

Submission  
No 3

## INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

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To whom it may concern

my wife and I usually travel around Australia for about nine months of each year (chasing the sun). Our home base is Nth East Victoria and we travel in a 9.1 metre converted bus which is fully self contained with fresh water tanks, waste water disposal tanks, solar panels and storage batteries. We tow an enclosed trailer housing a small 4WD vehicle which becomes our “get around” car when we stop to explore. The total length of the rig is about 15.5 metres. Off and on we have been traveling around this country for about eight years. A large part of our travels have been and will continue to be in NSW but as you know OZ is a big place and there is lots more to see. You might call us typical grey nomads.

I recently made a submission to the Queensland Drive Strategy and I believe that much of what I wrote is relevant to your Inquiry. My comments are primarily related to tourists traveling by road in regional areas. The issues that need to be looked at are nation wide and not isolated to NSW. I thought the QLD report was well structured and highlighted many of the issues facing various authorities as well as having regard for the needs and wants of people traveling in mobile accommodation. (MA)

Let me say that I think many of the problems are in fact caused by the travelers themselves but our experience over the years indicates that there are still political, bureaucratic and commercial self interest obstacles blocking an enjoyable longer term stay in many towns around Australia.

It seems to me that the seven objectives being discussed in the Queensland report can all be linked back to a central point and that is

**“The form and configuration of the Mobile Accomodation”.**

Each objective should be looked at only after establishing the type of MA. Mobile accommodation to me means any form of mobile configuration which is used by its occupants to eat in and sleep in whilst traveling. It can be a basic “backpacker” van, a caravan, a 5<sup>th</sup> wheeler or a motorhome. Many Government authorities, be they Local, State or Federal, try to deal with the problems associated with the increasing number of people in mobile accommodation as if they are all one group. The fact is that there is a basic structure to differentiate MA within the target market and in my view it can be broken down into three groups.

- (1) Mobile accommodation in which the occupants don't give a damn about where they stay, how long they stay, noise pollution, littering or waste water pollution.
- (2) Mobile accommodation which is **NOT** self contained where the occupants rely on external providers for toilet facilities, ablution blocks, rubbish bins and in most cases a source of 240v power. Generally these people will have no fixed means of collecting and retaining waste water. The people in these forms of mobile accommodation have **chosen to be NOT** self contained for two reasons
  - a. **Size of vehicle they have chosen limits the onboard facilities**
  - b. **The cost of a true self contained vehicle is not within their budget**

(3) Mobile accommodation which is legitimately self contained and allows the occupants to rest or stop for a specific period of time without having to rely on any external services. They will have a fixed means of collecting and retaining waste water, the ability to store rubbish, and in many cases solar systems to provide power. The people in these forms of mobile accommodation have **chosen to BE** self contained for a number of reasons

- a. **Personal comfort – generally a larger configuration**
- b. **Personal hygiene – onboard toilet, bathroom and washing facilities**
- c. **Ability to park/rest responsibly in areas where there are no facilities provided**

If it is accepted that there are three groups of people in the mobile accommodation target market as described above then it should be possible to come up with a solution for each group. I believe that the third group, self contained mobile accommodation (SCMA), represent at least 30% of the total target market and are by far the easiest to accommodate. People in legitimate SCMA do not require any facilities or infrastructure other than a relatively flat piece of ground to park the vehicle. A source of potable water, waste water dump point and a mini skip for rubbish would be helpful but not necessary. ***If Shires/Councils could accommodate 30% or more of the market in a low maintenance, minimal infrastructure site then it must relieve the pressure for sites to accommodate the other two groups.*** One of the problems that I believe many Shires/Councils encounter is that when they try to provide park/rest areas with ablution blocks and other facilities, various local, State and Federal laws and regulations create obstacles. It seems to me that provision of a flat piece of ground with no facilities would not throw up as many obstacles.

*There are two issues that must be resolved for SCMA sites to work effectively.*

### **Self Containment System**

Most of the organisations representing people traveling in Mobile Accommodation (MA) agree that it should be possible for MA's that meet a minimum level of self containment to be offered areas for resting and/or stopping whilst those that do not meet a minimum standard would need to find areas that cater for their requirements. What is also apparent is that those same organisations seem to all have different ideas as to what Self Containment means. A National scheme which satisfies the various Government agencies and local Authorities and applies to MA's across all of Australia should be devised and implemented. The CMCA Leave No Trace scheme has now been strengthened but still needs some work. The problem for a lot of the RV clubs is a large number of their membership could not satisfy the requirements of a "real" self containment scheme. The CMCA should be congratulated on taking a tougher stance.

There are at least two recommendations that I would make

- (1) RV manufacturers should be required to include grey water tanks in all vehicles that have built in plumbing. i.e. grey water cannot be plumbed directly to ground.
- (2) A meaningful self containment scheme requiring participating vehicles to have containment mechanisms to satisfy a fixed minimum stay time should be developed.

### **Meeting consumer needs– to better understand what it is that today's tourism consumer is looking for to improve the travelling and holiday experience.**

If you were to ask me what is top of the list in improving my traveling and holiday experience I would tell you that I want

**“safe, legal, compliant, low cost no frills accommodation OPTIONS”**

I don't want FREE because I expect to pay. Being in a true self contained vehicle I don't need anything other than somewhere to park/rest/camp overnight or longer so that I can explore and patronise the particular town or region. Infrastructure such as waste disposal points and access to potable water are obviously important but they can be managed and planned as part of the journey.

**Road quality, safety and maintenance– to ensure visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience whilst travelling to their destination on the state's efficient and resilient road network.**

Road safety, quality and maintenance will always be a problem in our ever changing landscape and although there are roads in various parts of NSW that could do with some improvements I understand that it is a constant work in progress.

**Signage**

Signage throughout Australia is in my opinion a disgrace. A National policy on wording should be put in place to encourage consistent traveling behaviour. One set of rules and wordings would not make the Sign maker companies happy but I am positive that taxpayers and rate payers would be much better off.

As citizens we are entitled to be made aware of exactly what the lawmakers and bureaucrats mean when they put up a sign. Inadequate, confusing and misleading signage is one of the major contributors to problems caused by travelers. We all know that there are some people who will always believe that rules and signs apply to everyone else except them. Unfortunately that sort of person will continue to cause problems for all of the other honest law abiding citizens. Having said that what is meant by a sign indicating

1. **No camping** – does that mean no parking, does it mean in front of the sign or behind the sign, under whose authority, does it mean setting up your tent. What about sleeping in my RV overnight. Is that different from sleeping in my normal car.
2. **Parking** - normal street parking will more often than not indicate some time periods or time limits but others just indicate parking. Is it only daylight hours or can it be overnight. Does camping mean parking.
3. **Rest** – We have all seen the signs telling us to rest and don't drive drowsy. You know the ones like “Rest or R.I.P.” Problem is where and if we do stop and rest, then what is resting. Do they mean having a sleep which could then be said to be camping. So one regulator tells us to rest but another regulator tells us to make sure you don't rest/sleep in a no camping area.
4. **Fines** – I am a “rules” person and also believe that contravention should be dealt with firm policing and penalties. Saw a sign the other day which displayed "No camping - Penalties of up to 20 units may apply". That may be cheaper than the Caravan Park. Bureaucracies don't want to tell you what a "unit" is because then they can simply change the value without having to change the sign. They expect us to know what a unit is and that is has a monetary value. Heavy penalties clearly displayed will deter most RV travelers from not complying.

There are numerous examples of signage which in a Court of Law could be challenged and shown to be totally useless. If we are to be expected to comply with rules and regulations then we have a right to demand clear and precise signage.

**Roadside infrastructure– to ensure roadside infrastructure enhances the drive tourism experience through the provision of adequate, high quality and appropriately located infrastructure which meets the needs and expectations of the consumer.**

Some of the new roadside infrastructure that we have seen in NSW is fantastic and it would be nice if that type of facility was more widespread. Our experience is that they are often few and far between and in many cases do not accommodate modern larger configurations.

**Separate sites/rest areas for self contained vehicles over a certain length may be one solution.** There is no need to provide any services as we have them onboard and in my view the provision of services such as toilet blocks will only attract those who need them i.e. smaller vehicles and configurations. Sites for smaller vehicles could provide toilet facilities. Other services such as potable water and power could be provided on a “user pays” basis. I understand that in some parts of Europe “user pay” service sites are available for travelers to top up with power and water if they do not have their own facilities.

**Accommodation and facilities– to provide a range of accommodation options to meet the needs and expectations of consumers.**

The key word in this statement is “range”. Just as an incoming tourist can choose accommodation from 2 star to 5 star I believe that people in MA should be able to choose their standard of accommodation. We traveled north last year as in previous years and although there are some great low cost no frills sites they are generally some distance from the larger towns and cities. Many of the larger regional cities are regarded by travelers as RV unfriendly. If you want to stay in close proximity to these areas you must stay in a Caravan Park or move on. This is despite the fact that during the peak season the Caravan Parks are generally fully booked and very few, if any, offer a low cost no frills option. Overflow options are often available but not made available due to local red tape and over zealous bureaucracies. Hundreds of people bypass these so called RV unfriendly regions and spend their money elsewhere. This situation can be frustrating because many travelers including ourselves from time to time like to have a “city fix” and do some serious shopping and sight seeing. In my view there are many opportunities for delivering accommodation options however bureaucratic rules and regulations seem to stifle many of these options. Different compliance requirements from State to State and one Shire/Council to the next are the main impediment to solving the problems. Many of the rules and regulations were enshrined when MA was an EH Holden towing a 14ft caravan with only a bed. Pressure from Caravan Park owners to shut down alternative accommodation options is generally based on some of the onerous R&Rs that they are required to meet. This often allows the local shire/council to take the easy way out by simply shutting down the Caravan Park alternative. There are many stakeholders all with a different agenda but at the end of the day we all want similar outcomes.

- (1) Governments at all levels want to encourage people to travel and explore this great country and leave some money in the various communities along the way.
- (2) MA industry participants want to be able to provide a quality product in a commercially competitive manner.
- (3) People in MA simply want safe, clean and legal accommodation options with the ability to choose the standard based on their own circumstances.

Some points to consider

- Accommodation providers be encouraged to offer a range of options. One of these options would be a product to suit Self Contained vehicles ONLY. The requirements for this sort of option should be less onerous which translates to a lower site fee.
- Caravan Parks rarely offer unpowered sites, user pay ablution blocks and continue to promote facilities such as camp kitchens, playgrounds and swimming pools. This sort of package may well suit a young family but I don't see a lot of older travelers leaping about on swings and slides and bouncing on air pillows.
- As we know power and water are valuable resources and in this era of green responsibility we are all encouraged to reduce electricity consumption and conserve water. Accommodation facilities that don't offer an unpowered option to people that have their own "green friendly" resources are not being green friendly. Rightly or wrongly if I am paying for grid power I will use it and have no concern for my level of usage. In my own vehicle we have to manage and conserve our energy usage because it is a finite resource. That concept should be encouraged. Water is another resource that whilst it is regarded as free will be abused by many people. User pay infrastructure should be encouraged so that people can decide how much power they want to use and how long they want to stay under the shower. Installation of hardware and infrastructure to offer user pay water and electricity could be encouraged by offering tax deductions or other incentives to the business operator. The business operator should be able to "mark up" the price of electricity so that the cost of installation can be recouped. People will decide their own usage based on the price. Maybe the air conditioner will not be left on all day whilst they out. Water consumption should be offered along similar lines.
- It seems to me that the problem is not a lack of potential sites to accommodate travelers the problem is the myriad of different rules and regulations. Caravan Parks, Showgrounds, rate payer funded facilities, private property owners offering short term stays, local sporting clubs, school grounds and Service club car parks all provide an opportunity to accommodate travelers under certain conditions. A consistent set of rules drafted to apply to modern self contained self sufficient MA configurations will go a long way towards reducing the size of the problem. No frills leave no trace sites should be able to operate under minimal infrastructure rules. Accommodation providers could establish low cost products on an equal compliance basis. If a provider chooses not to offer a low cost no frills product then that is a commercial decision.

Regions and towns throughout Australia can benefit in many ways from the MA population and the availability of low cost no frills accommodation options will go a long way to encourage them to stay and contribute.

Thanks for the opportunity to have a say and good luck with implementing long overdue change.