



Phill and Pamela Chadd, Kathleen and Peter Major and Berta Scott try out the RV short stay area in Jarrahdale. Photograph — Kelly Pilgrim-Byrne.

New short stay in town

BY AMY BLOM

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia has named the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale an RV-friendly town following the opening of a recreational vehicle short stay in Jarrahdale this week.

The short stay area allows for a number of RVs to be parked in bays in Jarrahdale Road near Millars Road.

Shire president John Erren said it had been a long process but the shire was excited the facility was now available to travellers.

“Our shire has so much to offer travellers such as the historic timber town in Jarrahdale, the Serpentine Dam, the breathtaking Serpentine Falls and the many cycling and walking trails,” he said.

“We’re excited we can provide this free RV short stay area so travellers can take their time and experience the beauty of our area.”

The CMCA launched the RV-friendly town program as a way to encourage the expansion of tourism related infrastructure and services while boosting the economy of towns providing RV tourist specific amenities.

To qualify, the town must provide access to a general shopping area, provision of appropriate low cost overnight parking and access to potable water and a free dump point.

CMCA director, national consumer representative and government liaison Ken Kipping said the results of the program continued to be promising.

“It is great to see an increasing number of towns qualifying as RV friendly,” he said.

“CMCA strives to promote a number of programs that will facilitate improved relationships between RV travellers, government and the community.”



Happy campers at what cost?

THE famed beauty of the Franklin River Reserve outside Toora has spread far and wide, with scores of caravans, tents and campervans regularly parked there. Locals who have kept tabs have counted an average of 25 to 30 vehicles there each day over summer, often many more.

Those in favour of free camping at the reserve argue that the campers contribute to the local economy by buying provisions of one sort or another in the nearby towns of Toora and Foster.

'But at what cost?' say others, pointing to the overflowing rubbish bins and the overused toilet facilities, originally designed for no more than a dozen flushes per week.

"So much for 'leave no trace'," said Rachel Brown, who runs the nearby Toora Tourist Park with husband Andrew. She was referring to the self-containment code of conduct for Recreational Vehicle (RV) users, which promotes environmentally responsible camping.

South Gippsland Shire Council's highly contentious decision to allow free camping at the

reserve as part of its Recreational Vehicle Strategy 2014 was made primarily to attract RV users.

"RV users are self-contained, self-sufficient and do not require external toilet, shower and BBQ facilities," reads the RV Strategy. Yet the majority of people who overnight at Franklin River Reserve are clearly far from self-sufficient. From her observations, Rachel Brown estimates as few as 10 or 20 per cent of the campers are RV users, with the majority being travellers in small vans, cars and/or tents.

Multiply the number of vehicles commonly at the reserve by two, to allow for a couple of holidaymakers per vehicle at the very least, and numbers of visitors mak-

ing use of the limited facilities at the reserve mounts up significantly. Shire workers generally collect rubbish bins three times each week, but often this is not enough. Last weekend (a long holiday weekend) had barely started when the bins were already full and overflowing, creating a terrible eyesore, if not a health hazard. This is the case more often than not.

The health of the Franklin River is also at risk, suggested Ms Brown. "The septic system is not designed for this amount of use."

She said that a shire truck and excavator recently spent a day at the reserve digging trenches to deal with problems with the septic system. "And it's the rate-payers who are paying for all this," she pointed out.

"It was a challenging process when we devel-

oped the RV Strategy," admitted South Gippsland Shire Coastal Promontory ward councillor Cr Mohya Davies. "A large percentage of the community is in support of free camping, although there is some opposition. There are pros and cons, and I am aware it comes at a cost."

Cr Davies said that Council had increased

the rubbish collection at the reserve in a bid to keep up with the demand from campers, and the septic issue has been fixed – for the moment – with no plans to upgrade the current small toilet block.

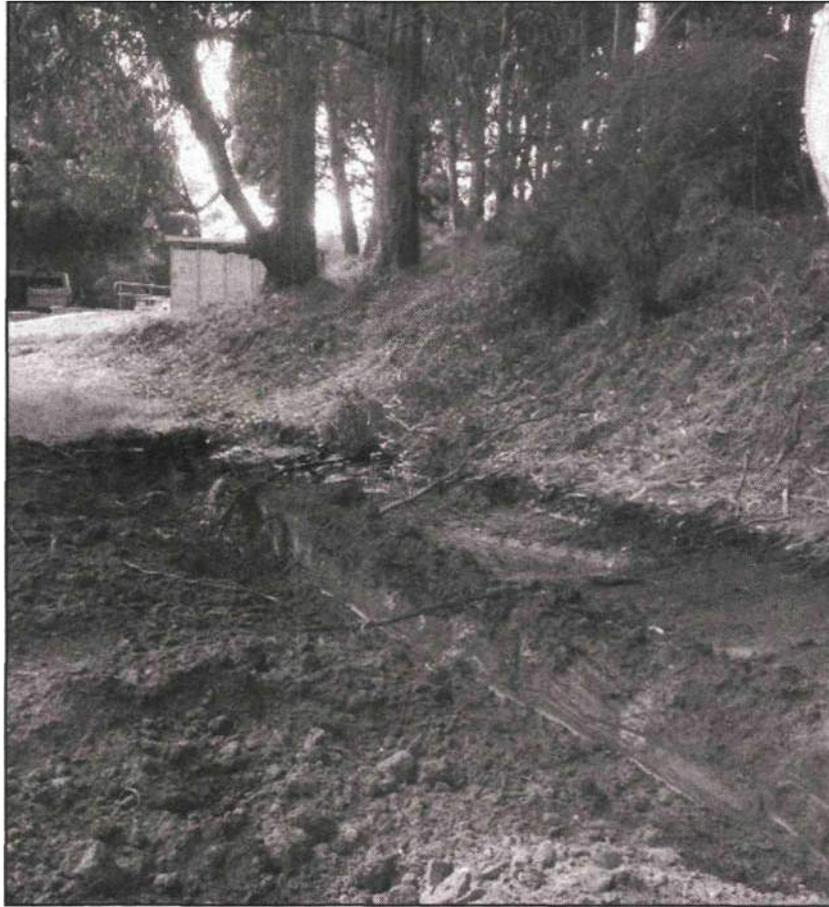
The councillor said that she regularly calls into Franklin River Re-

serve and acknowledges that there are very few self-contained RVs among the many users of the reserve.

"Council needs to understand the costs of allowing people to camp there. I acknowledge there are very strong opinions on both sides of the debate. The RV Strategy will be reviewed at some stage. We have to ask ourselves: 'Is this what we want the Franklin River Reserve to look like?'"



• **Overflowing bins have become a common sight at the Franklin River Reserve since the introduction of free camping.**



• Council digging works to combat septic problems at the Franklin River Reserve.



NZ playing hardball over Wicked words

WICKED Campers has been dumped from the New Zealand Department of Conservation's tourist information listing for those wanting to hire campervans.

A spokesman for Conservation Minister Maggie Barry said the decision followed uproar over the slogans on the vans and there had been an expressed determination by three government ministers to have the company rejected because of sexual or anti-women overtones in its slogans.

A major national holiday park company is advising owners throughout its network to make sure all offensive slogans are covered or to ban entry to the vehicles altogether.

Top 10 Holiday Parks group chief executive David Owendale said the company was concerned about the offence the Wicked Campers slogans were causing.

"We are ... encouraging our franchisees to respond accordingly, either ensuring the offensive material is covered prior to entry to the park or refusing the offending vehicle entry entirely," he said.

NZ Motor Caravan Association chief executive Bruce Lochore said Wicked Campers was not a member of the association.

"Absolutely not. We wouldn't have them. They pretty much give New Zealand the big finger," he said.

— APNZ



Dump point proving popular

By Grace Rutherford

An RV dump point was installed in Seymour last month, which is expected to increase tourism in the area and benefit the local economy.

The RV dump point is a service for caravan and RV drivers where they can empty waste from their vehicle in an environmentally friendly way.

Seymour's dump point is the only free site in Mitchell Shire, and is at the end of the Vietnam Veterans Walk, next to the roundabout on Wallis St and High St.

The next closest free site offering is in Yea and Heathcote — a considerable detour if you are travelling to Melbourne.

Nagambie and Goulburn River Tourist Parks also have dump points, however they are restricted to registered guests only.

"There were a number of people that would get so angry because Seymour didn't have one," Seymour Visitor Information Centre's Ruth Hall said.

"When I first started at the information centre you had people up in Wangaratta on the way down ringing and asking where the closest dump point was."

Mitchell Shire Council recognised the importance of this infrastructure, which was identified in the Goulburn River Valley

Tourism destination management plan, and aligns with council's strategy to support Mitchell Shire's growing visitor economy.

Mitchell Shire Council expects the dump point will encourage travellers to stay longer in town which will benefit local businesses.

Towns that install dump points benefit from the increased visitation to their communities by caravan and RV tourists with the added benefit of responsible waste water disposal.

Research shows Campervan and Motorhome Club Australia (CMCA) members spend an average of \$572 per week when travelling on the road.

"It's very good that it's close to the shops

because people will come in and hopefully when they're off the freeway they will be able to utilise businesses in Seymour," Mrs Hall said.

The dump point is central to the Visitor Information Centre, Vietnam Veterans Walk, shops, public toilets, and there is adequate space to accommodate caravans and RVs.

"This new RV dump point better supports a portion of Mitchell Shire visitors that rely on this type of infrastructure, most times scheduling their travel itineraries to align with convenient access to these facilities," Mitchell Shire Mayor Cr Sue Marstaeller said.

Since being installed a month ago, the Visitor Information Centre has recorded an increase in visitor numbers for February 2016, compared with previous years.



Great news: Caravanner Ken McDonald and Visitor Information Centre volunteer Ruth Hall at the new dump point.