above the bedhead.

Kitchen appliances include a microwave oven, Camec cooktop and griller, Dometic AES 150L fridge-freezer, range hood, stainless-steel sink and an array of cupboards and drawers.

The interior furniture is finished with a choice of elm or Vittoria wood grain with beige cupboards, and the walls are white and bright.

There are nine seat-fabric colours to select from, two curtain colours and two choices for the gloss splashbacks and laminates.

Coromal promotional material uses acronyms such as RTV and XC pack, without explanation of exactly what they mean. The only hint points to them being

“ultimate adventure, built to handle rough conditions”. Precisely what they consider their capabilities are is left unanswered.

The upgrade packs include independent suspension, upgraded axle, off-road electric brakes, bigger chassis bearers, 16-inch wheels, stronger furniture fixing, water tank protectors, rotational hitches and cutaway rear end.

Depending on what terrain you may plan to expose your van, it would be wise to seek dealer advice on exactly what these packs offer.

There are several other factory-fitted options available, including an electronic stability control system, picnic table, solar wiring, external shower; Bluetooth-equipped CD radio, external TV and barbecue points.

LOWDOWN

COROMAL ATLAS A552S

Price: \$46,700

Suitable for: On-road (without upgrades)

Internal length: 17ft 6in (5.035m)

Tare weight: 1490kg

ATM: 1968kg

Towball weight: 165kg

Dealers: Cannington RV Centre, Albany Highway, 9356 1999; Mandurah Caravan and RV Centre, Paton Road, 9581 7300. Country dealers: Cameron Caravans, Albany; Batavia Coast Caravan Land, Geraldton; Southern Coromal, Bunbury.



VERDICT

This van has many pluses but I would be loath to suggest the RTV and XC upgrades would take you too far off the highway, maybe gravel roads at best. Despite this, it will have appeal to many on-road users looking for an easy-to-tow van with most of the necessities.

In the Atlas, the bathroom is tucked behind the living area.



Relax on a 1500mm-wide mattress, with air-con above.



TRAVELLERS ARE RV HAPPY IN INGHAM

RACHEL RILEY

NEIGHBOURS Danny and Dawn Spencer, Sue Hammond and Tony Johnson have fallen in love with Ingham.

But they say this might not have happened had it not been for the new 48-hour RV free campsite at the TYTO Wetlands.

The two couples had been travelling from Brisbane to Cairns and saw the signs for the new site along the way.

On their return trip, they decided to stop on Monday and spent the next 48-hours exploring the sites and tastes the region had to offer.

"This is the best free camp we

have ever stayed at in terms of the location, facilities, outlook and proximity to town," Ms Hammond said.

"It's really as good as it gets," Mr Johnson said. "We have spent money on beautiful coffee, cheeses and meats and between us we would have all spent over \$100 each," Mr Spencer.

Mr Spencer said during his visit to Ingham he spent a bit of time counting the number of vans and potentially missed opportunities passing through.

"The absolute challenge for Ingham is to stop the traffic from just driving through the town, so whatever encourages people to

stop and have a look has to be a positive," he said.

Ms Hammond said during their stay they did not come across any vans or campers that did not comply with the site's strict self-sufficient rules.

"We think they are policing it well," she said.

"During the time we were there we saw someone twice a day in morning and afternoon checking the site."

"We adhere to a program called 'Leave No Trace', which means all we left behind was our tyre tracks," Mr Johnson said.

The group said they understood the free site may be

affecting the numbers at nearby caravan parks. But they said every dollar they don't have to spend on accommodation, they would spend elsewhere in other businesses.

"I personally went around and asked people staying at the site would you have stayed in Ingham had this facility not been here and the answer was overwhelmingly no," Mr Johnson said. "We have everything we need in board so we don't need a caravan park so we seek out free camp sites wherever we go.

"But if people are required to stay in a caravan park they might just drive straight through."



RV travellers Tony Johnson, Sue Hammond, Danny Spencer and Dawn Spencer have loved staying at the free RV friendly site at the TYTO Wetlands.

Picture: RACHEL RILEY



Caravan park boost

A DESIRE to create family memories and traditions is driving a resurgence of interest in caravan park holidays, according to the new chief executive of the nation's largest caravan park network.

Stuart Livingstone said parents keen to spend time with their children in traditional holidays away from iPads and smartphones is giving the sector a healthy boost. Mr Livingstone, 41, was head of the Caravan and Camping Industry Association of SA for a decade before becoming national chief executive of Top Tourist Parks of Australia.



Ongoing lobbying for freedom camping

ANOTHER leading recreational vehicle lobby group has submitted an urgent letter calling on the City of Ballarat to establish freedom camping and free waste-disposal dumping points for caravans, campervans and motorhomes.

The Fifth Wheeler Network said in its submission given to the council last week, that RV travellers need a place to park during short stays into tourist towns.

The group argued the proposal does give caravan parks a commercial advantage.

"Our Club does not have a stake in the Ballarat issue as it is mostly considered by our members and many of the RV travellers in general to be a place for which only a short day visit is warranted," the submission read. "But it remains so it will simply continue not to be patronised to the extent of other more RV accommodating towns."

The submission comes in the wake of delays in the council finding a resolution to the issue.

The proposals were deferred by the council earlier this month.