

2013 Year In Review

In writing this report, I reflected on the year and what we have achieved for residential strata owners. Standing beside OCN Chairman Stephen Goddard, witnessing NSW Fair Trading Minister, Anthony Roberts, announce the reforms he (and we) had worked so hard to deliver I felt very proud. And humble.

Few organisations have the capacity, commitment, tenacity or experience to bring about such positive change in legislation that we see today. It takes a lot of hard work, expertise, patience and goodwill.

It was an overnight success, ten years in the making. Every fibre of OCN's being - since its formation in 2002 by people grappling with the complexities of strata living and building defects, to the announcement of major strata reforms and strong measures to minimise those defects - has been dedicated to improving strata living.

None of this would have been possible without dedicated people: a tireless Board and passionate members who have contributed generously of their time and expertise, and the sponsors that made it possible in 2012 to engage a dedicated person to focus on the relationship building and advocacy that earned OCN a place at the government table beside much larger and more powerful lobby groups.

That combined strength has allowed strata owners to evolve from being viewed as a commodity, seen but not heard, to the legitimate and respected voice of a valued segment of the community. Wow.

2013 in Numbers

- 11 – years of owner support and advocacy
- 7 – government submissions
- 3 – joint submissions and joint statements
- 2 – meetings with MLCs
- 4 – Strata Law Reform round tables
- 3 – government Board appointments
- 11 – radio interviews
- 32 – print articles
- 1 – TV coverage
- 1 – public seminar
- 1 – Strata research paper partnership (strata renewal)
- 7 – voluntary Board members
- 1 – part-time staff member

2013 Education / Events

Members Meeting, February	Topic: Energy Audits and Savings
Members Meeting, May	Topic: Building Management Software saving you time, stress and \$
Members Meeting, August	Topic: Does Your Building Have the Best Value Insurance Cover?
Members Meeting, November	Topic: Strata Law reforms
Public Seminar, November	Topic: Improving Your Building Improves the Value of Your Apartment

OCN was privileged to welcome NSW Fair Trading Minister's Chief of Staff and Policy Director as guest speakers.

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Major Sponsors



Achievements

Strata Law Reforms

- Strata renewal with a protective framework of review, mediation and appeal
- Defect bond for buildings over 3 storeys. Developers can't vote on defects. 2 year expert inspection
- Realistic budget/levies to be set by developer or owners corporation can recover difference
- Strong disclosure requirements around insurance commissions to strata managers
- Maximum 3 year strata management agreement

Home Building Act Reforms

- Register of Home Owners Warranty certificates (to prevent forged certificates)
- Fire safety and waterproofing now defined as major defects with 6 years warranty (currently 2 years)
- Breach of (defect) rectification orders to be an offence
- Expert determination model to be trialled to replace years of litigation over defects claims

Advocacy

- **Planning System Review** - OCN made a joint submission with Strata Community Australia (NSW) to this major review, on a troubling development within the building regulation and certification segment.
- **Strata Legislation Review** – Extensive reforms have been announced and should become reality mid 2014. The use of phoenix companies to avoid defects rectification is being tackled by NSWFT taking a whole of government approach – to be applauded. OCN continues to work closely with NSWFT to ensure the final product matches both the Minister's and OCN's vision for a better strata world.
- **Home Building Act Review** – OCN is pleased to report a strengthening of consumer protection in the proposed reforms, which we hope to see come into force mid 2014. In parallel, OCN is working with government and industry to strengthen licensing and ensure the quality of building experts, with the aim of significantly reducing unnecessary and expensive litigation.
- **NSW Tribunals Review** – OCN has made four submissions and met with the Chairman and Deputy Chairmen to achieve more consistent findings and improve the process from complaint to appeals.
- **NSW Emergency Services Levy Review** – NSW residents almost saw the abolition of this unfair tax on responsible insurance policy holders, but sadly the government blinked and it has been deferred for two years. OCN will continue to lobby with other stakeholder groups for a fair broad based tax.
- **Government Committees** - OCN now sits on NSW Fair Trading Property Services Advisory Council (advising the Minister on eg strata management agreements and licensing matters) and the Home Building Advisory Council, as well the Building Professionals Board which regulates building certifiers.
- **NSW Land & Property Information - Strata Industry Working Group** - This committee, which includes a broad representation of property industry and regulators, will define common and individual property to support the upcoming strata law reforms on apartment alterations.
- **City Futures 'Strata Renewal' Research Project** - OCN is again partnering in this important research, to look at 'Economically viable and socially sustainable approaches to urban redevelopment'. OCN sees this as a vital component of its approach to strata renewal.
- **Building Professionals Board (NSW Planning)** – as a Board member OCN can now influence positive change in building certification. The Board is looking at improved training, licensing and accreditation, and enforcement to achieve reliable building certification.
- **\$1million Energy Efficiency Information Grant – 'Smart Blocks'** in which OCN partnered with Strata Community Australia, Sydney and Melbourne Councils and Green Strata, is now delivering workshops on reducing energy consumption and costs (a significant portion of every scheme's balance sheet).