

## 2014 Year in Review

As Executive Officer of OCN I have the privilege of working with committed people who are all eager to help you, our members. I am constantly reminded that helping strata owners is in our DNA.

My thanks go to your tireless Board members and the passionate members who contributed generously of their time and expertise to develop submissions, provide member guides such as on the high speed internet, and our wonderful sponsors who contribute enormously in terms of funding, support, guidance and contribution to the myriad, complex law reforms.

We are always working to support you, and to represent you, with one eye on your needs today and one on future generations and how we can make their strata lives better. Signing the [Planning for People: A Community Charter for Good Planning in NSW](#) was one of many actions OCN took to promote a better future for the rapidly increasing number of people living in 'vertical villages'.

### 2014 in Numbers

- 12 – years of owner support and advocacy
- 11 – government submissions
- 3 – government Board appointments
- 1 – additional state representation (Qld)
- 6 – radio interviews
- 30 – print articles (often reprinted in many other publications)
- 3 – TV coverage
- 2 – Strata academic research partnerships
- 6 – voluntary Board members
- 1 – part-time staff member

### Member Services

During the year, in between the ongoing government consultations and submissions, we have:

- Improved the website.
- Upgraded the Forum. Soon members will be able to elect to receive daily or weekly digests, or subscribe to individual forums eg governance on a self-serve opt in/out basis.
- Improved the look of monthly Member Updates.
- Held four member meetings, covering a variety of topics.

### Events / Education

- March: Lift Tales and Tribulations, Strata Finance
- May: Strata Law Reforms
- August: Fibre Optics – To TPG or not to TPG?
- November: OurBodyCorp DIY strata management and the virtual village square OurPlaceManager

Thanks to our sponsors

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## Achievements

### Internal

- **Discussion Forum automation** - increased productivity, reduced reliance on volunteers
- **Website upgrade** – new responsive theme adapts to different devices
- **Newsletter** – improved styling increased member engagement
- **Database** – developed automated self-serve member information updates

### External

- **'Smart Blocks'** which OCN co-founded with Green Strata, Strata Community Australia, Sydney and Melbourne Councils won the prestigious 2014 Victorian Premier's Design Award for service delivery.
- **Strata Law reforms** – together with peak bodies representing strata managers OCN stopped the January 2014 introduction of some poorly considered changes.

## Advocacy

- **Strata & Community Title Law Reviews** – OCN continued, against a backdrop of changing Ministers and disappearing departmental staff, to advocate for practical reforms. Sadly, concerns that the Strata Renewal proposal (75% agreement to redevelop) would make the government look developer-friendly, saw introduction deferred till after the 2015 election. OCN's mission is now to ensure the reforms do happen. OCN also commented on recent, less controversial community title proposals.
- **Home Building Act Review** – the government was not concerned about being seen to be close to developers when it failed spectacularly to deliver a better deal for owners with building defects. OCN campaigned long and hard, essentially alone, to stop changes which our legal advisers contend will substantially and retrospectively reduce the few remaining rights of home owners.

Government also failed to act to improve construction quality, despite some 56 enquiries into the construction industry since around 1995 and NSW Home Owners Warranty claims for buildings less than 3 storeys (3+ storeys have no protection) costing taxpayers around \$1.5m per week. As a result OCN has called together industry groups to collaboratively create our own future.

- **Planning System Review** – 'bold' reform proposals failed to eventuate, including the Better Buildings Model aimed at delivering better quality construction. OCN continues to advocate for a single building commission in a senior portfolio which delivers a robust framework, to weed out shonky operators. The review of the Building Professionals Act may provide an opportunity for positive change.
- **IPART Red Tape Reviews (Licensing and Local Government)** – OCN submitted comments on the fragmented bureaucracy which, as an example, on one hand requires pool barrier certification and on the other recommends de-licensing of fencers who are even now the most complained about trade.
- **Qld Property Law Review** – OCN was invited to participate in stakeholder forums, the first time home owners have been permitted to participate in shaping the laws that govern their lives.
- **NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal** – is building case law to achieve more consistent findings and improve the process from complaint to appeals. OCN is in regular contact to monitor improvements.
- **Government Committees** - OCN 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.
- **Swimming Pool Certification** – OCN called for deferral of the planned 29 April 2014 introduction which did not allow swimming pool and spa owners sufficient time to have their pools certified. For owners corporations this could have resulted in legal action by owners unable to lease or sell their lots. Sadly, government inertia may see a lack of certifiers leading to the same outcome in April 2015.
- **Renewal of the Compact City research project** – OCN has again teamed with City Futures Research Centre to report on the social and economic consequences of reducing the approval rate to 75%. Impacts include not only social dislocation, but stamp duty and taxation implications for investors.