



# Dump point to lure tourists

**USMAN AZAD**

BUNBURY City Council will build the city's first free waste dump point, to tap into the lucrative tourism market for caravan and campervan users.

The dump point will be built at one of Bunbury's most popular tourists spots, opposite the Koombana Bay Kiosk and the newly renovated public toilets.

The council supported the plan on Tuesday night, on the condition that Tourism WA will contribute to the cost.

Council staff will prepare a traffic plan because some councillors are worried about the safety of children at a nearby playground.

During the debate, Cr Karen Steele said she supported the proposal but not the location.

She said the plan could come at the cost of children's safety because caravans would not have enough space to turn around safely, forcing them to reverse in the carpark.

"It is a safety issue," she said. "It is not the right spot for a dump point."

Cr Murray Cook praised the idea, believing it would encourage

tourists to visit Bunbury.

"This actually puts us on the map," he said.

"Bunbury is not on the map. I love being on the map. It doesn't matter what it is."

There are at least three dump points in Bunbury but none are free and can only be used by guests of resorts and caravan parks.

There was no community consultation about the plan but the council was approached by Tourism WA in July.

There would be no extra capital costs because the sewerage system for the new toilets at Koombana

Bay could be modified.

"The opportunity to provide improved facilities to attract and re-

tain visitors at no capital outlay for the city is only feasible if the dump point can be installed in conjunction with the upgrade works to the Koombana Bay ablution block," senior building and structures officer Mark Robson said in his report to the council.

A dump point is believed to encourage tourists to stop and then spend time and money nearby.

Tourism WA estimates 939,000 visitors stayed in caravan parks and campgrounds in WA last year.



**Cr Murray Cook**



**NEW APPROACH:** Ideas for free sites for so-called "freedom campers" put to council

# New look at vanpackers

**MEGAN KINNIMENT**

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BYRON Shire Council may establish new camping sites where "vanpackers" and "grey nomads" could camp for free with basic toilet and shower facilities offered, within walking distance of the main town centre.

The idea is one of the options on the table at the next council meeting as the council debates how to manage the effects of street camping in the shire.

The council's governance manager, Ralph James is recommending the council partner with the North Coast Destination Network Freedom Traveller Taskforce to look into policy and management of the increase in "freedom camping" – where travellers without vehicles camp for free in parks and reserves; or "vanpackers" and grey nomads in recreational vehicles camp on the roadside.

"It's timely that the regional tourism organisation is preparing to conduct research into free camping and the opportunities and challenges," he said.

"What this may cost the council is unknown at this stage, but could be between \$5000 and \$10,000."

The issue is an ongoing problem for Byron Bay, Mr James notes, with vanpackers causing grief by camping illegally in residential streets with no public sanitary facilities.

Approaches to managing free camping ranges from zero tolerance (infringe-

ment based approach) to an accommodating approach

with the provision of basic amenities, through to active market attraction in inland areas looking to boost visitor numbers Mr James said.

Byron Shire Council falls into the zero-tolerance approach, he said, with Byron Shire issuing more than 500 fines and 200 formal warnings this year to date.

However, he notes: "Only 30% of fines to backpackers for such offences are recovered, as Federal legislation prohibits the Fines Recovery Unit from pursuing offenders once they have left Australia."

In contrast, Dunedin City Council in New Zealand has implemented a "welcoming" strategy where there are designated "freedom camping" sites for non self-contained vehicles they refer to as freedom campers.

"The NZ freedom camping visitor segment is recognised for its contribution to the local tourist economy and encouraged," he said.





**A NEW WAY: Only 30% of fines issued to vanpackers at Byron Bay are recovered by the council.**



# Back to basics in great outdoors

**Scott Podmore** has a look at an industry that has stood the test of time and is booming in our backyard

AT A farewell party for my friend on the eve of his year-long family caravanning adventure, I asked him whether he was concerned about taking his boys out of primary school for a year and hitting the road for a lap of Australia.

"Absolutely not," he said. "They'll learn more in the coming year than they will in the next five at primary school."

Two weeks later while watching the news on TV, there they were, the entire family knee-deep in the ocean somewhere along the east coast helping to save a beached humpback whale.

It was a goosebumps kind of

moment for me; something much more profound for them.

Another Aussie family who recently packed their life into a caravan for a year and hit the road are Nikki Harris and Matt Allan and their four children. Choosing to explore their "own backyard" rather than overseas was an easy decision, Nikki says.

"We felt a road trip holiday around Australia was easier and safer," Nikki says. "We allowed 12 months of travel on the same budget that would have achieved for us a quarter of the time overseas."

"For us, the experience was as much about the length of time together as a family as the

destinations we took in. We definitely followed the old adage: It's the journey, not the destination. We wanted our kids to know their own country.

"Matt's father had planned to do the trip when he retired years earlier and died prior to doing it. That was a big motivator for us to seize the day."

Seize the day, indeed, and the "Harris-Allans" are just one of a significantly growing number of families choosing the caravanning and camping lifestyle, according Australian Tourism Research findings.

The ATR research found the largest consumer group in the industry is made up of 35 to 49-

year-olds, who account for about 50 per cent of all travel in the sector. That figure is further backed by the Alliance Strategic Research finding that the key current user group was 35 to 49-year-olds, particularly families with children.

"It's about escapism, getting back to basics and family values," says Stuart Lamont, chief executive officer of the Caravan Industry Association of Australia.

Lamont and his fellow industry leaders are rightly rubbing their hands together at a time when the global travel market hasn't been without its challenges in recent years, namely a global financial crisis.

Caravanning and camping has always stood the test of time and economic challenges, but now it's surging.



"We're time poor and this type of holiday experience gives us the opportunity to discover more of our beautiful country and get our hands dirty," Lamont says. "It's affordable. You take your family away to Disneyland or Bali and you come back home with a credit card debt. You choose to go caravanning, and you have an asset to either resell or re-use."

Affordability aside, it's the non-material aspect that stays with you as a caravanner or camper, good and bad alike.

"Some of my fondest memories as a kid were some of the disasters at the time, too. It's that genuine, warts-and-all experience that can also make it so special.

"You know, going caravanning or camping and it's pouring, you're waterlogged and you think at the time 'I'm never doing this again', but they're the memories you have that you look at most fondly. They're bonding moments, lasting memories. Essentially, that's what you get out of caravanning and camping."

The stigma of grey nomads dominating the travel sector is gone as families continue to hit the road.

"The serious growth in the registrations is the family van range," Lamont explains.

"We're seeing anecdotal evidence that there are a lot more families going to the caravan and camping shows, and a lot more sales are in that sector."

The CIAA boss suggests another reason why it's boom time is simply due to the fact the type of holiday experience is "built into our culture".

"If you look back in time, a large percentage of the population of Australia has gone caravanning and or camping some time in their life, and many childhood memories are built on going away to stay in a park, in a caravan or on a riverbank somewhere with their family.

"For mums and dads, it's about instilling in their children some of those hardcore values they learnt, and this is an inexpensive way of re-creating some of those memories and passing on a legacy to the next generation."

In fact, the boom goes beyond the family market. While the typically popular grey nomad sector remains strong, "gramping" is the emerging trend as well as an increase in Asian visitor numbers.

"That inter-generational 'gramping' trend is certainly growing," Lamont says. "Grandparents are taking the opportunity to take their grandchildren on holiday.

"There's also a real opportunity now in the international market with Chinese visitors as we see them rapidly becoming our No.1 inbound. We haven't caught the wave of that just yet, but we're certainly starting to see it."

Dennis Werthenbach, chairman of Family Parks (one of the big caravan park chains along with others like BIG4 and Top Tourist Parks) says he believes the appeal is a lot to do with the "quality and value" being offered by most parks throughout Australia.

"I'm enormously impressed with the improvements and value offered for everything from the larger resort-style parks – with eateries, bars, water parks, jumping pillows and so on – through to our smaller and more humble locations with tranquil settings, near lakes, rivers and beaches," Werthenbach says.

"The value is really important, whether you have a tent, caravan or hire out a cabin. It's terrific value. Throw in the fact we have fantastic Australian-made recreational vehicles and products, and a serious manufacturing work force, and everybody wins."

Caravanning and camping has always been a big industry

in Australia. But it now accounts for a staggering \$7 billion of annual expenditure.

Caravan registrations have experienced a higher rate of increase than any other vehicle type in the past two years and research into the number of registered RVs or motorhomes in Australia shows a jump year-on-year of 5 per cent.

In 2013, the number of registered RVs in Australia was 528,869, rising from 502,025 the previous year. Of those registered vehicles, 474,783 are towed product (for example, caravans, camper trailers, tent trailers and other towed RVs) while more than 54,000 are motorhomes or campervans.

Lamont believes the love affair Australians have with caravanning and camping isn't about to finish any time soon.

"I was talking to someone about this the other day, and I love my job because I get to go around Australia, but once I could never understand why people would choose to do the great lap around Australia six or seven times or go back to the same place over and over," Lamont says.

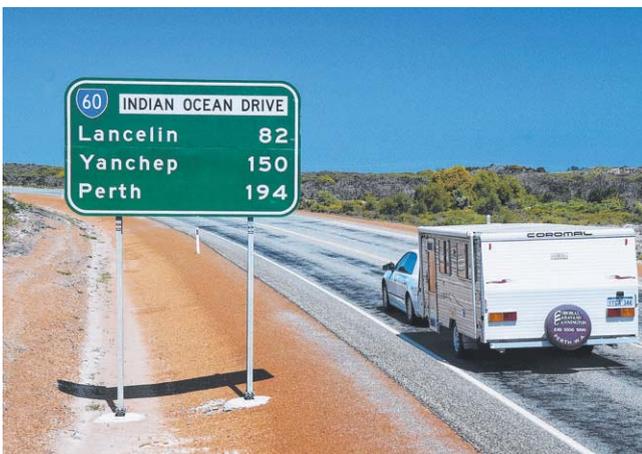
"Part of that is habit and routine, but you can go to the same place at a different time or be in a park with a different neighbour, different weather conditions and you get a very different experience.

"It's a really healthy time for caravanning and camping. The growth in the broader market is always going to be about what people desire – the creature comforts away from home, the raw experience of getting your hands dirty in the outdoors. People are craving that."

**More: [experiencecaravanningandcamping.com.au](http://experiencecaravanningandcamping.com.au)**



**ALL IN TOGETHER:** (clockwise from main) Enjoying Watsons Beach on the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia; a visitor hops in to the Berrara Beach Holiday Chalets on the NSW South Coast; setting up the tent at Rawnsley Park Station, Flinders Ranges, SA; on the road from Geraldton to Perth; and family holidays on the Clyde River in Nelligen, NSW.



**FAMILY FUN:**  
Camping in the Murray River National Park, Katarapko, South Australia (above); and a prime beachside spot at Horseshoe Bay, Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia (left).



## POPULARITY OF PARK LIFE

- There are more than 528,000 registered RV vehicles in Australia.
- This is the fastest growing vehicle type by registration.
- 85 per cent of Australians have stayed in a caravan holiday park at least once in their life.
- Over 67 million site nights were spent in the caravanning and camping sector annually in 2012.
- 90 per cent of all caravanners and campers in Australia are domestic.
- Expenditure by caravanners and campers is \$7 billion annually.

