

The Owners Corporation Network: A History

The Owners Corporation Network (OCN) was born in February 2002 after a number of new owners of apartments bought off the plan in different Sydney buildings came together to discuss common issues.

Many of them were wrestling with defects problems that their developers refused to fix. Many had ten-year million-dollar contracts with suppliers their developers had signed on their behalf that seemed impossible to cancel.

All were keen to find better, more efficient and less time-consuming ways to run their owners corporations. And everyone was struggling to find a way through the maze of concerns with very little information available about this brave new world of strata-living.

When the first group of 20 owners from various Executive Committees came together, they were startled to find they had so much common ground. They then agreed to set up an organisation together – the OCN – to meet regularly to discuss and share their issues, and to help each other out where they could.

Over the following months, then years, they worked together on problems as diverse as contractors and developers colluding to make money out of new owners with secret, hugely expensive back-hander deals; developers controlling Executive Committees in order to avoid having to pay for defects to be rectified; strata levies either being grossly underestimated at the time of sale, or being weighted in favour of commercial and retail lots that were part of the same strata plan; inexperienced building managers; bylaws that were completely unsuited to their buildings; pet policies that allowed, memorably, a small horse to be kept in one townhouse; and an agreement that left unit-owners paying for a nearby library on a deal done by a developer with the local council.

As well as helping each other and disseminating information about strata-living at the monthly meetings, the OCN set up a website and an email discussion group for members to ask questions and receive advice.

They also began holding regular information seminars, with invited guest speakers, to educate themselves, and others. Speakers included some of the country's leading architects, insurers, strata managers, specialty service providers and strata lawyers. The first seminar was launched by Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore. Education packs were prepared and handed out.

Another turning point came early on, in April 2002, when the OCN made its first official submission to Government about strata-living, presenting to the Parliamentary Inquiry on NSW Building Standards. The industry was taken aback by such a well organised group making a forceful stand on the future of apartment-owners, asking for necessary changes to the legislation and Government policy, a viable and visible lobby group, and a strong, authentic alternative to the developers' lobby.

The OCN charter was drawn up: *'The Owners Corporation Network is made up of Owners Corporation members representing Sydney's larger strata title residential developments and many thousands of individual property owners. The role of the OCN is to facilitate the ongoing improvement of living in and/or investing in large strata title buildings. The OCN will focus on facilitating necessary changes to government policy and legislation. Furthermore, the OCN strives to educate Owners Corporation Executive Committees and individuals through sharing experiences and disseminating information from relevant documentation and related organisations'.*

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Since then, the OCN has appeared regularly in the press, in newspapers, magazines, on TV and on radio, with its opinions keenly sought by the media.

Representatives are asked to make submissions to Inquiries and receive a steady stream of invitations to address meetings and national conferences, including the bi-annual landmark strata event at Griffith University on the Gold Coast.

They're also called in for frequent meetings with Government departments, advisors, legislators of all parties and the Minister for Fair Trading, now the Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation.

The OCN's reach and influence has been growing steadily. Branches have been set up in Victoria and Queensland, and a carefully-curated sponsorship policy has allowed it to fund a full-time professional staff.

Today, as the peak professional body of strata owners and residents, the OCN has become a strong voice on behalf of strata owners everywhere, and continues to work tirelessly to make the future of apartment living as equitable, enjoyable and stress-free as it was always intended to be.

Past Chairs of the OCN

Jason Sharpe 2002

Colin Tate 2002-2003

Rex Wood 2003-2004

Stephen Goddard 2004-

Phil Gall

Jane Hearn

Fred Tuckwell (2022 - present)