

Council

RV PARKING AREA ON LOT 250 MEMORIAL ROAD
MOUNT BARKER

Mount Barker Caravan Park – Paper for Consideration

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SHIRE OF PLANTAGENET

PAPER FOR CONSIDERATION

COMMERCIAL / NON-COMMERCIAL CARAVAN FACILITIES

Prelim

- The Drive Market is the single most important contributor to the Shire of Plantagenet tourism economy.
- Development in the size of RVs, and the inclusion of modern conveniences, has increase the number of visitors choosing self-contained RVs as a driving option.
- This growth has seen a greater use of non-commercial camping sites such as rest areas, campgrounds and Council showgrounds in some regions. Sanctioned and unsanctioned
- In 2019 there were approximately 245,000 RV uses (motor homes, caravans and campervans) on the road; by 2025 that number is expected to increase by 100%.⁴ as the *Baby Boomers* generation commences retirement travel. Australia wide
- Caravan manufacturers are meeting customer demands by supplying pop-up to small range caravans with toilet shower facilities and grey/black water capture. Selling point being that the caravan is now considered "Self-Contained"
- It is estimated that over the next 12 years, up to 4 million Baby Boomers will retire: 1/6 of the population.

History

Historically, free camping sites were created with no infrastructure provided, they were set up as 24 hour overnight stays, mainly roadside but also included the great spot down by the creek, or the out of the way dirt road into the bush. They provided a rest opportunity from driver related fatigue, offered a nice view with a spectacular sunset or simply were a chance to get away from the general travelling traffic.

Emerging traveler needs led to a change in trends, travelers were setting themselves up to make the most of free camping areas, States and local councils were pressured into providing free camping options, infrastructure demands increased, toilets were installed, some sites provided shower facilities and BBQ's. These sites became social hubs with many travelers meeting at pre-determined spots along the road daily to nurture their growing friendships over a wine or bikkies and cheese.

Caravan manufacturers realizing these trends build caravans with specific options that allowed the traveler to stay out in the wilderness and have less need to book into a caravan park. Caravan park site prices increased or offered little incentive for travelers to choose the local caravan park over the grass by the lake.

In many cases free camping areas became to preferred option, much to the detriment of the commercial caravan park operation down the road.

The Plantagenet Shire differs from no other region within Australia where the provision of "free camping" opportunities within council boundaries cause local and state concerns.

The issue that continues to divide councils, community and commercial enterprises is when a free camping site directly competes with or impacts upon commercial operators such as caravan parks or tourist villages.

To the commercial operators who have invested huge amounts of money in delivering caravan park services into a town along with personal and emotional costs, often impacting on family and the wellbeing of family members this "free loading" has to be stopped. Caravan Parks Associations continue to lobby local and state governments to address the issue and either eliminate all free camping opportunities within a certain kilometer range of a town center or provide a facility that at least offers management and control mechanisms to administer the facility. A requirement described under the State of WA Local Governments Act.

Some Tourist/Drive Associations aggressively lobby town councils to provide these facilities, often for free or at a discounted site price. Some associations go as far as "blacklisting" or threaten towns that choose not to be a part of a particular brand.

Councils (Councillor's) often feel pressured from many angles and all too often through no fault of their own fail to fully address the issue(s). The same Councillors must support the very industries within the region that contribute not only to the region's economic revenue base, but also add to the attraction and vibrancy of a region. The use of rate payer's money, of which a caravan park operator contributes to significantly must be used in an open and transparent way and not be in open competition to a commercial enterprise. Caravan Park Parks are a local business, contribute to the local rates required by local council and like all rate payers demand that the funds raised through rates are spent in a fair and transparent manner.

The local caravan park is of no cost to the local ratepayer, rates increase dependent when turnover increases and land values increase.

The Shire of Plantagenet Opportunity

It is a fact that "free camping" only applies to those who stay at such a site, it is definitely not free to the local council who incurs considerable cost to maintain such a site with rubbish removal, infrastructure maintenance costs and public liability issues. There is also a social cost for the local resident who must contend with the influx of the free campers utilizing a community asset and making that area unusable to the residents.

The Plantagenet Region is ideally located at the "crossroads" to everywhere in the great southern and beyond. By offering a wide variety of fulfilling experiences to each and every visitor we will not only increase the reputation and visitor satisfaction rate, we will also increase the length of stay and therefore an increase in the tourism dollar into the shire.

Currently local council have the power to determine policy and bylaws that can control the free camping opportunities. Council bylaws can determine:

1. If free camping is to be permitted within a town or council jurisdiction.
2. If a fee will apply and how much.
3. Determination of the site and location within town(s).
4. The time limit or length of stay allowed at any one time.
5. What services will be provided by council and at what cost, i.e. caretaker on site, rubbish removal, site maintenance etc.

Council should consider the legal implications that the current site has regarding the WA Local Government Act 1995

3.18 Performing Executive Functions Items B and C
Caravan Park and Camping Grounds Act 1995
Division 2 Duties of Licence holders
13 Duties of Licence holders
Item 1
Division 4 Local Government Operated Facilities
Item 15 1 and 2 References to Sections 13 and 31

Policy or Position

Does the Shire of Plantagenet have a policy/position relating to non-commercial caravan/camping sites?

Considerations for policy should cover:

- commercial VS consumer needs
- infrastructure and maintenance needs, costs and revenue recovery strategies
- risk, safety and public liability implications
- signage
- visitor information and technology applications
- Education, marketing and promotions.

User Pays.

One strategy to consider is to offer no free low cost camping within a prescribed number of kilometers from a regional town center, but to provide an area with a set number of days stay for a fixed amount of dollars charged, based on powered or non-powered site.

This concept tends to be more readily accepted by the commercial sector, tends to be "less confronting" to the public and still allows for retail and other suppliers to access revenue from the traveler.

If an area is provided then it comes with several related costs, these costs need to be offset. Put simply; charge a fee. National Parks charge a fee, tour attractions charge a fee; today most travelers expect to have to pay something to enjoy something.