

They're queueing to get Lostock in space



GAZING AT GALAXY: Alan Sheehan, of Oberon, relaxes next to his Meade Lightbridge optical telescope last night.

— Picture by Peter Stoop

By TODD DAGWELL

STAR-gazers from far and wide trekked to Lostock in the Hunter Valley last night for the start of the annual Ice in Space Astrocamp.

Held over three nights, the event brings together amateur astronomers and anyone interested in learning about the galaxy while enjoying the outdoors. Astrocamp organiser and

Ice In Space founder Mike Salway said this would be the fifth "star party" held at Lostock with more than 120 people expected to attend. "It's just a great chance for people to get together and

enjoy the night sky. Absolutely anyone is welcome," he said. Lostock is an ideal location because it is "very dark" and free from pollution unlike city and suburban areas, Mr Salway said.

"In Lostock we will be able to see star clusters, nebulae and all the planets of our galaxy," he said.

For information www.iceinspace.com.au

Regular review of traffic problem

By MICHELLE HARRIS

A SHORT-term fix for two bottleneck roundabouts in Maitland is not feasible, meaning motorists will have to wait for improvements that will come when two nearby major road projects are finished.

Maitland MP Frank Terenzini made the assertion yesterday and said he had a commitment from Roads Minister David Borger that traffic levels at the New England Highway roundabouts would be reviewed regularly.

The roundabouts, near Maitland railway station and hospital, are clogged during peak hour.

The condition of the road between the roundabouts has been questioned following a high number of crashes.

The government said this week it would install safety barriers.

Speaking about what he described as his "way forward" for eradicating the roundabout bottlenecks, Mr Terenzini said the traffic would be assessed each year.

A "comprehensive review" would be done when the \$65 million third Hunter River crossing and the \$1.65 billion Hunter Expressway opened in 2011 and 2013, he said.

Mr Terenzini said spending on an overpass or other big fix wasn't feasible when the expressway and third river crossing were being built nearby and would substantially improve the situation.

Lake mayor rules out forced redundancies

LAKE Macquarie City Council's rising salary and wages bill was unsustainable, mayor Greg Piper said yesterday.

But the mayor stopped short of supporting forced redundancies to rein in the bill.

The council's salaries and wages have risen by \$15 million in four years to \$62.9 million, an average annual increase of 7.8 per cent.

With superannuation costs included the increase is 9.5 per cent a year.

Cr Piper said the bill was



DAMON CRONSHAW
LAKE MACQUARIE

"not reasonable and not sustainable", placing him at odds with council general manager Brian Bell.

Mr Bell defended the bill a fortnight ago, saying the council had a "deliberate goal to attract and retain the best people".

Cr Piper said he was "not advocating" forced redundancies, matching Mr Bell's policy.

"Maybe it seems like a soft option but I don't think, unless it's desperate, that we should be looking at getting rid of jobs, but we are looking at natural attrition," Cr Piper said.

The council said in April that 40 positions would not be replaced when staff leave this year to save \$3 million, but it has watered down the policy to fill positions if their absence would "negatively affect community services".

Cr Piper conceded the policy had not achieved what the

council set out to do.

"I think we have to look at better use of the staff we've got," he said.

He would like the policy of "holding back on recruitment" to "deliver more in the short term", but said reducing employee costs would not be enough to save the \$10 million to \$15 million a year needed to balance the books.

He reiterated the view that the council had to consider cutting traditional community services.

The Newcastle Herald reported

yesterday that Mr Bell said the council's service review would save more than \$5 million in "the next three to five years".

Cr Piper said he had not heard the \$5 million figure before.

"I do think it will be something in that order, but I would like to see the time period a little bit quicker," he said.

"I'll be speaking to the general manager about that."

What should council do? letters@theherald.com.au

Flying fatality

A VICTORIAN man, 53, who fell to his death from his paraglider may have failed to secure his harness before taking off, police said.

Paramedics were called to Mystic Hill near the township of Bright about 1pm yesterday, but the man had died at the scene, an Ambulance Victoria spokesman said.

Trawlers' escape a lesson to others

By DAN PROUDMAN

THREE professional fishermen who abandoned their trawler after it struck rocks in fog outside Port Stephens early yesterday were plucked from a liferaft within an hour because they followed correct emergency procedures, experts said.

Long-term Nelson Bay fisherman Miro Milanja, 43, and his two deckhands wore lifejackets and deployed the raft before using their mobile phone to call for help and turning on an emergency beacon to give water police something to aim at.

An investigation into how the 16-metre trawler, Jo Anne II, ran aground between Fingal Bay and Boulder Bay about 2am yesterday is con-



tinuing and will look at whether fatigue was a factor. Mr Milanja and his deckhands Malcolm Hunter, 56, and Graeme Clenton, 48, were fishing off the coast in thick fog before striking land.

Although the trawler was able to be manoeuvred off the rocks, it quickly began taking water and it was decided to abandon ship.

With their lifejackets on,

the trio deployed the liferaft before alerting authorities.

"They have done everything correctly and appropriately, their actions should be what is followed always," the state's acting water police chief, Superintendent James Johnson, said.

"Not only did they follow the correct procedures, but they had the right equipment."



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