



Wheely stupid



By **ALENA HIGGINS**

THE Southern Downs is losing up to \$1.8 million in tourism revenue because it fails to provide adequate non-commercial accommodation, a national motorhome club spokesman says.

Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) communications manager Colin Balfour said the region was shunning a slice of the lucrative recreational vehicle (RV) pie - the fastest growing domestic tourism sector in Australia, according to CMCA.

"Currently the Southern Downs region is missing out on this market because it is perceived as being unfriendly to RV travellers by not offering a mix of accommodation options," Mr Balfour said.

"It's the businesses and towns like Warwick and Stan-

thorpe that are missing out.

"(RV travellers) spend like they are home, because they are, just on wheels."

Earlier this month, Southern Downs Regional Council (SDRC) established a reference group to investigate camping options for the area, using the Department of Tourism's 'Queensland Camping Options Toolkit' as a guide.

Made up of industry stakeholders, the group is tasked with devising ways to ensure the region is positioned to capitalise on the growth of the market, while balancing the expectations of members on both sides of the commercial and non-commercial divide.

Mr Balfour applauded the move, saying it was important for council to look at low-cost and no-cost alternatives to meet consumer demand, but

stressed the need for transparency and a whole-of-community approach in decision making.

"The self-contained segment of the RV traveller market regularly chooses not to use caravan parks as these vehicle's accommodation needs are limited to access to a dump point and potable water and a place to park," he said.

"Consequently, they do not want to pay between \$25 and \$35 per night for an unpowered site in a caravan park."

However, president of the Caravan Park Association of Queensland and co-owner of Warwick's Kahler's Oasis Caravan Park Majella Kahler rejected Mr Balfour's claims, saying SDRC provides two camping areas targeted at self-contained RV travellers, one each at Allora and Dalveen.

These spots were chosen

as they did not directly affect commercial park operators, Ms Kahler said, but added council was reassessing whether the cost of ongoing maintenance was still "worthwhile" at the Dalveen site.

"There is no such thing as free camping - somebody is paying for it," Ms Kahler said.

"If you are a pensioner and struggling to pay your rates bill and you can't afford to go on holidays, then I think these pensioners would object to us subsidising free areas for people to have a holiday."

A SDRC spokeswoman said the council was reviewing all of its parks as part of its Parks Rationalisation Program.

The reference group is expected to provide council with its recommendations by April 2015.



Come on, wanderers, we're ticking so many of the boxes

CHARLEVILLE

THE TOWN has regained its RV-friendly ranking thanks to more downtown parking and a cheap no-frills caravan park.

Murweh shire council, the Campervan motorhome club of Australia and Graham and Debbie Reid's Bush caravan park have signed a memorandum of understanding to ensure parking close to shops, 24-48-hour parking for self-contained vehicles within the town precincts, access to potable water and dump points.

Mayor Denis Cook said designated town parking and dump points at the airport and bush caravan park, which charged \$5 a night for unpowered sites, would ensure the town's status. "We pay the parking rates at the Warrego club for workers," he said. "So there is more room in the street for RVs. They park in Galatea street, in Sturt street, all the way along down there, and the other side of the post office."

He added the town's return to RV-friendly status was a plus. "I walked past two caravan parks today and they were full so there is plenty of them around," he said. "Then people will talk about Charleville being an RV-friendly town. I think it will get more people coming to our town, spending money and seeing what we have to offer."

CMCA special projects officer Don Eldred said Charleville lost its status for 12 months last year because it did not offer a less-than-\$10 camping option within 10km of town. "At the time Chris Blanch said they could use the fishing locations outside town to comply with the economic guidelines," he said. "But it went pear-shaped because the fishing fraternity didn't want caravans at the fishing spots. Basically they were just complaining. It was untenable. We could have persisted but eventually it boils and boils and boils."

He said dump points enabled campers to stay longer. "We had to do a whole review of the towns

because one or two of them made changes without letting us know," he said. "Now its basically firm because of what the bush caravan park has done."

Charleville would be promoted through the club's The Wanderer magazine and by word-of-mouth. "I was talking to someone in Townsville the other day," Don said. "They were asking me about doing a trip and I said go via Roma, go a hard right, and rest up at Charleville. That's the way it will get people to the town, word-of-mouth, hell-for-leather."

Roadie Reid said the town had been missing out on a large tourist market. "After we built the park we realized there was a whole group of people who were skipping the town," he said. "They were the ones that wanted cheaper camping options and they had self-contained vehicles. They weren't coming to Charleville. It is a no brainer. That's why the council was very helpful to us to get the development done."



To gain RV-friendly status, towns must offer parking, short-term camping areas, dump points and water.



Council to consider camping proposals

'Urgent' meetings held to negotiate issue

MELISSA CUNNINGHAM

DEBATE surrounding a proposal to allow recreational vehicles to camp for free in Pioneer Park in Wendouree has risen again.

Urgent meetings were conducted by City of Ballarat council officers between parties for and against the proposal late last week.

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia is spearheading a campaign to establish free camping for recreational vehicles at Pioneer Park in Wendouree.

It is also proposing a year-long trial for free dumping points for caravans, campervans and motorhomes to dispose of their waste.

Both proposals were considered by Ballarat councillors at the council meeting last month but were deferred due to the city's request to seek legal assistance on the matters.

CMCA co-director Keith Moxham said the RV lobby group had sought its own legal advice on freedom camping in Ballarat which found the proposal did not exceed competitive neutrality laws in Australia.

"We have provided that legal advice to the council and would like to think that by the council meeting, this information is carefully considered by council officer," he said.

Mr Moxham said he wanted to see a resolution to the longstanding issue.

Victorian Caravan Parks Association chief executive officer Elizabeth White told

The Courier while the association supported a proposal for a trial of free dumping points for RVs at existing caravan parks, they were opposed to freedom

camping.

Ms White said she feared if freedom camping went ahead it would not be adequately supervised and could result in degradation of the site.

She said caravans and other vehicles which were not fully self contained may also attempt to use the site.

"There have been no definite parameters have been put in place to ensure that this site will be properly monitored and maintained," Ms White said.

Ms White said she had highlighted to the council an alternative concept used in the City of Geelong which allows recreational vehicles to park in parking bays for four hours.

"This will ensure they are still stopping in Ballarat and utilising the town," Ms White said. "Then they could drive down the road to one of the various free

camping zones."

There are four free camping zones within 25 kilometres of Ballarat, including one in Slaty Creek, Iron Furnace, Smythesdale Gardens Reserve and the Enfield State Park.

City of Ballarat general manager city strategy Natalie Reiter said the council held meetings with parties in favour of and against freedom camping last week.

"Officers are in the process of further modifying the freedom camp to reflect the positions of interested parties to provide councillors with full information to make their decision on the proposed trial," Ms Reiter said.

Both proposals are scheduled to be considered again at the August 13 council meeting.

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UNDER FIRE: Council blasted for taking business from Rockhampton's caravan park operators

Free parking 'robs van parks'

Michelle Gately

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RALPH Warner thinks Rockhampton Regional Council needs a "dumb ideas folder".

And the first thing that should be filed away is the decision to allow people to park their campervans and caravans in Kershaw Gardens overnight for free.

Last month, council voted to allow a free overnight stopover for recreational vehicles at the gardens and it appears many travellers have taken advantage of the opportunity.

In a letter to The Morning Bulletin yesterday, Ralph aired his concerns about how the move would affect local caravan park operators.

"How shameful that the Rockhampton council now allows such a camp-ground at an entrance to the Kershaw Gardens on a busy city by-way flaunting many of the strict rules and regulations that it demands of commercial operators," he wrote.

But Rockhampton Region Mayor Margaret Strelow said caravan parks were not the only businesses council needed to consider in allowing overnight parking.

"Councillors understand that there are many issues that come into play in the consideration of providing free camping within the city limits," she said.

"But it is not just one business type... that needs to be considered.

After operating a Rockhampton caravan park

for 32 years, Ralph has plenty of experience in the industry.

And he'd like to see more money spent locally by

people travelling through the region.

"What a kick in the guts this decision had been to accommodation and tourist operators," he wrote.

"How can councillors not feel some shame that they are robbing their business and highly regulated constituents of rightful revenue? What does this do to encourage further enterprise in tourism?"

"What respect does it give to the efforts that caravan park operators have individually and collectively given... as flag-bearers in tourism promotions throughout Australia and

overseas for this region and the state?"

Ralph said caravan park operators relied on offering accommodation for business viability. He said many caravan parks "would hardly ever break 32% (site occupancy) annually".

Cr Strelow argued that providing free parking enticed people to stay in the city when they would have bypassed it.

"Extra visitors into our region for an extra day has got to be a good thing."



“ Mayor Margaret Strelow: Extra visitors into our region for an extra day has got to be a good thing

HARRY'S VIEW: P27



HAVE YOUR SAY
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MIXED REVIEWS ON RV SITE

RACHEL
RILEY

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ABOUT six permits a day have been issued for the use of Tyto's RV free site over the past three months, with travellers indicating they had injected almost \$80,000 into the local economy.

But nearby residents said the benefits to local businesses is coming at a cost to rate-payers and local caravan park operators.

Figures given to the *Herbert River Express* show a total of 413 permits had been issued for use at the free site on Cooper Street from the opening of the trial until close of business on Monday.

Of those 413 permits, 81 were issued in June, 289 in July and 43 until August 4.

Figures for the total number of nights spent at the RV site show about 72 per cent of people chose to stay for the maximum 48-hour period.

A Hinchinbrook Shire Council spokeswoman said each permit holder was asked if they would have stayed in the region if the RV site was not here.

Out of 338 respondents, 276 said no, 36 said yes and 26 did not answer or were uncertain. Returned surveys also indicated the visitors had spent just under \$79,000 throughout the region.

But despite council's glowing figures, Cooper Street residents Scott and Bernice Tolcher say the site has been

plagued with problems and had become a real eyesore.

"We bought a place that

was nice and quiet 17 years ago with no prospect of anything being built there, but now within 50 metres of our home we've got a caravan park," Mr Tolcher said.

"It's the only place I have ever been to in Australia that

has one this close to residential houses.

"We loved our view of the wetlands before but this has just destroyed it."

The Tolchers say they have experienced a number of issues with the site including bright flood lights, non-compliant vans dumping waste, travellers using the wetlands

as a toilet and barking dogs.

They say they have also been forced to cover windows and doors at night to avoid prying eyes. But there is biggest concern is what impact the free site is having on regular tourism operators.

"I really do feel sorry for the caravan parks because I thought we were supposed to

be supporting local businesses," Mrs Tolcher said.

"If the council are good enough to take money off local people through rates, they should support them, not go into competition with them at the ratepayers expense."

Mayor Rodger Bow said he made several visits to the RV

site to meet with travellers and speak with concerned residents in the area.

"Any concerns raised regarding the RV site have been addressed by council officers and councillors," he said.

"As always with any trial there will inevitably be a few kinks to iron out.

"All in all the pilot trial is progressing well and this is re-

flected in the figures recorded at the Information Centre.

"Council, as planned, will revisit the RV site at the end of the trial and discuss the suitability of the site and the contribution these visitors have made to our Shire."

Have your say: Has your local business been positively or negatively impacted by the visitors staying at the Tyto's trial free RV Site?

Send us a Letter to the Editor to hre@news.com.au or PO Box 996 Ingham, QLD, 4850. Alternatively, you can contact us on Facebook. Just search the *Herbert River Express*.

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Scott Tolcher



**The view Cooper Street, Ingham
residents copped after a light at the RV
Free site was turned to face their
properties.** Picture: SUPPLIED

