



## Another side of free camping debate

Dear editor,

Last week I read an article in Bourke's *The Western Herald* (July 13, 2014) entitled 'Free camping not a concern for local caravan park operator' and sought permission from the editor to use information from that article for this letter to the editor.

The article was an interview with Peter Simmonds who owns both of Bourke's caravan parks and was written after the issue of free camping had been in the news in the neighbouring towns of Cunnamulla and Cobar.

Mr Simmonds said he sees free camping as motivation to provide the best facilities he can.

He said that in his experience there are always travellers who look for free camping, but it is not something that impacts greatly on his business.

"At this stage we know there are anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen down at May's Bend there and it is a beautiful little spot, you can't blame people for wanting to stop and camp there," Mr Simmonds told *The Western Herald*.

"If it ever got to the point where 80 were free camping and only 20 were staying here then we'd have to do something about that, but we are not overly concerned about it."

Mr Simmonds said in the article "the bulk

of travellers will mix free camping with visits to caravan parks" and he sees it as motivation to constantly improve his parks' facilities.

"You can't sit on your hands.

"We want to keep people coming and feel they are getting value for their dollar."

Mr Simmonds said so far this season the numbers through his parks are comparable to last year, while he's heard other centres have not been doing as well.

He said with record numbers at caravan and camping shows this year, more people are choosing to hit the road and the future is looking bright.

"They are definitely spreading out and finding those little towns and little spots and places to stay so you have to be front foot forward, keep it fresh and make sure you are doing the right thing and offering them value for their dollar," Mr Simmonds said.

I also raised the free camping subject with Bogan Shire councillor Hazel Griffiths who said that following complaints from Nyngan's two caravan park operators, the shire stopped freedom campers from using the local showground after it was realised those campers were using the showground power and not paying.

However she tells me that Bogan Shire has embraced freedom camping in all other areas.

Ian Setttee, Cobar

**Mr Simmonds said he sees free camping as motivation to provide the best facilities he can.**



# Business on RV patrol

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IN a bid to boost Ingham's official RV friendly tag, a newly refurbished tourist information sign has been erected at Frances Creek rest area to attract travellers to stay and play in the region for a few days.

Websites such as Free Camping Australia and phone applications directing users to low cost RV sites are making it more accessible than before for travellers looking to do it on the cheap.

Hinchinbrook Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism president Mary Brown said studies showing "people would not have otherwise stopped" had influenced the decision to revamp the old sign, which up until now had appeared "tired" and worn-down in state.

"The caravan markets are changing and they are a different beast now," Mrs Brown said.

"Modifying business models are the only way local caravan owners will stay afloat," she said.

"Caravan managers will be forced to reinvent themselves and rent their sites out for a lesser amount of money."

Re-evaluating the client base is a gateway for caravan park owners, who are facing a risk of a drop in commercial caravan usage.

"A lot of those self-contained people will not stay in caravan parks anyway," Mrs Brown said.

The provision and new signage approaches the issue with

prospective free camp sites in mind. "We worked closely with the council in the design stage to standardise the map so tourists are receiving the same consistent message," Mrs Brown said.

The new sign to accommodate the travellers is a glossier and cleaner version directing tourists to the Hinchinbrook Shire's best hot spots, including the lesser-known Wallaman Falls.

"This is the first step to diversification," Mrs Brown said.

The controversial six-month trial at Tyto Wetlands's RV free site has hit a nerve in the community-at-large in the past three months.

But some business owners say they are continuing to reap the benefits from cash-savvy RV campers.

Casa Pasta owners Jocelyn and Peter Teitzel said they had seen a "fairly high number of

customers" come through their Lannercost Street restaurant doors.

Mr Teitzel has quashed the idea free-campers have intentions to leech off the community.

"They don't want a free journey," Mr Teitzel said.

"They want to do things when they are here, they just don't sit in their caravans and do nothing."

Mr Teitzel said talk of relocating the free camp site further out of town was marked a senseless option.

"It cannot go from Tyto to the showgrounds because people walk into town and spend money because of the proximity," he said.

"At least 50 per cent of businesses in the town would have benefited from this, if not more."





# NEW IDEAS FOR MEMORIAL POOL

## Businessman calls for tourism future to save 'redundant' site

**Arthur Gorrie**

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LEST we forget. Barter St businessman Ross Caulfield wants to see Gympie's potentially disused Memorial Pool given new life as a major transit centre and RV facility.

Mr Caulfield says the area's memorial function must

be retained. But he says the pool's days seem numbered, as Gympie Regional Council pushes for a new \$20 million aquatic centre at Tozer Park.

Changing the site's purpose to a road tourism drawcard would give new life to the existing building, keep the memorial spirit alive and boost the Mary St dining and entertainment precinct.

"When the water park opens, the pool will be redundant and if we want to keep the memorial alive we will have to find a new use for it," he said.

Mr Caulfield said that new use could be a transit centre, attracting tourism dollars from up to 1000 caravans and recreational vehicles a day and helping guide tourists to other parts of the region.

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PHOTO: TANYA EASTERBY



# Memorial RV park plan

Tourism plan: 'Bring in the visitors and give new life to memorial'

## FROM PAGE 1

"MAYBE 1000 caravans and RVs go past Gympie every day on the highway and if they have to stop at Chatsworth they might not bother coming to town," Mr Caulfield said yesterday.

His vision is for dual bus lanes over a filled-in pool, renovation of the existing kiosk, showers and toilets and short-term parking for 14 or more RVs and caravans.

"If some want to stay the night, why not let them?" he said.

"If we park at Chatsworth, we'll cook our own dinner.

"But people stopped in the CBD are only a short stroll from coffee shops, restaurants and entertainment.

"It can't hurt the revitalisation of Mary St.

"I had to go to Tiaro recently and we stopped and had a bite to eat and every second vehicle was a caravan that Sunday morning.

"They'll soon find Gympie's user-friendly and if they come into the car park now, they'll find only three or four parks.

"If they turn up about 5pm, why not let them sleep in their self-contained vans for nothing.

"They're not going to do anyone any harm and they will eat somewhere while they are here.

"The toilets and showers would need to be upgraded and there is no reason people could not pay, coin in the slot, to have a hot shower.

"A dump point and water

facilities are also needed.

"Buses, motorhomes and caravans all really need drive-through parking.

"If they turn in near the highway underpass, they could drive in and angle-park on the Nelson Reserve side of the pool.

"When they leave they could drive straight out into the bus lanes," he said.

Drive-through parking could be available in the existing parking areas.

"The park would provide attractive surroundings, public barbecues and a play area for kids," he said. "It's got to help Mary St."

Mr Caulfield developed his vision for the pool area after reading about the aquatic centre, for which the council has now adopted a \$1.1 million design tender.

**“They're not going to do any harm and they will eat while they are here.”**

— Ross Caulfield



**VISION:** Ross Caulfield has drafted a proposal for Gympie Memorial Pool to be changed into a bus/recreational vehicle interchange centre.

PHOTO: PATRICK WOODS



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## Luring the roadies

**E**CONOMIC diversification is incredibly vital to any community's long term growth and it's not rocket science that many are pushing for tourism to be one of the frontrunners next to our cane industry. I see diversification in Hinchinbrook Shire Council's RV parking site, a vision that they have had since 2003. It's now 11 years later that this project was aired and now it finally has legs - we're halfway through a trial. After several chinwags with various people around town, it's working and in a big way.

People are taking the initiative and using it, a little competition doesn't hurt anyone and remember, this is a trial and with a lot of people commenting about how Tyto Wetland is a "white elephant" well, I think it's time to get over that. We need to think of ways to best use the facility. The Tyto-bashing is getting a bit, boring, dull, yawn. It's there now, you can't bulldoze it down. Time to move on. This RV trial is really a great spot for people to enjoy the surroundings and it's not far from town. And if you disagree, well where can they go? Where's a good spot? By excluding any market, you exclude them from town, they will just drive on through and not spend a cent. We all complain how they pass us by and we look at ways to capturing them. These RV campers are a pretty savvy bunch and there is a vast network of them — it's not like they are a bunch of smelly hippies who eat endless amount of tinned food. Wouldn't it be in our best interest to have the attitude of being RV friendly? Let's give our visitors an experience that they can't forget and are wanting even more.



# Picture perfect Urunga

EVERYONE knows Urunga is one very special spot – so it's only fitting that the North Coast Holiday Park has been officially feted as one of the best in the land.

That acknowledgement has vindicated the effort and delighted the staff at the park.

The holiday park at Urunga Heads won the top award for excellence at the Caravan and Camping Industry Association & Manufactured Housing Industry Association's 'Annual Awards of Excellence' in the Hunter Valley last week.

Their win came in the category of Best Holiday Park North Coast (100 sites or less) in a night that celebrated the best of the best in the caravan and camping industry across the State.

NSW Crown Holiday Parks Trust CEO Steve Edmonds said the relationship of the trust with the local council and chamber of commerce has been a great success at Urunga and one that the trust continues to roll out in local communities.

"This award also demonstrates the ongoing commitment that the park's managers, Shane and Debbie Dunlop and their team at Urunga Heads have towards providing the best possible experience for guests," Mr Edmonds said.

"The team at Urunga Heads always go the extra mile to ensure park guests are taken care of so it's no surprise that they have received this top industry accolade.

"The caravan and camping holiday is part of the Australian way of life and the team at Urunga Heads is to be congratulated for providing a first class holiday destination that families can enjoy for many years to come."

The Urunga Heads park was also a finalist in the 2012 Corporate Trust Managers Award and received a Silver Gumnut Award in recognition of their commitment to sustainable business practices.

The Gumnut Awards is a progressive rating scheme for parks, which recognise demonstrated commitment to sustainable environmental and socially responsible management.

The Urunga Heads park was also nominated for the 2012 Awards of Excellence in the Best 3.5-4 Star North Coast Park.

Bellingen Shire mayor Mark Troy was chuffed by the park's success.

"This is a fantastic achievement and serves to highlight just how fortunate we are

to have a tourist operation of such a high standard right here in the Bellingen Shire."

Park manager Shane said he was happy to receive the award as his wife Debbie and his staff have a lot of pride in the facility and consistently work hard to keep the amenity at its best.

"Our guests are always our priority," Shane said.

"We have also been working in conjunction with the Urunga Chamber of Commerce to reinvigorate the foreshore reserve, removing an aged playground and opening the area up for public use which is enjoyed by hundreds of people on a weekly basis.

"New barbecue facilities, a brand new playground and exercise equipment for park guests and the public to enjoy have all been

installed which are wildly popular."

Urunga Mylestom Chamber of Commerce president Steve Allan said this award was recognition for the fantastic team behind Shane and Debbie.

"Chamber has worked closely with Urunga Heads to build on the beautiful, natural assets of the twin river estuary," Steve said. "As the park is situated between the town centre and the famous Urunga Boardwalk, it really is our 'City to Surf' connection and I'm delighted to see this award for excellence being presented to such a prominent Urunga facility.

"The Urunga Heads Park is a true destination which attracts many return visitors; my congratulations to the entire team!"

\*North Coast Holiday Parks Urunga Heads has 21 cabins and 96 short-term caravan and camping sites. It is located in the heart of Urunga village, on the edge of the Urunga lagoon.



L-R: North Coast Holiday Park operations manager Brad Shiels, Urunga Mylestom Chamber of Commerce president Steve Allen, Urunga Heads Park managers Shane and Debbie Dunlop and Bellingen Shire mayor Mark Troy.



## Talk of the town

We have been travelling throughout this great land of Australia now for three years in our fully self contained motorhome and are currently travelling up the east coast of Queensland before once again heading west to the outback areas.

As we travel we have need for supply of supermarkets and takeaway foods, fuel, LPG gas, clothing, presents for children and grandchildren, dining out, tourist activities, vehicle servicing, medical services and pharmaceutical supplies.

The full-time travelling RV grapevine has, for a long time, labelled Bowen as an RV unfriendly town that tries to force RV users into caravan parks and "cracked down" on freedom campers. Some of the RV travelling community do not need caravan parks and will not be forced into high priced parks by some greedy caravan park operators who manipulate regional councils.

As we approached the Bowen local government area, we ensured we were fully provisioned and fuelled up so that we would not have the need to spend any money at any business in your area and we bypassed your town today.

We have seen in social media that Bowen is seeking the business dollars from the RV community and offering incentives to visit the town, but still will not provide freedom camping sites.

Sorry folks, we will not be herded into high priced caravan parks that provide services that we do not need — we will continue to bypass your town and not spend any money in your region.

Once you start to provide freedom camping near your town, then the travelling RV community will start to patronise the businesses in your area.

The caravan parks may not benefit from this, but the council should realise that there are a lot more businesses in a town than just caravan parks.

**Ron and Joan Read  
Travellers**



## City to make Geraldton 'recreational vehicle friendly'

The City of Greater Geraldton is preparing a draft strategy aimed at making Geraldton "recreational vehicle friendly".

The draft strategy was unveiled at last night's city council agenda forum. An officer's report notes that as an RV destination, Western Australia ranks low among Aus-

tralian States, and Geraldton rates relatively low among WA destinations. It adds that Geraldton is missing out on substantial numbers of visitors, along with the economic benefits brought by them.

"Capturing just those visitors who currently bypass our city could realistically increase Geraldton's total overnight stays by 50

per cent or more, boosting the local economy by an estimated \$9.4 million a year," the report says.

The report recommends a three-stage process to boost the City's RV-friendly status.

Firstly, providing supplemental services in line with the expectations of RV travellers.

Secondly, providing additional "dump points" in Walkaway and Mullewa and possibly at the Francis Street carpark.

And thirdly, designing and constructing information bays at all entrances to Geraldton to provide information for RV travellers.



# Camper anger

## Ratepayers footing bill: Park owner

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A NUMBER of caravan park owners are becoming concerned that Cassowary Coast ratepayers appear to be footing the bill for some travelling caravans and recreational vehicles.

The debate over opening Pease

Park in Innisfail once a year to grey nomads was sparked by Division 4 councillor Mark Nolan after he was approached by holiday-maker Del Connelly suggesting that the Cassowary Coast could be more RV friendly.

Kay Kitchen from Kurrimine Beach Holiday Park sent a letter to councillors addressing a number of is-

sues regarding rates and noncompliant holiday makers.

"We have had some 24 mostly smallish motor homes, obviously from a caravan club of some sort, camped at the Kurrimine Beach Community Hall over the weekend," she said.

"I have rung around our local caravan parks and there are at least seven caravan parks that could have accommodated all of these noncomplying campers in the one park.

"There was even enough room to accommodate them at the Kurrimine Beach Council Caravan Park.

"This is a flagrant breach of council regulations.

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