



# Council will push ahead with RV facility plans

David Braithwaite

WITH a suitable lessee for Maffra Caravan Park unable to be found, Wellington Shire Council felt it had little choice but to transform it into a short stay facility.

On Tuesday night, council confirmed it would redevelop the caravan park into a short term recreation vehicle and event camping facility, meaning current residents would have to move by August 19.

Once the park is vacant, a \$75,000 redevelopment will begin to remove and demolish old and outdated infrastructure, replacing it with new services including dump point, solar lighting, landscaping and signs.

Council officers will continue to work with local support agencies to help the park's six remaining residents find long term accommodation.

Wellington Shire mayor Darren McCubbin said while the welfare of the park's residents was an important priority, long term residency in local caravan parks was not the best outcome for people needing urgent accommodation.

"Caravan parks are not, or should ever be considered as appropriate sites for long term social housing," he said.

"We are currently working with DHHS and local community and social housing representatives to support the few people currently living at the Maffra Caravan Park to find more suitable housing."

However, council has been criticised for the way it has handled the relocation of residents.

St Vincent de Paul worker Pat Fogarty said residents were in distress when she visited the park after the eviction notices were issued.

"I felt that the men had not been given the respect they deserve," she told council.

Trevor Fogarty, also a St Vincent de Paul worker, said the park provided much-needed accommodation.

"The park provides them with cheaper accommodation than units, which are not available on their income," he said.

"Otherwise, they're in danger of being homeless. That's why the Department of Housing drops them off there, because it doesn't have the stock to provide units or housing for these sort of people."

Mr Fogarty said council should have provided an explanation in person to residents about the relocation.

"Perhaps a more humane approach would have been much better than what has happened," he said.

Darryl Maxfield, who has lived in the park for 18 months, feared for what could happen to the facility after long term residents left.

"Once kids know that no-one's in there, they're going to run amok," he said.

Mr Maxfield also said Maffra would lose the money spent regularly by the residents.

"Everyone spends \$120 to \$180 for food each week in the town," he said.

Cr Carolyn Crossley said Crown land should not be used for long term accommodation.

"We should be looking at the government to provide appropriate and suitable housing, rather than using inappropriate short term responses to that serious community need.

"I think that when we had the Thomson River Caravan Park (Sale) closure ... that various people who were living in that area actually had better housing outcomes.

"I'm sure this will be the end product of this occurrence as well."

The only councillor to vote against the redevelopment motion, John Duncan, was disappointed residents weren't consulted before the eviction notices were issued.

"There are other RV parks in Maffra," he said.

"There's an unofficial one at the rec reserve, and an official one at the golf course."

Until June 2013, the caravan park was operated under a Crown land lease.

The lease was surrendered when the lessee indicated it could not satisfy its obligations, including to complete capital investment.

The park has been operated directly by council since then.

Earlier this year, expressions of interest were sought for a new lessee.

Potential lessees were asked to provide information such as experience, level of investment they could make and how tourism opportunities could be increased.

Only one submission was received, which did not meet the evaluation criteria, so the submitter was

not invited to tender.

With the expression of interest process not resulting in a lease being established, consultation in how the caravan park could be redeveloped began.

Council officers sought feedback from a range of Maffra community and business groups and organisations, each of which has supported turning the park into a short and event stay only facility, focussed on tourism and visitors.

"This caravan park does not provide Maffra with the service or amenity it needs," Cr McCubbin said.

"To maintain the facility as a caravan park would cost significantly more than cost of a short stay RV refurbishment.

"The required infrastructure and service levels of a caravan park are far greater, with facility renewal at Maffra estimated between \$750,000 and \$1 million.



“As a caravan park, this is not a successful facility.  
“As a place of residence it is not, nor has it ever  
been, suitable for long term housing.

“It is council’s aim to facilitate better and more  
appropriate outcomes not only for the park’s resi-  
dents but also for the future of tourism in Maffra.”

Stratford on the River Tourist Park owner and  
manager Louise Perrett was concerned about the  
effect providing free accommodation would have  
on local commercial operations.

“When you talk about a short stay park, where  
is the level playing field for us as a caravan park  
operator?

“We have really high legislative requirements to  
be registered as a caravan park, and the costs that  
go with that, and we see the council offering the  
service that we’re offering at a commercial rate,  
for free,” Ms Perrett said.

Maffra Caravan Park will become a short stay  
facility similar to Willow Park in Rosedale.



**Wellington Shire Council plans to convert Maffra Caravan Park into a no-fee recreational vehicle facility.**



# Grey nomads seek park

**EMMA CHADWICK**

TOWNSVILLE is missing out on valuable tourist dollars from grey nomads who are bypassing the city in search of free campgrounds on their way north.

Next month up to 300 grey nomads will pull into the Ross Dam for five days of the Moto-co RV Dam Fine Rally, which attracts members of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia.

It was estimated last year's rally injected more than \$300,000 into the local economy and more than half stayed for the Townsville 400.

The club's CEO Richard Barwick said for the rest of the year there were no free stopovers in Townsville for their 66,000 members.

He said the growing group of retired Baby Boomers spent many months on the road and so were attracted to free and low-cost camp grounds. Townsville's closest free camping grounds are at Alligator Creek 21km south of Townsville and Saunders Beach 33km north.

Mr Barwick said the parcel of land at the Ross Dam where

the rally was held each year would be a perfect spot for a low-cost winter stopover.

He said the club had recently signed a 10-year caretaker lease with the Hinchinbrook Shire Council for an RV camping ground close to the Ingham Golf Club.

Mr Barwick said under the landmark agreement, the

CMCA pays rates on the land and had spent \$100,000 to develop the RV Park, which provides access and a secure place to park, potable water and dump points.

"It is our first lease of this kind in Australia and we plan to have some more. It would be great if Townsville was one," Mr Barwick said.

"Council need to look at the big picture rather than just allowing campervans and motorhomes into commercial caravan parks.

"There are just short of 600,000 motorhomes and campervans registered in Australia and we estimate there are 125,000 caravan and motorhomes on the road at any one time.

"We know they are in Queensland for at least three months of the year."

Townsville city councillor Mark Molachino, who represents the Upper Ross area of Division 4, said it was a delicate issue for local tourism business owners.

"We always need to be very mindful of our local commercial parks which in some cases have invested millions of dollars," Mr Molachino said.

"In smaller towns like Ingham where there isn't the same level of commercial investment, it's a different story.

"Here in Townsville we need to be encouraging visitors and tourists in a way that supports our local businesses, rather than encouraging something that would be in direct competition."



# RV friendly

**The Kingborough Council have approved the development of a Recreational Vehicle Strategy for Kingborough to be funded from the Governance consultancy budget for 2016/17.**

The motion was carried at the council meeting on May 9, with eight out of 10 councillors voting for the development of the strategy.

The increase in tourism in Tasmania has caused an increase in the number of tourists using recreational vehicles (RV) for accommodation/transport, and also backpackers who are taking advantage of seasonal work opportunities within Kingborough.

A submission had been made calling for the development of Margate to become an RV friendly town with the provision of facilities for overnight stays by recreational vehicles.

Vicki from Alpha's Caravans & RV Centre in Huntingfield said they have noticed a large increase in tourists visiting from interstate, approximately 80 per cent more than there was five years ago.



Kingborough is becoming an increasingly popular place for tourists to visit in recreational vehicles. (PS)



# Now here come the choppers

Hold on to your hats, the push to get cable cars and helicopters in Tasmania's wildest places is on in earnest, warns **Nicholas Sawyer**

**W**ITH election pork-barrelling starting to ramp up, an alarming trend is already apparent — pre-emptive funding of tourism projects in national parks prior to serious consideration of their merits in a bid to make their approval almost a foregone conclusion.

The reallocation of the Cadbury millions kickstarts two controversial projects.

The derelict Bernacchi Lodge (the former Antarctic Division training facility) on the Central Plateau and in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is to be renovated to become “premium accommodation”.

Premium accommodation at this location can mean only one thing, an up-market fishing lodge. And what will be the main attraction? The obvious answer is helicopter fly-fishing trips to the more remote lakes on the plateau when the weather permits.

What does the proposed new management plan for the TWWHA say? Up to five landing sites will be considered in the Self-Reliant Recreation Zone that contains most lakes of interest. What was one of the most controversial aspects of the review of the TWWHA management plan? Helicopter access to remote areas.

The other project to receive serious funding is a proposed expansion of the RACT's Freycinet Lodge further into the national park. This is explicitly prohibited under the management plan and opposed by many because it will increase visitors to an already overcrowded area. It was originally proposed as part

of the State Government's expressions of interest process where the project was described as cabins and sites for motor homes accessed using an existing roadway.

The more recent description provided with the funding announcement describes the development as eco-accommodation pods. Survey pegs observed by local residents suggest a new access road is proposed, intruding further into the national park.

No development application in the suburbs would be accepted by council without more detail than is provided in most of the EOI proposals, and if the proposal changed as much as this one has, a new development application would be required.

Surely the public deserves the equivalent or better in regard to major development proposals on public land.

What other ill-considered tourism developments in

national parks are likely to receive pre-emptive funding during the election campaign?

There are two likely candidates.

The Cradle Mountain cable car, which is justified by the Cradle Mountain Visitor Experience Master Plan. The

master plan contains little analysis of the need, the type of experience that should be provided for visitors, or consideration of much cheaper and less controversial alternatives. It is simply a document prepared to spruik the cable car proposal.

Construction of the western section of the Three Capes Track. The current track only opened just before Christmas. Let's give it a couple of years to demonstrate that it is a success and establish that there is a demand for a longer walk before considering additional spending. It is unlikely that it will ever attract enough walkers to break even, and unlikely that extending it will make any difference.

Our major national parks are under pressure from rapidly increasing tourist numbers. It is vital to maintain a quality visitor experience or Tasmania's reputation will soon suffer. This will not be achieved by wasting scarce funding on ill-considered

proposals, especially ones intended to get ever increasing numbers of visitors into a few iconic locations.

Our two most popular national parks, Freycinet and Cradle Mountain, both have

major overcrowding problems.

How about an election vow to fund serious planning to determine the best way to address overcrowding, with funding for implementation guaranteed to follow once the best solution is agreed?

In a recent Talking Point (*Mercury*, May 13), Tourism Tasmania chairman James Cretan spoke of “commitment to a genuinely shared vision coupled with careful strategic oversight” as a prerequisite for Tasmania's continuing tourism growth.

Cretan was too diplomatic to single out developments within national parks as an area where strategic oversight is lacking, but Tasmania's national parks play a crucial role in attracting visitors.

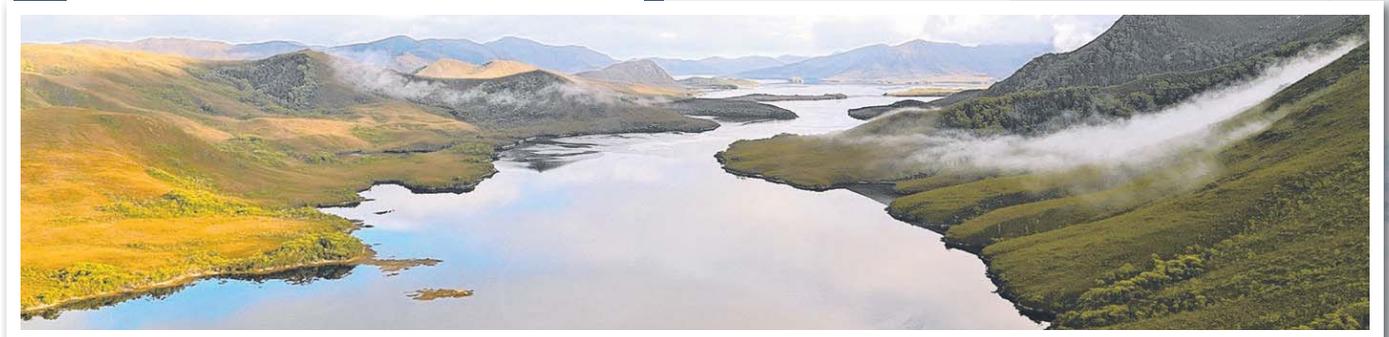
Surely it is obvious that opportunistic development proposals, in the absence of a shared strategic vision or a robust assessment process to keep them in check, have the potential to reduce our great national parks to mediocrity. This will damage not only the parks themselves but also



Tasmania's tourism industry.

**Nicholas Sawyer is a retired planner with the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service.**

What was one of the most controversial aspects of the review of the TWWHA management plan? Helicopter access to remote areas.





**Mercury (Hobart), Hobart**

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**SPECTACULAR:** Bathurst Harbour in the Southwest National Park that is part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. **INSET:** Port Davey. Pictures: TOURISM TASMANIA