



## Camping Closure at Franklin River

At its meeting yesterday, South Gippsland Shire Council resolved to prohibit camping at the Franklin River Reserve due to public health concerns and the damage and inappropriate use of infrastructure. The reserve will be returned to its original use and will be open for day visitation.

A report tabled to Council identified a number of issues related to the site with the most concerning related to the onsite toilet block which was installed in 2018. The wastewater system that was selected for the site was intended to have a 30-year design life however the system has failed due to misuse, causing untreated effluent to come to the surface. Exposure to untreated effluent has significant public health impacts and is of particular concern in this location as it is close to the Franklin River waterway.

The untreated effluent has also extended into the management area which can no longer be mown as the land is too soft, and to protect workers from unnecessary risk due to the site's contamination.

As a result of COVID19 restrictions the reserve has been closed for camping which has allowed officers to test the theory that no camping eases pressure on the septic field, allowing it to return to its normal state. It is anticipated that with day use only, the field may recover and properly function again.

Other issues at the site relate to some campers overstaying of the 48-hour camping limitation, observations of people washing dishes in the single small toilet hand washing basin and the lack of adequate drinking water onsite. Risks relating to fire safety and fallen tree limbs have also been identified.

Council's Chair Administrator, Julie Eisenbise said the closure to campers was regrettable but necessary for the safety and health of users.

"Franklin River Reserve has proven popular with both day visitors and campers but the site can no longer sustain the number of people that have been using it. It needs to be rehabilitated. The closure of the reserve to campers is not just due to one issue but a number of ongoing problems.

"We know that the reserve is well-regarded but we cannot ignore the problems that exist with the site when it comes to camping, particularly public health concerns. We hope that the natural value of the site will be preserved by this decision," said Ms. Eisenbise.

With camping now restricted, certain areas of the reserve will now be fenced off however the site will still be accessible for picnics and other day use activities.

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