

CARAVAN AND CAMPING ACTION PLAN

Statement

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [5.21 pm]: Last long weekend, I travelled through the south west region and returned home through Manjimup and Bridgetown. I was surprised to see a legion of caravans, camper trailers and utes with swags on the back making their way back from holidays in the south west. When I went through Bridgetown, I was very disappointed that my favourite bakery was inaccessible. There was not a car park available due to the swarms of people in the town. It was very good to see the town alive with people. I was greeted by a similar picture in Balingup, Donnybrook and other small towns on the way to Mandurah. Obviously, caravanning and camping is a very popular pastime and is very good for small country towns; it assists their economies. It is very good for Western Australians to experience the great outdoors. Caravanning and camping is a great economic boost to Western Australia. I undertook a little bit of research that shows that for every dollar spent at a caravan park, \$1.38 is spent in the local community. That amounts to nearly \$1 billion spent within communities by people caravanning and camping, which is not an insignificant sum.

I was encouraged by a meeting with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, when I was briefed on the Parks for People program that is a component of the “Caravan and Camping Action Plan 2013–2018”. It is good to see that the Department of Parks and Wildlife is engaging with the community to get people to visit parks and be a part of the environment by making sure there are camping grounds and caravan parks to go to. I believe disused rail reserves offer further opportunities. There are a lot of disused rail reserves throughout the south west and agricultural regions that could be utilised as four-wheel-drive tracks and for horse riding, mountain biking and those types of activities. Camping grounds could be provided along the disused tracks for adventure trail-type tourism. Inevitably, those tracks lead to country towns, and people using the disused rail tracks would end up in country towns at some stage and contribute to the economies of the regions.

It is important that the government and local councils provide for the growing interest in this form of leisure activity. I attended the City of Wanneroo council meeting, which was attended by about 200 people. The reason so many people attended that meeting is that the City of Wanneroo had closed without notice Dewars track near Two Rocks. This track has been used by people for nearly a decade. It is a major recreation area and is the lifeblood of small businesses in Two Rocks. The council believes that there are safety issues with the track, which is a fairly blunt instrument. If the council wants to shut something down, it just claims there is a safety issue, because it is very hard to argue against. The four-wheel-drivers at the meeting were well behaved. They expressed their concerns and sentiments about the track closure very well, and they put some very good questions to council members. My worry is that despite the logical and well-formed questions presented to the council, in my mind, there was definitely an odour of bureaucracy in the room. The answers from the bureaucrats were somewhat dismissive. I do not think the questions were given a good hearing. In fact, one young guy, who is a volunteer firefighter, asked a very relevant question. It related to physical barriers being put in place that meant these tracks could not be accessed. He wanted to know how firefighters and emergency crews would be able to get onto that track when there were fires throughout the fire season. One member from the public put forward that there had been an emergency on the beach and they were not able to get emergency services in and a chopper had to be used. I think that shutting that track down was very much a knee-jerk reaction by the council.

Among the attendees was a business owner from Two Rocks. He spoke on a couple of occasions. There was no doubt that this guy was in distress. He said that his business had gone down 50 per cent since the track had closed, which is enormous, on top of the fact that the boat ramp in that town has now been closed for some time. The businesses are suffering. If businesses close in Two Rocks, it will be very detrimental to that area.

My worry now is about one of the council’s proposals. It wants to spend \$120 000 on a report and review of the track’s safety. If it is going to spend \$120 000 on a report about the safety of the track, I cannot fathom why it cannot invest that \$120 000 in actually repairing the track itself. As I said, the members of the public who attended were well behaved and law abiding. Volunteers even offered their earthmoving equipment to assist in opening that track up because it is a community resource that people use all the time. I suspect that the City of Wanneroo intends to permanently close this track, particularly when it wants to commission a report that will not be completed until September. We know that that usually means that, at the end of the day, the track will never be open again.

I hope that the elected members of the Wanneroo council—those who represent the people of Wanneroo—have the wisdom and the courage to have an unbiased and good look at what the council is trying to achieve here. I hope they do not bow to bureaucratic pressure. I hope that they ensure the track opens again. As Western Australians, we should be making sure that we engage the community and facilitate access to this sort of recreation and not lock people out.

House adjourned at 5.28 pm
