

# Travelling grey nomads using free camps are huge cost for central Queensland locals

ABC Rural Suzannah Baker and Bridget Judd Fri 12 Sep 2014, 2:14 PM AEST



Photo

John and Dawn Montgomery from the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, staying at a free camp in St Lawrence, central Queensland.

Suzannah Baker

Central Queensland ratepayers say they're footing the bill for 'grey nomads', in a deal leaving much to be desired.

St Lawrence, a township 160 kilometres south of Mackay, experiences an influx of campers each winter, as southern travellers seek to escape the cold climates of Australia's southern states.

Kevin Elliott, of the Isaac Regional Council, says the population of about 140 doubles every night in winter, but they're yet to see any significant economic returns.

## **Audio 4:41 Long time St Lawrence resident and travelling grey nomad discuss the 'value' of free camps in Queensland**

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[Audio Link](#)

"[They] all come up here to the warmer climates, but we don't see the influx from northern people heading down there in the summer time.

"So I don't believe it's 'we take them in the winter time, they take us in the summer time'. I think we're the ones sort of missing out up in the north here."

Mr Elliott says there are significant costs involved with accommodating the campers for free.

"Those people over there probably use more water each night than what the whole town uses.

"[There's] at least 100 or 200 people over there every night. There's a tremendous amount of cost in water and that sort of thing."

However, Mr Elliot says there are some travellers that will leave a donation, but expects it's only a minority of travellers who do.

But a grey nomad from the NSW Hunter Valley, John Montgomery, disagrees.

He says despite suggestions otherwise, most travellers abide by the axiom to 'give more than you take'.

Mr Montgomery says the attraction of free accommodation in towns like St Lawrence is helping keep local businesses alive.

"By getting us to stay in the town and go to the little shops that are there, or have a meal or a beer at the pub, that's keeping it alive for the locals.

"So instead of paying \$40 for a caravan park...we'll distribute that \$40 among three or four shops.

"The majority of us feel that if towns want to put these places in, we'll put a few bob back into the town so they keep them."