

## 2015 Year in Review

OCN was formed in 2002 as the result of executive committee members grappling with the challenges of complex, 'cooperative' living and building defects. I am proud to say that in 2015 OCN was a key player in the introduction of a building defects bond and a new legal regime to govern strata living.

What made this possible? A dedicated, voluntary Board with a vision. Sponsors and supporters committed to improved strata living. And the invaluable contribution of its members. It is a great privilege to work with such extraordinary people, and to witness the changes a small band of committed citizens can make.

### 2015 in Numbers

- 13 – years of owner support and advocacy
- 14 – government submissions
- 3 – government Board appointments
- 30 – print/digital articles (+ multiple reprints)
- 8 – radio interviews
- 3 – TV coverage
- 1 – Strata academic research partnership
- 7 – voluntary Board members
- 2 – part-time staff members

### Member Services

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

- Revamped the website
- Improved the monthly Member Updates
- Started to build a library of useful member guides
- Alerted members to a number of potential dangers eg self-combusting washing machines
- Held four member meetings and three seminars, covering a variety of topics:
  - February: Strata Law Reforms – What They Mean For You
  - May: Strata insurance - Now and The Future
  - August: Strata Laws & You
  - September: Your Legal Responsibilities Living in a Vertical Village
  - November: Protecting Your Investment & Adding Value to Your Community, and Reducing Your Levies Through Energy Savings

### Achievements

- **New Website** – new, fast and easy to navigate and search website
- **Building Defects Bond** - as the result of OCN pointing out the disconnect between builders and the final owners, the government introduced a defects bond and pre 2 year inspection regime.
- **Strata Renewal** – as the result of OCN partnering with industry, the government brought in a lower threshold for renewing schemes past their use by date or on land that could be better utilised.
- **Off the Plan Contracts** – OCN founder Sue Williams exposed and OCN was involved in developing the solution to preventing developers from rescinding Off-The-Plan contract to resell at higher prices.
- **Qld presence** – OCN's Qld presence was cemented by a joint submission with SCA(Q) and ARAMA on the Qld property review.

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## Advocacy

- **Government Committees** - OCN sits on the NSW Building Professionals Board (regulates building certifiers) and, until they were disbanded midyear, the NSW Fair Trading Property Services Advisory Council (strata and licensing matters) and the Home Building Advisory Council.
- **NSW Strata & Community Title Law Reviews** – A new Minister with a new title – Innovation & Better Regulation – restarted the reform process and the Strata Development, Strata Management, and Community Title Bills became law. These laws, the culmination of four years of deep involvement by OCN and, whilst not perfect and work continues, are scheduled to come into force on 1 July 2016.
- **NSW Building Professionals Act Review** – the independent review of this legislation produced far reaching recommendations which government is considering. A single Building Commission with carriage of licensing and building certification was a key component strongly supported by OCN.

This is positive news after the government failed spectacularly to protect home owners through the Home Building Act reforms or act to improve construction quality, despite some 56 enquiries in the past 20 years while NSW Home Owners Warranty claims for buildings less than 3 storeys (3+ storeys have no protection) is costing taxpayers around \$1.5m per week. OCN continues to work with industry to ensure the recommendations become a reality.

- **Qld Property Law Review** – OCN made two submissions to the ongoing Qld property review.
- **NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal** – OCN participated in two consultative forums and liaised directly the Tribunal on issues of interest eg the right for strata schemes to have representation.
- **NSW Swimming Pool Certification** – In 2014 OCN called for the delayed introduction of requirements which did not allow owners time to certify their pools and spas, and warned that government inertia may result in a lack of certifiers leading to the same outcome in 2015. And so it was. The government is now reviewing the proposed legislation, with a view to requiring certification by 29 April 2016.
- **Collaborative Economy roundtable** – OCN participated in discussions hosted by the Minister for Innovation & Better Regulation, who is keen balance fostering 'disruptive technologies' with appropriate regulation to protect consumers.
- **Renewal of the Compact City research project** – OCN was a proud and active partner in this important 3 year project, with the final report being released on Economically Viable and Socially Responsible Approaches to Urban Redevelopment.
- **Partnership with Ryde Council** – OCN has partnered with its first Council to deliver much needed information to strata owners. This initiative is partly to mobilise local government to support its community and partly to extend OCN's educational reach.
- **Solomon Islands delegation** – OCN was privileged to meet with a Solomon Islands delegation looking into setting up strata title in that country, and explain the need to put their people before processes.
- **NBN Migration** – OCN was invited to participate in a working group looking at migrating lift phones and fire services to the NBN.
- **Off-The-Plan purchases** – OCN participated in an emergency roundtable to prevent developers rescinding contracts so they could re-sell at a higher price. That roundtable resulted in urgent legislation to protect purchasers.
- **Griffith University Strata Conference** – OCN was appointed to the planning committee, delivered two presentations and participated in a panel session at this preminent strata conference.