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## **Letters to the editor**

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### HRBA supports decision

THE Hamilton Regional Business Association is pleased to announce their support of SGSC's decision to implement the Community Welcomes Recreational Vehicle (RV) program.

Late last year HRBA sent a letter to Council stating that it would be more beneficial to implement this program, rather than establishing a free dump point in Hamilton.

Research by the Caravan, Camping and RV industry indicates that campers who stay in paid sites (commercial campers) spend a higher amount than those who stay in free camping areas.

HRBA does not support the establishment of a free dump point in Hamilton, as this would directly affect the local caravan

parks, which currently provide a free dump point, and allow campers to dump rubbish or fill up water for a small fee.

Should an additional free dump point be considered for the Greater Hamilton region, HRBA would prefer smaller towns around the Shire to be an option, rather than competing with already established businesses.

The Community Welcomes RV Program provides signage and information for RV travellers, directing them to short-term parking, commercial caravan parks, dump points, tourist attractions and dining options.

HRBA is supportive of Council adopting this program, as it provides an excellent marketing edge for campers to stay and spend money in the region, which, in turn, supports members of the Business Association.

MARK KEARNS,  
President, Hamilton Regional  
Business Association.



# Overnight parking to be allowed

## BODEY DITTLUFF

RECREATIONAL vehicles will be able to legally stay overnight at a designated area in Winchelsea following a unanimous Surf Coast Shire council decision on Tuesday night.

A year-long trial period for the RV-friendly parking zone, located on the banks of the Barwon River near the intersection of Mercer St and Barwon Terrace, will formally begin on April 1 to allow sleeping in self-contained vehicles for a maximum of 48 hours.

In tabling an alternative motion to broaden consultation, Winchelsea Ward councillor Heather Wellington said the area had been informally used for overnight stays in recent decades, with progress group Growing Winchelsea identifying the change as a priority.

“My view is that given we haven’t had any problems in 20 years ... I think it’s a reason-

able proposal,” she said. “There have been no reported problems as long as that’s been happening — it’s been used respectfully.”

The council resolved to hold quarterly meetings with key stakeholders during the trial to monitor results, while allocating \$1600 to the installation of signs providing clear direction to visitors staying in the area.

Restrictions on the site include the banning of tents, fires, and generators, enforcing no noise after 10pm and no public consumption of alcohol, and the requirement for pets to be on a leash at all times.

Eight submitters spoke for the proposal at a meeting this month, with many citing potential economic benefits and flow-on effects for local businesses.

Five submitters objected, with concerns including environmental impact and the detrimental effect on the existing local caravan park.



# Campervan rally to boost local economy

Over the next few weeks campervans and motorhomes will be coming in droves to Forbes for the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) Solos Network rally.

About 350 vans are expected to converge on Forbes Showgrounds for the week-long rally from March 14 to 21.

The Solos Network is a special interest group within the CMCA, for people who travel alone in campervans or motorhomes.

When the CMCA have a rally, the Solos Network organise one around the same time within 100-150 kilometres of the mother club, or the "grown-ups" according to Forbes rally team event coordinator Rainey Parsell.

"They're the grown-ups and we're the teenagers, the solos," Ms Parsell said.

"They choose first and they chose Bathurst (in April), so we look at a circumference of about 100-150km and visit every town in that circumference until we find one that has what we need such as showground facilities, a council willing to help us and who want us to come.

"And they're all starting to want us because we bring so much money to the town."

The Solos will normally spend on average in excess of \$100,000 in the host town of their week-long rallies.

"We try and spend all our money in the town," fellow rally team organiser Al Carroll said.

"We get a receipt and put all our receipts in together to work out how much we've spent."

Ms Parsell said Forbes will really benefit from the rally.

"People will look at Forbes and think, 'my god I'm going to come back'," she said.

"Our motto is, we're here to have fun and spend money in your town."

Throughout the week of the rally there will be a program of events with activities on every day.

One of the biggest days scheduled will be the open day and markets held at Forbes Showground on Saturday, March 19.

Everyone is invited to go along and check out some of the vans and talk to rally members about their lifestyle.

There will also be food and market stalls and entertainment by Solos members and locals including school students and Forbes Country Music Singers.

The rally team are currently looking for stallholders for the markets, so if you are interested contact Rainey Parsell on 0406 169 869.

Other events on throughout the week include a welcome dinner at Forbes Services Memorial Club on Monday night, on Tuesday night Forbes Shire Council will be putting on a film, Wednesday night will involve

Old Time/New Vogue dancing at Forbes Town Hall, there will be a trivia night on Thursday, a themed dinner dance at Forbes Golf and Sportsman's Hotel on Friday night, an Elvis tribute show Saturday night and a talent night and closing ceremony on Sunday.

Throughout the days Solos members will have the opportunity to go on day tours, as well a variety of activities such as walking, tai chi, meditation, rock n roll classes, line dancing classes, belly dancing classes plus seminars on health, safety on the road, cooking demonstrations, van maintenance etc.

"It's a full week," Ms Parsell said.



**Solos Network rally team Laurie Baxter, Rainey Parsell and Al Carroll are already in Forbes planning for the upcoming rally. 0216campervanrally(1)**



# Freedom camping cancelled

BALLARAT City councillors voted Wednesday night to kick the freedom campers out of Pioneer Park earlier than initially thought.

Council officers had proposed a March 31 end date for the trial for free camping in the Wendouree park. The resolution was amended by councillor Amy Johnson to bring forward the end of the trial by two weeks.

Council heard from supporters of the freedom camping plan, who said it brought people to Ballarat, as well as a caravan park owner who said it was hurting her business.



**GOING GOING, GONE:** Ballarat City councillors voted on Wednesday night to kick freedom campers out of Pioneer Park earlier than planned.

There have been claims about the Wendouree site's alleged misuse, including people overstaying the two permitted nights and not meeting the self-containment water and toilet measures.



## RV-friendly plan gets green light

BY JAMES TAYLOR

A PLAN to make Winchelsea officially RV-friendly is going ahead after being approved by the Surf Coast Shire.

At their meeting on Tuesday, councillors resolved to change the local law to allow sleeping in self-contained recreational vehicles, self-contained caravans or self-contained motorhomes on the Barwon Riverbank between Mercer Street and the railway bridge.

Under the 12-month trial, which will start on April 1, travellers will be allowed to sleep overnight for a maximum of 48 hours.

The council will also work with Growing Winchelsea – which initially pushed the RV-friendly plan – and interested stakeholders to establish a monitoring program during the trial period, including quarterly meetings and key triggers for early cessation of the trial.

Following the trial, the shire will hold a review in April 2017 and make recommendations on whether it should continue.

Winchelsea Ward councillor Heather Wellington said people parking on the riverbank had been a long-standing practice, despite the local law preventing it.

“Given we’ve had a 20-year history of this happening without any real problems, I think it’s a reasonable proposal.

“Winchelsea of itself is not going to be a major tourist attraction, but it is an attractive place for people to stay.”

Fellow ward councillor Carol McGregor said she also supported the proposal.

“We’ve spent a considerable amount of time discussing the issues with the community, and there need to be some checks and balances.”

She said RV-friendly sites were typically located on the outskirts of towns, and she hoped the riverside area could be preserved in its natural state as Winchelsea itself grew larger.

“I think we have to ensure the use of RVs doesn’t marginalise local people from using the area.”