



RV PARK FOR ESS LAGOON?

IAN LEWIS

ESS Lagoon could soon be used as stop over point for owners of recreation vehicles travelling through the district, with the blessing of the Glenelg Shire Council.

The council has applied to the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) to be recognised as an RV friendly town in a bid to attract some of the 66,000 CMCA members who travel throughout Australia in motorhomes, campervans and caravans each year.

Tents are not included.

The CMCA also provided a subsidy to the shire for a dump point at the Island Park Caravan Park at Island Park.

The council was told at its April meeting that the caravan and camping market had evolved considerably over recent years and the availability of new self-contained RVs and the increased domestic travel of 'baby-boomers' had led to a change in the traditional caravan and camping market.

"RV users were self-contained, self-sufficient and did not require external toilet, shower and barbecue facilities," the report said.

"Therefore, opening our shire to RV tourists will not compete with existing caravan parks (including the council's lease on Island Park Caravan Park) and only encourage growth in tourism for Glenelg Shire.

"This will have significant economic impact, as the average spend of RV tourists is \$500 a week (according to CMCA's research paper titled 'The Self-Contained Recreational Vehicle Market 2010 and beyond')."

The research found that 97 per cent of RV tourists spent money when they stop over in a town. It included:

- Fuel \$210;
- Living expenses such as groceries and medicines \$160;
- Repairs and maintenance \$25;
- Tourism activities \$51; and
- Other \$4

"An RV friendly town (RVFT) is one that has satisfied a set of guidelines to ensure they provide a certain amount of amenities, and a certain level of

services for these travellers, whether in small or large vehicles ranging from 5m to 19.5m in length.

"When RV tourists enter a town displaying the RVFT sign, they know they will be welcome, certain services will be provided for them that may not be available in other centres, and they will have access to a safe place to stay overnight, and possibly for a longer period. For a town to be appointed to the program the set of guidelines that must be met are:

Essential:

- Provision of appropriate parking for RVs of all sizes within the town centre (within a kilometre of the post office), with access to a general shopping area for groceries and fresh produce. This parking is required to be clearly signposted for 'RV Parking Only';
- Provision of short term, low cost

overnight parking (24/48 hours) for self-contained RVs, as close as possible to the CBD (no more than 5kms from the Post Office);

- Access to potable water for refilling fresh water tanks; and
- Access to a free dump point at an appropriate location.

Desirable:

- Provision of long term parking for self-contained RVs;
- Access to medical facilities or an appropriate emergency service;

- Access to a pharmacy or a procedure to obtain pharmaceutical products;
- Visitor Information Centre (VIC) with appropriate parking
- VIC to provide a town map showing essential facilities, such as short and long term parking areas, dump point and potable water; and
- RVFT signs to be erected within

the town precinct – these are provided free of charge by the CMCA upon appointment to the program.

CMCA also looks at the general attitude of the council and the business people; after all it is called the RV friendly town program.

The council report went on to say the CMCA believed that RV travellers should have access to an appropriate accommodation mix, such as low cost and commercial options.

"This is supported by a growing trend of RV travellers seeking free camping areas, with one of the frequently asked questions at our Visitor Information Centres 'where are the free camping spots?'"

"There are a limited number of existing free camping areas within the Glenelg Shire, but these are rural or bush locations. A number of RVs already

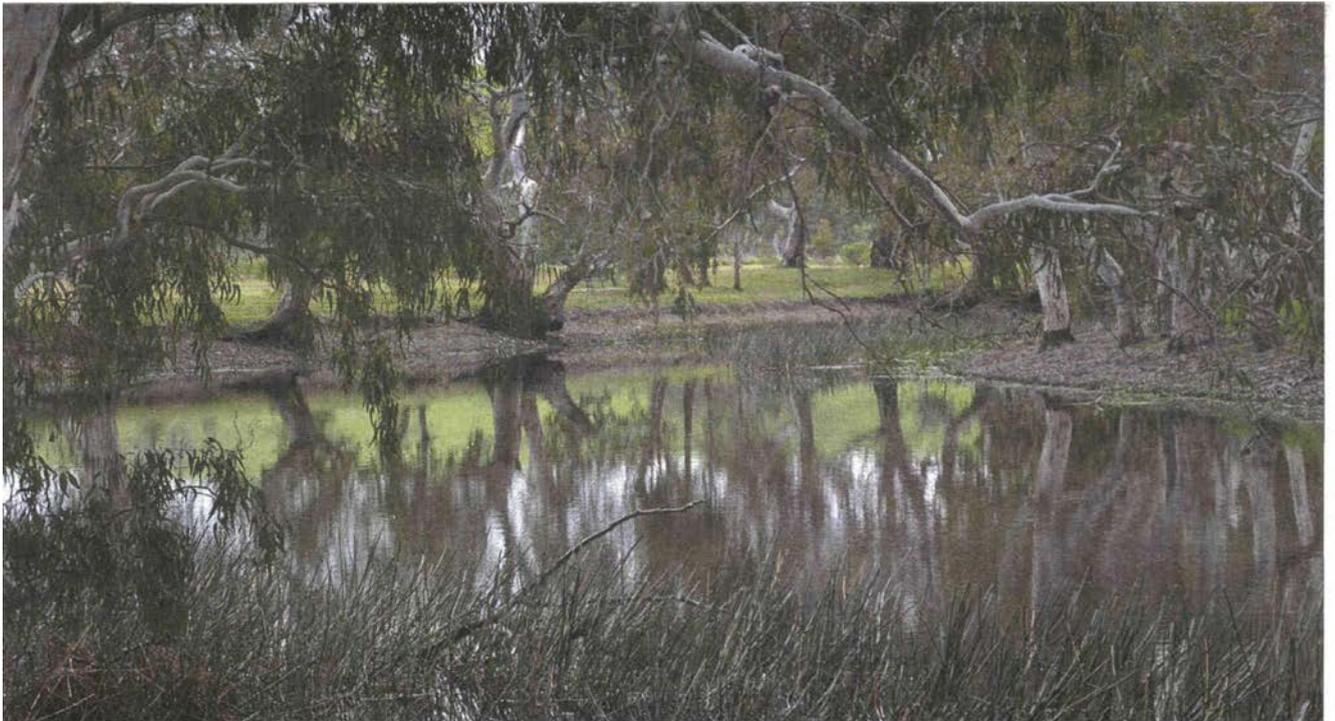
utilise the Henty Park area in Portland and the Ess Lagoon area in Casterton for overnight parking, despite neither being designated free campsites.

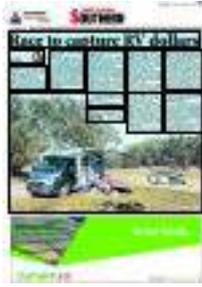
"The recognition of RVFTs within the Glenelg Shire would encourage tourists to "stay another day" and build on the economic benefits of tourism. A decision not to allow free camping spots could be an opportunity lost for the Glenelg Shire, with CMCA research indicating that their members spend an average of \$572 per week



when travelling, but travellers are likely to move on if they cannot secure a suitable site," the report said.

The council decided at its August meeting to apply to the CMAC to recognise Casterton as an RV friendly town.





Race to capture RV dollars

By SHAN
GOODWIN



FORGET log cabins and calf feeding, farmers looking to dip a toe in the tourism game should set their sights on the recreational vehicle (RV) traveller.

The low Australian dollar has fuelled what was already Australia's fastest growing tourism sector, the motorhome and caravan operator, and the peace and quiet,

unique geography and community spirit of country towns is drawing them inland.

While local governments across NSW are scrambling to make themselves RV friendly via rest areas for free overnight camping and parking for access to central business districts, tourism experts say working properties present an attractive "stopover" option.

Year-to-date RV production in Australia is tracking eight per cent higher than 2014, which itself was the second highest annual production in two decades.

A whopping 21,500-plus RVs will come off the factory line this year, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures.

The Australian Caravan Industry Association of Australia says there has been a 34 per cent increase in registrations of RVs since 2008.

Chief executive officer Stuart Lamont said about 90pc of all visitor nights in the sector were spent in regional Australia, so RV travellers were pumping "tremendous wealth into the economies of regional communities".

Still, the opportunity to attract RV travellers was enormous and largely untapped in the bush, he said.

"The advantage country towns have is the ability to engender strong parochialism for their community," he said.

"The establishment of a tourism-minded culture

where every retailer and service provider in the community is a tourism ambassador goes a long way to wel-

coming well-connected travelling groups such as the RV market."

Australia's largest RV retailer Australian Motorhomes marketing manager Mat Perks, Newcastle, said interestingly, primary producers themselves, both retired and still working, were big RV users.

As such, Australian Motorhomes, which sells big names in the game like Winnebago, Avida and Sunliner, has exhibited at Gunnedah's AgQuip for the past 15 years.

Primary producers have connections to the land and want to see agriculture in operation in other parts of the country, he said.

The easy going way of life and camaraderie also fits well with the farmer personality, he said.

Not everybody is convinced the RV juggernaut is a boon for country towns, however, with the "high impact but low yield" and "freeloading" tag often directed their way.

Academic Rod Caldicott, from Southern Cross University's School of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Lismore, argues that concept is off the mark.

"More and more small towns and agritourism ventures are recognising

this cake is getting bigger and there is plenty to go around and looking for ways to make their product more attractive to this market in order to secure a bigger slice," he said.

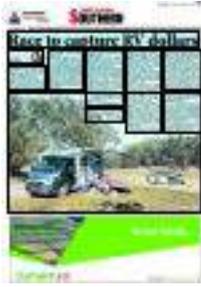
"Research indicates that 34pc of RV users utilise caravan parks only, just 16pc utilise free camping only and the other 50pc swing between the two.

"That 16pc still have the same tourist dollars to distribute in a small town. They make the conscious decision to do it in different ways – dining out, buying souvenirs, taking a local farm tour or making a donation to the rural fire brigade."

Mr Caldicott said the huge opportunity for farmers to tap into the RV market was being limited in NSW by outdated legislation.

"In NSW, if you have two or more RVs on a site for three or more days, you must meet the same compliance requirements as a commercial caravan park, which is cost prohibitive for most property owners looking to supplement traditional farm incomes via tourism," he said.

"In Queensland and Western Australia, there has been the recognition of the need for reforms to allow RV camping on farms."





Off the beaten track

RV tourists a potential farm income

By SHAN GOODWIN



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Recreational vehicle holidays are now the fastest growing tourism sector in Australia. This Trakkaway 700 motorhome and its owners take in the atmosphere of western NSW at Bourke. Photo: Simon Bayliss.