

Accommodation crisis is looming, council warned

By EVE REITMAJER

AN accommodations crisis is "just around the corner", the Whitsunday Regional Council has been warned.

Cr Gaudry said the Bowen/Abbot Point Community Consultation Group, set up to be the community voice in regard to the Abbot Point State Development Area, had highlighted rents were increasing as availability decreased.

"An acute accommodation problem is just around the corner and it is not being addressed," he has warned fellow councillors.

"Come March or April, when the pickers move in, I think we will have a big problem," he said.

Speaking after the last council meeting, Cr Gaudry said the lack of rental accommodation was a concern across the board.

However, it was a particular concern for many government services, and he used education as an example.

"At the moment it looks as if more families are moving in to the region and there has been a lot of interest in school enrolments next year," Cr Gaudry said.

"More students mean more teachers," he said.

Cr Gaudry said in departments experiencing a state-wide teacher shortage, such as science, maths and manual arts, it would be difficult for Bowen to compete with other towns where there was teacher housing available, cheaper rents and lower house prices.

In regards to more teacher housing for Bowen, Cr Gaudry said Education Queensland thresholds in regards to rent prices and occupancy rates might have been met, but even if building got under

way now there would still be a six-month lead-in time.

"I believe, as a council, we need to address that," he said.

Cr Gaudry said both long-term and short-term solutions were needed.

"Council is doing two things," he said.

"Firstly, we are inviting the Director Generals of Education, Health and Emergency Services to Bowen to highlight the problem with them and get things moving.

"To overcome the problem in the short-term, Peter Button, the (WRC) director of Land Use and Social Planning, is preparing a report on options available."

Cr Gaudry said one of those options could be to utilise "hidden accommodation", such as spare rooms in occupied houses.

"The report will look at things that we

can do as a council to facilitate finding such accommodation," he said.

"But we also have to understand the legalities.

"We do not want people renting out their garages or overcrowding houses.

"That is why we are getting this report done."

Cr Gaudry said another avenue to help overcome an accommodation shortage in the long-term could be investor focused.

"A lot of blocks have opened up in Bowen over the years and we need to get investors to start building," he said.

"Perhaps, as a council, we could be looking at what incentives there are out there for investors to start building.

"Then we could get those investors into the same room and highlight Bowen's proposed growth along with any such government incentives or schemes."