

23 August 2024

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Reconstruction NSW

Attention: Sarah Tasic, Acting Director Disaster Risk Management

By email: [dap@reconstruction.nsw.gov.au](mailto:dap@reconstruction.nsw.gov.au)

### **OCN Submission on Disaster Adaption Planning (DAP)**

This submission is made by the Owners Corporation Network of Australia Limited (OCN), an association of thousands of apartment owners run by apartment owners. OCN, on behalf of apartment owners. The OCN is grateful for the opportunity to provide a detailed submission following an initial conversation with Amanda Leek, Hala Hubrag and Sarah Tasic on 6 August 2024.

- **Who is OCN?** - The Owners Corporation Network of Australia Limited (OCN) is the independent peak consumer body representing residential strata and community title owners and residents. As such, OCN is uniquely positioned to understand the needs and constraints within this unique housing sector, as well as to advise on the potential impacts that legislation may have on planning, development, and day-to-day operational outcomes. OCN are experts in residential strata, hence our comments relate to what our members are seeking.
- **Who lives in strata?** More than one in ten Australians – live in an apartment. In our major cities this is closer to one in four and to meet the projected demand for housing this will increase to one in two, or 50% of the population by 2050. Over 2.5 million people live in strata households in Australia. NSW, which has the largest sector, has just over 89,000 residential strata schemes housing 1.3 million people. It is the fastest growing type of dwelling, with over a thousand new schemes being registered each year. Source:  
[https://cityfutures.ada.unsw.edu.au/documents/717/2022\\_Australasian\\_Strata\\_Insights\\_Report.pdf](https://cityfutures.ada.unsw.edu.au/documents/717/2022_Australasian_Strata_Insights_Report.pdf)

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- **Why is DAP relevant to OCN?** OCN wants to work together with government to prepare for; respond to and recover from the potentially traumatic experience of unit evacuations. OCN would do that by being involved as a trusted, independent advisor and representative of OCN members. OCN would like to provide input on matters such as disaster adaptation planning in the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley (HNV) initially and then in other locations relevant to our membership based (in the location of units across NSW). OCN would value the opportunity to be involved with other preparedness measures such the development of public policy and the implementation measures such NSW flood planning.
- **What does OCN know about preparedness?** OCN has recently completed a strata preparedness study and issued a project report on “*Strata Disaster: How prepared are our apartment communities emergencies and disasters*”. More than 100 individuals from government, government agencies, industry, academia and community were engaged in the study, through ongoing discussions and participation in a stakeholder and expert roundtable. This provided a robust, cross-sectoral and multi-agency perspective of the barriers and challenges experienced by those at the front-line of emergency response and recovery in apartment buildings. In addition, almost 1000 online surveys were completed by residents and owners corporation representatives to establish a baseline of emergency preparedness in apartment communities.

The study identified the fundamental inadequacy of current emergency management and planning frameworks to ensure the safety and protection of the growing proportion of people living in apartments. Safety ‘law’ and ‘policy’ is largely compliance-driven and focused on building quality and fire prevention. Other more likely hazards, such as utility outages, water contamination, toxic gases, heat exposure, disease transmission, cyber attacks and security breaches are overlooked. Building fire safety standards and emergency requirements for evacuation do not apply to emergency preparedness and responses for natural disasters. Building defects are also a separate matter although they do highlight some of the same challenges for insurance, evacuation and the complexities of apartment living and strata law.

The study report sought a series of outcomes. For example:

- *“Outcome: Better planning and building standards that ensure buildings are built and maintained to be resilient to disasters and that allow occupants to evacuate in emergencies more easily.”*

- *Outcome: Emergency response plans, protocols, and essential information for all apartment buildings are available, kept current, and easily accessible to occupants and emergency responders”*

The full report: [https://ocn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Strata-Disaster-Report-V10\\_interactive.pdf](https://ocn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Strata-Disaster-Report-V10_interactive.pdf)

- **What is OCN seeking?** - In relation to DAPS, OCN is interested to provide guidance on the following key matters:
  - **Policy** - Identify mechanisms in long term strategic planning to plan for strata living preparedness via Community Strategic Plans, Local Environmental Plans and Development Control Plans.
  - **(strata) Community-led Capacity\* and Legal Responsibilities** - Include OCN as a representative to develop effective measures and actions for (strata) community led preparedness, first responders (residents and building managers onsite), asset management (10 year capital works plans and Strata Management law requiring OCs to maintain the building asset), post-disaster legal/remediation issues (under Design and Building Practitioners Act) and person-centred preparedness for NDIS owners/occupants and their carers.
  - **Education & Awareness** - Work with OCN to develop and deliver tailored training and resources to upskill volunteer committee members to lead emergency preparedness and response in their apartment communities (OCN has applied for grant funding to the City of Sydney to develop a pilot for this in 2025).
  - **Insurance Gap** - While post-disaster funding applies to individuals in dwellings some funding is not available to the situation of owner’s corporations, lot owners and tenants, resulting in an insurance gap.

In conclusion, OCN already has an independent role across NSW to advocate for better outcomes for people living in strata. As strata living becomes the predominant housing form in NSW, there is an urgent role for OCN to play in assisting government develop long term strategies and frameworks for planning and preparation for disasters. OCN would welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic further.

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## *Research Extracts*

\* There is a wealth of information supporting community-led disaster preparedness, here are some extracts of relevance:

“Under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (Home Affairs, 2018), based on the Sendai Framework, there is an acknowledgement that communities don’t control the levers to reduce risk (2018, 4) however communities can have an important role in shared responsibility and understanding of the risks.

Research in 2022 (INSW) about flood evacuation behaviour in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley by Newgate, on behalf of Infrastructure Australia, showed that:

- 70% of people that see evacuation orders ignore them;
- the median evacuation time is 1 hour, many people take up to 2 hours and 25% will take more than 2 hours to leave, if they leave at all; and
- people use their own judgement rather than heeding official warnings

Newgate also provided communication recommendations to INSW suggesting that:

- geographically targeted messaging would be more effective rather than broad area statements;
- people pay attention to locally relevant information; and
- community engagement could include disseminating information through resident’s associations.

The Newgate research also suggested that SES should be “testing flood messaging and campaigns amongst people with lower literacy / English proficiency and other vulnerable groups (e.g. First Nations communities).”

For strata living, there are high levels of vulnerable people (older residents and those with disabilities in supported accommodation) so local communication should be a priority. Investment (time money and resources) is needed from owners’ corporations, building managers and disability providers together with the NSW Government, SES and councils to provide appropriate solutions for planning, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Infrastructure Australia (2022) recommendations are to change engagement to include:

1. “An in-depth stakeholder engagement strategy that targets community leaders at a granular level should be developed, building on INSW’s existing engagement program. This should amplify general messaging, as well as delivering suburb-specific information.”

2. Development of partnerships with stakeholders and advocates beyond politicians, councils and emergency services to include “cultural and religious leaders, community organisers ...
3. The creation of suburb-specific messages rather than broad, HNV-wide information.
4. The need to test flood messaging and campaigns amongst people with lower literacy / English proficiency and other vulnerable groups.

*Key References:*

- Home Affairs, 2018, National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reductionframework.pdf>
- Infrastructure Australia, 2022, Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Research - Community Sentiment Telephone Survey (conducted by SEC Newgate). [https://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/3843/2022\\_december\\_hawkesbur-ypnean-valley-floods-community-sentiment-survey\\_sec-newgate.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/3843/2022_december_hawkesbur-ypnean-valley-floods-community-sentiment-survey_sec-newgate.pdf)
- The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030, <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>