

# Caravan Parks

## Long-term residents

*A caravan is a vehicle which is, or was originally fitted with wheels and is, or was originally built to be, capable of being towed by a motor vehicle and is, or was registrable as a caravan under motor vehicle registration regulations. A caravan may also include a temporary or fixed/rigid annex with or without independent amenities for independent living.<sup>1</sup>*

The caravan park sector is highly segmented. It is for the purpose of holiday accommodation, as well as permanent, temporary and crisis accommodation.<sup>2</sup> This publication will focus on those who are living in caravan parks as long-term or permanent residents, that is:

- ◆ those who consider that their primary place of residence is a caravan park; or
- ◆ those people who have been continuously residing in any caravan park or parks for three or more months, and are not on holiday.

2001 Census data demonstrates that 38% of individuals in caravan parks across Australia were at the same address 5 years earlier.<sup>3</sup> It is not uncommon for residents to have been in the same park for 5, 10 or even 20 years. *The notion that caravan park dwellers are not permanent still pervades policy makers and program delivery agencies resulting in inadequate responses from both government and non-government specialist community service and support agencies.<sup>4</sup>*

Caravan parks range from those that are 'tourist only' to those that cater predominantly for permanent residents. 'Tourist only' parks are often near areas of natural beauty such as beaches or National Parks, while the latter tend to be in areas that are (or were originally) regarded as marginal for standard urban development. These are often isolated from basic services and facilities such as shops, schools, child care facilities and other community services, which can exacerbate the difficulties that residents face living there.<sup>5</sup>

## SNAPSHOT 3

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**Shelter SA**  
Housing: a basic human right

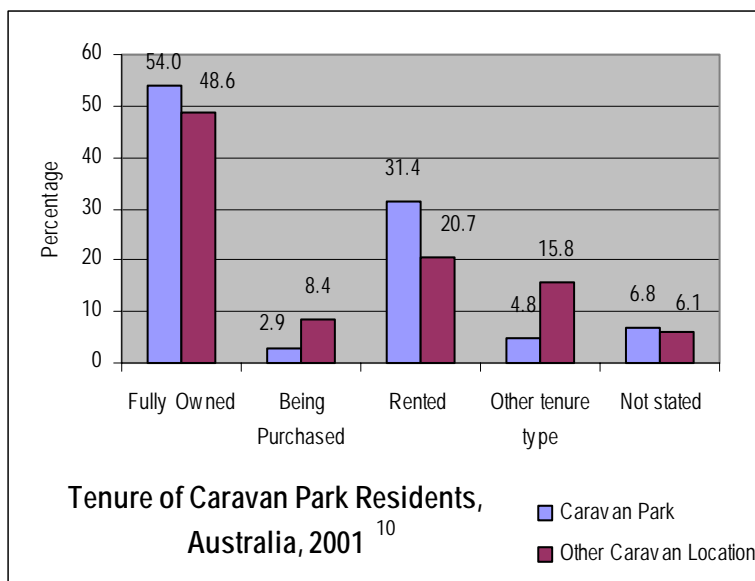
# Caravan Parks

## Characteristics of Caravan Park Residents

According to 2001 Census data there were 7,602 people in South Australia living in caravans, cabins or houseboats.<sup>6</sup>

Three distinctive sub-groups of long-term residents can be identified as using caravan parks:

- ◆ People making a deliberate choice to live in a caravan park for reasons of lifestyle, including a sense of community, access to communal facilities and affordability. Within this sub-group there are a large proportion of retirees who either own their dwelling but rent a site ('owner-renters'), or rent both the caravan and the site. Many of these residents are on fixed incomes from superannuation or pensions and have been living in caravan parks for several years.<sup>7</sup> Some of these residents would have sold their principal home, bought a caravan and subsidise their income during retirement with the interest on the remaining funds.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ Itinerant or seasonal workers in the construction industry, farming and fruit pickers or others with lower paid jobs who chose to live long-term or permanently in caravan parks. They tend to rent both the van and the site, so that they can move more easily with the availability of work.
- ◆ People who move into a caravan park as a last resort because there is no other suitable alternative at a particular time in their lives. They are not there by choice, but are unable to access housing in the private rental market or in public or community housing. They may have debts for rent or utilities, and may have a range of personal crises in their lives.<sup>9</sup>

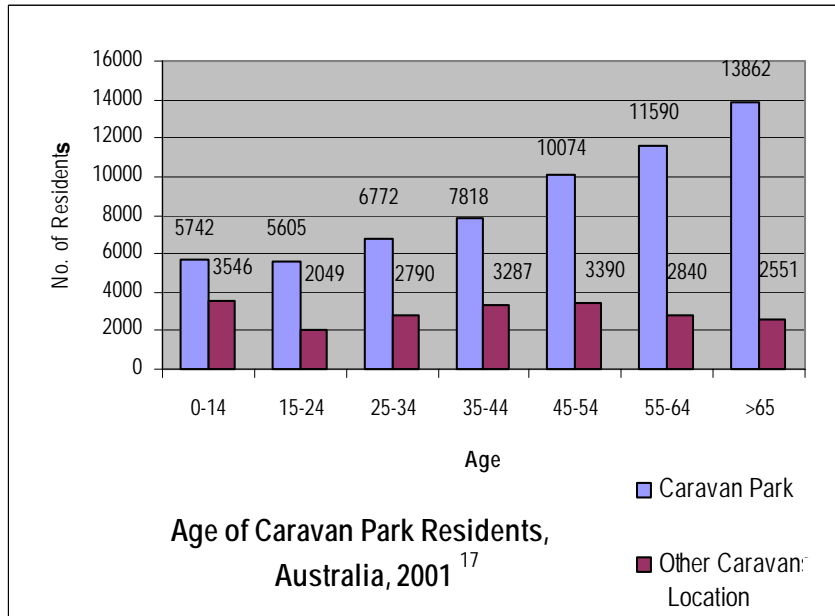


Note: 'Other Caravan Location' includes caravans that are located on someone else's property: in yards of private houses, on cattle stations, farms, vineyards or other places.<sup>11</sup>

- ◆ In 2001, 54% of households who lived in a caravan park in Australia owned their caravan outright (but rented the site that the caravan was placed on).<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ 2.9% were purchasing their caravan, and of these, 27% were in housing stress (i.e. paying more than 30% of their income on mortgage repayments).<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ 31.4% of households were renting their caravan.<sup>14</sup> Of these, nearly 41% were in housing stress.<sup>15</sup> While living in a caravan park requires less money in upfront costs than private rental, in the long term it is usually more expensive.<sup>16</sup>

# Caravan Parks

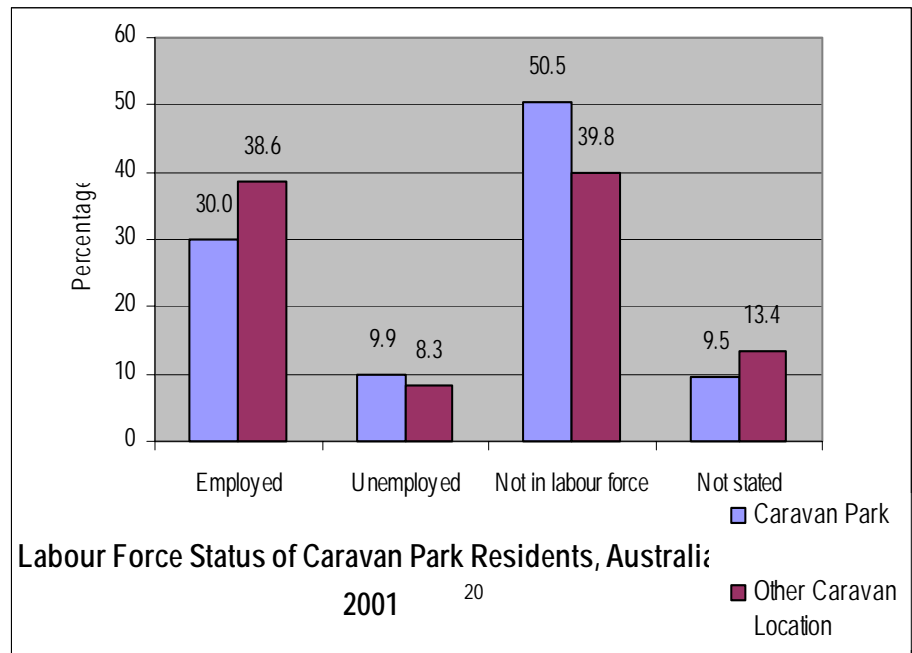
## Characteristics of Caravan Park Residents



In 2001:

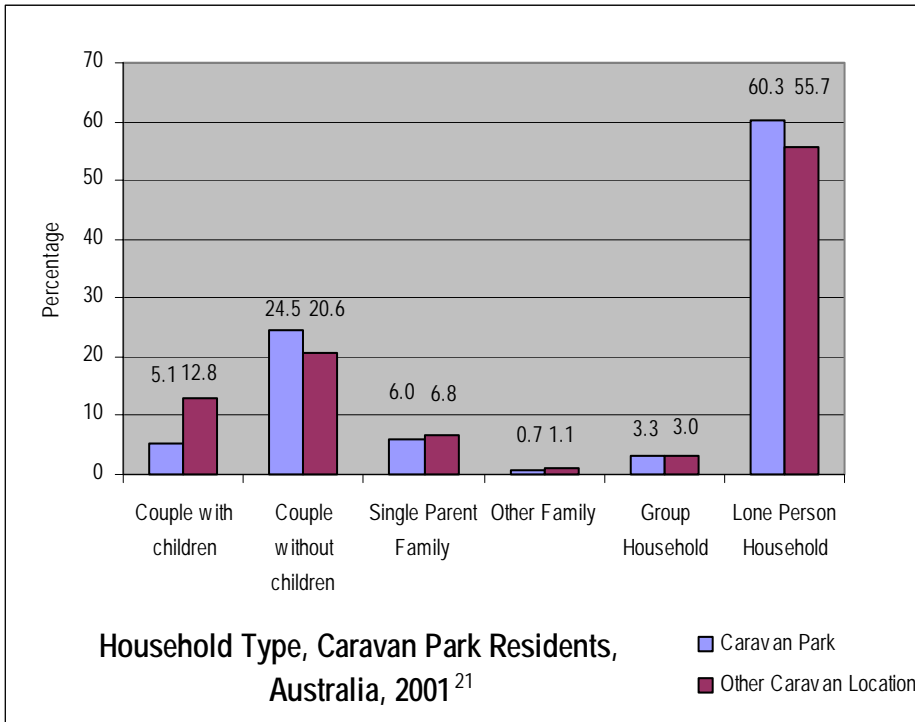
- ◆ There were 61,463 long-term residents in caravan parks in Australia.
- ◆ There were 20,453 long-term residents living in caravan parks in 'other locations.'
- ◆ 22.6% were 65 and older.
- ◆ 41.5% were 55 and older.
- ◆ 40.1% were aged 25-54.

- ◆ The predominantly elderly population in caravan parks is also reflected by the fact that 50% of individuals were not in the labour force.
- ◆ 9.9% of residents were unemployed, compared to the Australian average of 4.4%.
- ◆ Of those residents whose were employed, 90% were in lower paying occupations such as labourers, transport workers, tradespersons or clerical workers.<sup>19</sup>



# Caravan Parks

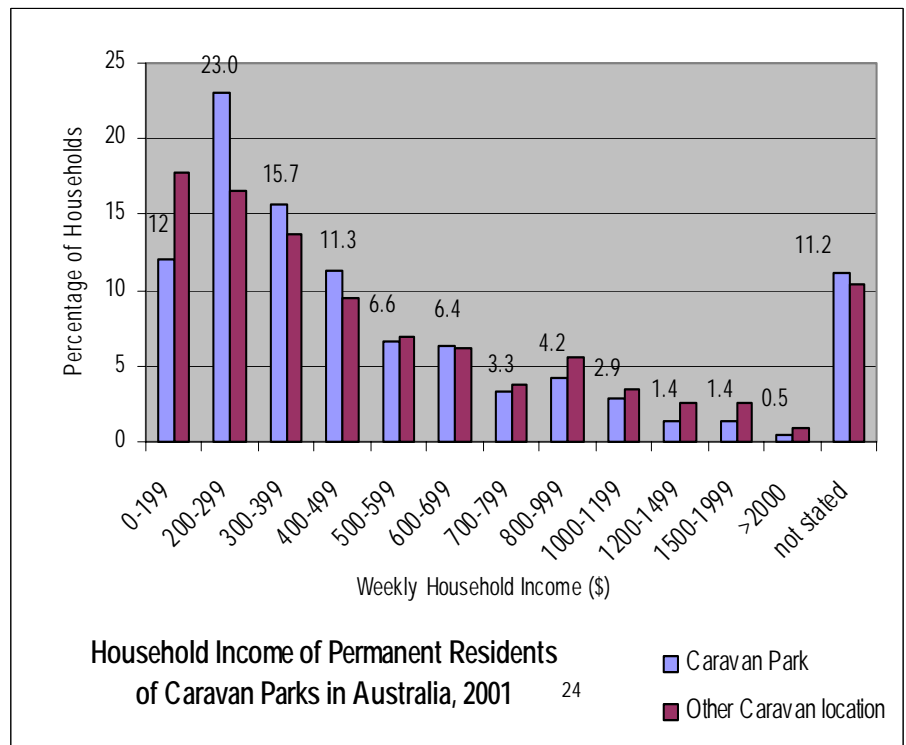
## Characteristics of Caravan Park Residents



In 2001, there were 38,273 households living in Caravan Parks in Australia:

- ◆ Over 60% (23,089) of households in caravan parks in Australia in 2001 were lone person households.
- ◆ 5.1% (1,944 households) were couples with children.
- ◆ 6.0% (2,307 households) were single parent families.
- ◆ 24.5% (2,307 households) were couples without children.<sup>22</sup>

- ◆ In Australia in 2001, 62% of households in caravan parks earned less than \$500 per week, compared to the Australian average of 29%.
- ◆ The lower socio-economic status reflects the number of people not in the labour force or unemployed, and the number of lone person or single parent families.<sup>23</sup>



# Caravan Parks

## Issues Facing Caravan Park Residents

- ◆ An overall decline in caravan parks and the number of caravans available for longer term occupancy.
- ◆ Locational disadvantage associated with isolation from the usual range of community services and facilities.
- ◆ Concentration of disadvantage and stigma associated with living permanently in a caravan park.
- ◆ Insecurity of tenure. <sup>25</sup>
- ◆ The majority of caravans have no toilet or shower facilities. As a result most residents need to use shared toilet and shower facilities, which can create safety concerns, especially for women and children, e.g. where there are no facilities designated for families, a single mother will have difficulty helping to bathe or supervise her male children.
- ◆ Unclean or unsanitary toilets and showers.
- ◆ No enclosed safe places for children to play outside.
- ◆ Lack of space for children to play inside when the weather is hot, cold, wet etc.
- ◆ Lack of space for doing homework.
- ◆ Lack of privacy within the van due to small size, and outside the van due to vans/sites being very close together.
- ◆ Children sharing beds.
- ◆ Lack of cooking facilities, such as having only 1 or 2 hotplates.
- ◆ Lack of space for storage of food, both fresh and canned.
- ◆ Lack of storage space for clothes and personal affects.
- ◆ Overcrowding.
- ◆ High levels of violence, drug and alcohol abuse in some caravan parks. <sup>26</sup>
- ◆ High level of residents with mental illness in some caravan parks.
- ◆ Caravan park managers sometimes do not permit agencies or social workers to enter the caravan park.
- ◆ Inconsistency in the application of park rules or unreasonably harsh or restrictive park rules. <sup>27</sup>
- ◆ Due to the fear of being evicted (relates to the lack of legislative protection), residents are often fearful to complain directly to the manager about deteriorating conditions.
- ◆ Threat of park closure.
- ◆ For 'owner-renters': difficulty in relocating to another park, especially if they have a permanent annex or have made other major modifications, as their accommodation is no longer in a state to be moved, or would cost too much to relocate. This can make them feel 'trapped' due to financial concerns: they cannot afford to relocate and their asset is depreciating. In some cases, the caravan park manager must approve the sale of the van. <sup>28</sup>

*Some parks are extremely well managed with generally very good relations between residents and the park manager or owner. Others...are very poorly managed with a litany of disputation between residents and park managers or owners. Park rules are often perceived by residents as draconian and owners and managers sometimes have a tendency to act like feudal landlords. Caravan parks have been described as having an essentially medieval land tenure system with park managers having unique power and responsibility acting as a service and infrastructure provider, gate keeper and landlord. With the landlord usually living on the park, there is a greater potential for conflict and intimidation than is usually the case for standard tenancies. <sup>29</sup>*

# Caravan Parks

## Lack of Legislative Protection

Currently the *SA Residential Tenancies Act* provides no protection for residents of caravan parks, who can be among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in our society. A person living in a park as their only or main place of residence:

- ◆ has no legal right to privacy
- ◆ can be evicted without reason, notice or recourse
- ◆ cannot require the park owner or manager to carry out repairs to the caravan or site
- ◆ is not entitled to any notice of rent or hiring charge increases.

Residents of caravan parks are open to exploitation by caravan park owners and managers. As the majority of residents cannot access other housing options, they are often unwilling to challenge caravan park owners and managers for fear of eviction and potential homelessness. They can be required to provide 'key deposits' which often act as bonds, but the deposits are not registered with the Residential Tenancies Branch, and often not returned.

Shelter SA considers that the *Residential Tenancies Act* should protect residents of caravan parks, and recommends that such legislation be based on the *Queensland Residential Tenancies Act 1994*. Unlike legislation in Victoria and New South Wales, the Queensland legislation covers all residents, other than those who are staying for purpose of holiday, emergency accommodation, casual overnight stay or who are an owner-occupier of a relocatable home. Residents on short-term tenancies (less than 42 days) have more limited rights and responsibilities than for long-term tenancies, but both have a level of legislative protection from the first day of their tenancy.<sup>30</sup> (A relocatable home is defined as *a moveable dwelling that is not registrable as a caravan or mobile home under the motor vehicle registration regulations, and includes manufactured homes*. A mobile home is defined as *a motorised home fitted or customised for use as a dwelling and capable of being registered as a motor vehicle under motor vehicle registration regulations; includes campervans, converted buses and similar vehicles*.)<sup>31</sup>

*Caravan park residents, those who live permanently in caravan parks, should be like all other tenure types and have coverage under tenancy legislation. No other tenancy type has a 'trial period'. Caravan parks are home to some of the most disadvantaged members of our community and we need to ensure that they have this legislative protection.*<sup>32</sup>

*Earlier this year we sent a number of letters to the Attorney General, as part of the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act, requesting that all residents of caravan parks have legislative protection, similar to current legislation in Queensland. We also requested that a Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service be established so that we would have someone to turn to, to ask for help in understanding our rights and what to do about them. We haven't heard anything about it since. So we want to use this opportunity to remind the government about our concerns, and ask that action be taken!*

*The quality of our lives should not depend on who the manager of our park is, but rather, there should be legislative protection and adequate minimum standards enforced to deal with issues in a fair and just way. Our vans are our homes, and we believe we deserve protection under the law, just like residents in other forms of housing, so that we can live happy and safe lives there.*<sup>33</sup>

Excerpt from a presentation made by a group of long-term caravan park residents at the National Housing Conference, Adelaide, November 2003.

# Caravan Parks

## Shelter SA Position Statement 3 Caravan Parks

- 3.1 Shelter SA believes that residents of caravan parks should be covered under the *South Australian Residential Tenancies Act*, using the *Queensland Residential Tenancies Act* as a basis.
- 3.2 Shelter SA believes that there should be restrictions placed on the caravan park operators about the sorts of rules that can be included in the park rules, as is the case in the *Queensland Residential Tenancies Act*.
- 3.3 Shelter SA believes that all residents of caravan parks (excluding holiday-makers and those on overnight stays) should be able to access the Residential Tenancies Tribunal for resolving disputes.
- 3.4 Shelter SA calls for the establishment of a Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service, managed by a non-government organisation, to assist all renters, including caravan park residents, to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities.



# Caravan Parks

## References and Further Information

### ***Coverage for All is Needed Now.***\*

(Galloway, J; Parity Magazine, 'On the Margins: Caravan Parks', Council to Homeless Persons, April 2001).

### ***National Overview: Status of Caravan Park Living in Australia 1993-2001.***\*

(Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle, Insite newsletter, February and July 2002). Available at: [www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/publications/ndpresources.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/publications/ndpresources.html)

### ***On the Margins: Caravan Parks.***\*

(Council to Homeless Persons, Parity Magazine, April 2001).

### ***On the Margins? Housing risk among caravan park residents.***\*

(Wensing, E; Holloway, D; Wood, M; AHURI August 2000). Available at: [www.ahur.edu.au/gobal/docs/70109\\_final\\_onthemargins2.pdf](http://www.ahur.edu.au/gobal/docs/70109_final_onthemargins2.pdf)

### ***Playgroups in Caravan Parks: Challenges facing families.***\*

(Playgroup of SA, 2001).

### ***Shelter SA's Submission for the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act.***\*

(Shelter SA, Feb. 2003). Available at: [www.sheltersa.asn.au](http://www.sheltersa.asn.au)

### ***The Last Resort.***\*

(Light, D; The Bulletin, Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003, p. 26-31).

***The Peoples' Voices.***\* Presentation at the National Housing Conference, Adelaide, November 2003. (Shelter SA, 2003). Available at: [www.sheltersa.asn.au](http://www.sheltersa.asn.au)

(\* denotes that this reference is available in the Shelter SA library).

### Footnotes

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|--|---|
| 1. Wensing, Holloway, Wood; AHURI 2003, preamble.                          | 17. Ibid, p.68  |
| 2. Ibid, p.10  | 18. Ibid, p.68, 70  |
| 3. Ibid, p.36  | 19. Ibid, p.71  |
| 4. Ibid, p.55  | 20. Ibid, p.74  |
| 5. Ibid, p.6   | 21. Ibid, p.74  |
| 6. <i>State Housing Plan Discussion Paper</i> , Dec. 2002, p.19            | 22. Ibid, p.73-74   |
| 7. Wensing, Holloway, Wood; AHURI 2003, p.iv                               | 23. Ibid, p.21  |
| 8. Ibid, p.48  | 24. Ibid, p.73  |
| 9. Ibid, p.iv  | 25. Ibid, p.1   |
| 10. Ibid, p.68 (ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing, CURF data file) | 26. <i>Playgroups in Caravan Parks: Challenges facing families.</i> , Playgroups of SA, 2001.         |
| 11. Ibid, p.20   | 27. Wensing, Holloway, Wood, AHURI 2003, p.8  |
| 12. Ibid, p.68   | 28. Ibid, p.51  |
| 13. Ibid, p.20   | 29. Ibid, p.7   |
| 14. Ibid, p.68   | 30. <i>Shelter SA submission to the Review of the Residential Tenancies Act</i> , 2003, p. 5-6, 33-39 |
| 15. Ibid, p.20   | 31. Wensing, Holloway, Wood; AHURI 2003, preamble.  |
| 16. Ibid, p.49   | 32. Galloway, J; <i>Parity Magazine</i> , April 2001, p.17  |
|  | 33. <i>The Peoples' Voices</i> , Shelter SA.  |

