

No holiday when tourists invade island homes

- Elicia Murray Urban Affairs Reporter
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"We don't make a profit off this property" ...Kim Dutton says plans to crack down on rental properties could force her to sell her Dangar Island cottage Photo: *Steven Siewert*

TRANQUILITY is so highly prized on Dangar Island that residents use wheelbarrows, not cars, to transport their goods from the wharf to their homes.

But trouble is brewing on the Hawkesbury over plans to restrict the use of holiday houses, which have been a source of income for owners and frustration to some permanent residents for years.

Hornsby Shire Council is considering a proposal to end the unregulated use of houses for short-term holiday rental by introducing development applications.

Guest numbers would be capped at six a house and owners would need to prove there was adequate parking at the house or nearby wharves.

Real estate agents and holiday home owners fear the strict rules may sound the death knell for holiday rentals in the council area, which includes Berowra Waters, Brooklyn, Milsons Passage and Wisemans Ferry.

Spearheading the reforms is a Greens councillor, Wendy McMurdo, who said there had been problems with holidaymakers leaving rubbish out and abusing residents who asked them to keep the noise down.

"I acknowledge there are some benefits from tourists, but what percentage of people does that benefit? Is it high enough to warrant the impost on the local population?" she said.

Harry Recher has lived on the island since 1969. Back then, his neighbours used to rent their boat house to the same group of friends every summer. "You got to know them. They understood the island. They understood how to behave," Mr Recher said.

Kim Dutton bought a cottage on the island with her business partner three years ago. They rent it out to tourists occasionally, but Ms Dutton said the changes could force them to sell.

"I think there's a mindset that the rental property pays for itself. We don't make a profit off this property," she said.

In response to complaints from residents, real estate agents introduced a cap on guest numbers and a 24-hour caretaker. An estimated 50 homes in the council area are regularly leased to tourists. Others are rented privately.

At Byron Bay, there is a proposal to define holiday letting precincts and charge holiday house owners a levy. On the South Coast, some councils have developed voluntary guidelines.

The chairman of Hornsby council's Employment and Economic Development Taskforce, Steve Russell, said parking was a problem for the council, not owners, and development applications would not control troublemakers.

A Department of Planning spokesman said it was considering measures to establish a consistent approach.