

**Submission
No 81**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Name: Mr Des Hartree

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Thank you to the honourable members of the panel for the opportunity to give evidence to the General Standing Committee No 3 regarding the inquiry into tourism.

I am a retired engineer who has spent much of the past 14 years living the dream of many Aussies, and that is to see Australia.

My expectations from this enquiry are:-

- a. To always be treated fairly as an individual and as part of a group
- b. To continue to have freedom of choice camping

My name is Des Hartree. My role is currently club delegate to the NSW Association of Caravan Clubs (40 caravan clubs). In addition, I am the NSW Director for the National Association of Caravan Clubs Limited (NACC), which represents some 150 Caravan Clubs affiliated via the various state associations throughout Australia. I am also one of two NACC Directors who are also delegates to a group called MoTOURing Australia, which brings together both the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA) and NACC both of whom promote responsible codes of conduct with their members to protect and support our environment.

MoTOURing Australia was formed with a Memorandum of Understanding (26 September 2009), for two reasons, firstly The Camping and Caravan Industry Association and some of their members seem to have forgotten that we are their customers and they need to work with us and not go behind our backs undermining and destroying our chosen lifestyle. Secondly if we were to represent and be a credible voice for Recreational Vehicle owners then we needed to combine resources and to speak with one voice.

Background

In the past few years the Camping and Caravan Industry Association appear to have instigated a well planned well resourced covert operation to change our way of life and lifestyle choice and take away our right of freedom of choice. This operation based on misinformation, possible even straight out lies and even coercion by inferring that individuals may be breaking laws has been on going and Australia wide. Some are quite basic like the claim that caravan parks bring millions of dollars into an area, reality is that caravan parks other than government grants bring nothing into an area, Tourists, Travellers Holiday makers and Grey Nomads bring the money into an area and it should be their choice whether they spend their money at a Caravan Park or not, and not be controlled by regulation and legislation to pay for whims and fads or services they don't require or need. The most serious action has been the misuse of federal regulations with assertions that Federal regulations brought in to implement the 1995 Himler report (to eliminate Government & Territory monopoly operations), which was extended to include local government. These regulations have been bastardised, particularly in Tasmania via the State Government Entities Directions Paper Sept. 2012 and individuals and groups other than caravan park owners appear to no longer have any rights.

The Tasmanian experiment (closure of previously free camp areas) has been a disaster which data published by Tourism Tasmania in March 2013 showing comparative data of camping and caravan park performance. Caravan Park (caravan) occupancy is down 30% comparing April 2009/March 2010 versus April 2012 /March 2013 periods. Non Caravan park occupancy rates, although less than

half the number at Caravan Parks, has remained constant. This has not just been a loss to Caravan Parks but also a disaster for other Tasmanian businesses

I understand the frustrations of the private caravan park owners and the need for change, Change is inevitable; the business model under which caravan parks operate particularly in built up/high density areas along the coast or waterways and cities is unsustainable. This is shown by the number of Caravan parks that have ceased operation or moved to increasing numbers of cabins to survive. We need to change our paradigm, open our eyes, look for segments that work and seek answers outside the square of past experience. I understand that some 30% of caravan parks in NSW are built utilising crown or public land

Recreational vehicle owners (with some 460000 registered units and some 20,000 new units joining the fleet each year, plus tent and trailer campers) would make up the largest single group of recreational enthusiasts in Australia many seeking a healthy lifestyles and visiting our numerous tourist and natural attractions. I estimate that more than 2,000,000 enthusiasts and it is probable higher, are or want to be involved. YET! We have locked up much of our public assets, denying access to bona fide RV enthusiasts and campers. The National and State Parks have done an excellent job in providing and upgrading facilities but in the highest growth area of tourism they have not kept pace with requirements or offset the losses from the private sector. Sydney is an absolute disaster with extremely limited and expensive private and public facilities and yet we are surrounded by National and State Parks and millions of Hectares of public land that is either not utilised or is under utilised. Local and State Governments are more than happy to provide land and facilities for other Recreational enthusiasts such as football ,Cricket etc but balk at the largest group ie. The recreational vehicle enthusiasts. Perhaps the primitive camping provisions could be extended to allow sporting fields to implement primitive camping facilities, which could be a financial boon to many struggling clubs and provide a level of security at these venues.

There are positives out there, we need to identify them, duplicate, enhance and expand them.

Example of positive moves are.

- the community based camp areas in towns like Gordon, Franklin and Penguin in Tasmania where councils have established camp areas adjacent to Picnic areas, council generally keep the toilets clean and do basic ground maintenance and local community groups collect the daily fees and communicate local attractions and activities to the tourists. Many villages through out Australia have similar programs, and they work.
- Show grounds and sports grounds in many areas are also used to accommodate RV travellers, These are usually public grounds and public facilities and should be used, possible reinvented to take advantage of the ever increasing number of grey nomads exploring our wonderful country. A great example of this is at Berry on the south coast of NSW.
- Western Australia have just announced a four year \$40,000,000 program to build camp grounds and caravan camping facilities, mainly in National Parks.

- The Mayor of the Gold Coast has just announced a major strategy to have Recreational Vehicles camp in special established location to encourage RV travellers spend time and money in the Gold Coast.

What would I like to see happen

- We need to properly designate and categorise “RESORTS”, “TOURIST PARKS”, “CARAVAN PARKS”, “CAMPING GROUNDS” and other confusing or non descriptive names. They need to have different but some what similar regulations which cover the spectrum from basic facilities to resort facilities and not try and have a single standard but most importantly that they conform to their classification (I believe that more than 50% of caravan parks (including resorts, tourist parks and camping grounds) are non conforming with current regulations, but may be more than adequate for the area and circumstances)
- Privately owned Camping Grounds and Caravan Parks (not Resorts or Tourist Parks as they usually have large numbers of cabins in direct competition with bricks and mortar Motels, Serviced apartments and Hotels) should be confirmed as public amenities classification, similar to parks, sports grounds, picnic and other general public areas and should have both local government rate and state government land tax exemption for that area used for basic caravan or camping, as they are really public ammenities (Without private Caravan Parks, Local Government would have to provide facilities as already happens in many areas)
- More crown land and public land should be released for Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds (We should not be surprised if more privately owned caravan parks are redeveloped with medium/high density housing) We need to plan for the future.
- Underutilised Showgrounds and sections of other public land should be opened up possible even utilising , primitive camping regulations. Full service Caravan Parks are an extremely important part but are only part of the answer. Consumers deserve “**FREEDOM OF CHOICE**”

Overall, I see many opportunities for NSW to attract tourists in this the fastest growing tourism sector, especially between the months of March and October when a large portion of the grey nomad market is on the move. I believe complex planning and competition policies, discourage councils to provide facilities for this segment of the market. The organisations I represent aim to work with communities to further develop tourism, particularly outside traditional routes, in favour of rural and regional travel, bringing with them broadly applicable skills, volunteering capacity, and economic benefits. I believe regulatory and legislative certainty will significantly contribute to encouraging this market to grow and prosper. Always remembering that “**Consumers deserve FREEDOM OF CHOICE**”

Des HARTREE

NSW Director - National Association of Caravan Clubs Limited

4th September 2013