

ORDINARY MEETING 5 MAY 2015	5.8
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ILLEGAL CAMPING

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RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

- 1. Approves an allocation of funding in the 2015/16 budget to facilitate the recruitment of a permanent part time local laws officer to assist Regulatory Services with the management of illegal camping, including early morning patrols, and associated enforcement; and**
- 2. Approves the allocation of funds in the 2015/16 budget, to install illegal camping signage at hot spot locations in the Shire; and**
- 3. Approves the allocation of funds in the 2015/16 budget for the purpose to engage the local Police on a commercial basis to assist Local Laws as required.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Growth in the camping industry is contributing enormously to towns and communities across Queensland, which is poised to be the number one drive tourism state by 2020. With the increased levels of camping and camping alternatives e.g. caravans, motorhomes and camper trailers comes the risk of elevated levels of illegal camping. Camping outside of designated caravan and camping sites can adversely affect the communities throughout Douglas and their pristine local environments. While it is recognised illegal camping cannot be eliminated, it can be managed by having a measured approach that balances tourist perceptions with community expectations. Council needs to find the balance when undertaking illegal camping enforcement. A pro-active approach to compliance and enforcement, increases in early morning patrols, installation of signage to key locations and working in partnership with the local Police are measures that can be used in the short term to deliver direct benefits to the local community and visiting tourists.

BACKGROUND:

With the significant evolution of camping over the past years, illegal camping within the Shire has become an increasingly prominent issue for the community. According to a 2014 Queensland Government report on camping within the State, growth in the camping sector is predicted to rise, with a doubling of overnight visitor expenditure from \$15 billion to \$30 billion per annum by 2020. Clearly the growth in camping presents economic opportunities for the Shire, and having solid measures in place to deal with illegal camping can advantageously benefit the local community and environment.

The profile of illegal campers within Douglas is mostly international and/or young, and the usual mode of transport is a motor home e.g. wicked vans, juicy vans, space vans,

Winnebago's. Sleeping in tents and/or swags is another form of illegal camping commonly identified.

During 2014, 103 complaints by the public were received by Regulatory Services, and 244 instances of illegal camping were observed by local laws officers during early morning patrols. It must be noted that the patrols were undertaken 2 days a week during peak times. It is highly likely increases to patrol frequency may yield greater numbers. For example Council officers observed 1,405 instances of illegal camping during 2010-11 where patrols were undertaken 5 days a week.

COMMENT:

To help manage illegal camping, the following measures by Regulatory Services have been implemented –

1. The installation of signage to the entrances of key “villages” with tailored messages will occur over the next four (4) weeks at –
 - Port Douglas x2 signs
 - Newell Beach x1 sign
 - Wonga Beach x3 signs
 - Ferry Crossing x2 signs
 - Cooya Beach x1 sign
2. Letters have been sent to campervan rental companies advising of camping regulations and lawful camping places in the shire.
3. A communication protocol has been formalised with the local Police. The Police have also offered to support Local Laws officers from time to time with early morning patrols.
4. Bollards have been installed at Four Mile Park, Teamsters Park and Market Park.
5. Council's website and Facebook page is being updated with camping information.
6. A flyer handout about illegal camping translated into 6 languages has been created to help with law enforcement and compliance.

Additional measures for consideration include –

- Supplement entrance signage with hot-spot signage targeting locations well known for illegal camping. A preliminary audit identified over 20 potential hot-spot locations.
- Install more bollards to key locations preventing access to sensitive areas e.g. foreshores, reserves, esplanades.
- Install boom gates to restrict access to paths, tracks and roads to beaches and other areas e.g. Market Park, Rex Smeal Park.
- Engage Police in a commercial arrangement known as “Specials” to jointly do patrols with Local laws officers and assist with enforcement.
- Recruit an additional part time local laws officer to assist Regulatory Services with patrols and other associated enforcement activities.

Other longer term options available to Council include –

- Changes to Local Laws e.g. strengthen the definition of camping and improve enforcement options for illegal camping.
- Creating late night curfew areas.

Fully Responsible:	Funding the full cost of a program or activity.
Regulator:	Meeting the responsibilities associated with regulating activities through legislation or local law.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Increased financial and human resources are required to implement the proposals. The implications are –

- Council approval for the 2015/16 budget to facilitate the recruitment of a local laws officer, on a permanent part-time basis.
- The allocation of funds up to \$4,000 to design and install signage at hot spot locations.
- The allocation of funds up to \$10,000 to engage local Police (known as *Specials*).

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

A failure to adequately address illegal camping may result in –

- Increased costs associated with clean up of disbanded camp sites.
- Poor community perceptions about Council that potentially affect its standing and reputation.
- Impacts to the environment and visual amenity within local community.
- Heightened community safety concerns and nuisance complaints.
- A limited ability for Regulatory Services to respond and manage illegal camping concerns.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

ECONOMIC: Regular clean up costs associated with disbanded camp sites. In addition, taking action against a small minority should enhance the appeal of the area to other visitors, bringing with it economic benefits.

ENVIRONMENTAL: Environmental harm from deposited litter and other material can be a major concern. Similarly, the clearing of vegetation from surrounding foreshores, esplanades and reserves to make camp/fire sites can have a significant impact to the local environment. This may require re-vegetation action to be undertaken.

SOCIAL: Community sensibilities can be strongly tested when societal norms regarding the use of public spaces and recreational areas are being exploited indiscriminately for private use. Community perceptions about Council's management of illegal camping, and the sensitivities in balancing these concerns with law enforcement can be challenging. Council needs to consider how to manage the mobile camper industry, the resultant implications on tourist numbers and perceptions, as well as community expectations and Council enforcement.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

The Mossman and Port Douglas Police were consulted with regards to compliance and enforcement. The Shire of Broome and Whitsunday Regional Council were contacted about

illegal camping management strategies, and legal advice was obtained from King & Co relating to the issuing of PINs to vehicles and associated prohibited camping activities.

ATTACHMENTS:

Not applicable.