



When something fishy is going on up there

For most people, living in a strata complex offers a peaceful lifestyle. However problems and complaints can sometimes arise. Buyers, particularly first time strata buyers, are urged to do some digging first, reports **ADAM ZUCHETTI**.

THE NSW Office of Fair Trading has released a list of the most common complaints received from residents of strata communities.

Fair Trading Minister, Virginia Judge, said: "On the whole, the reasons for most disagreements between neighbours, owners and owners' corporations are what people might reasonably expect."

But the Office of Fair Trading has also received some unusual and downright bizarre complaints.

"Can you imagine discovering that the reason water was leaking into your property from the unit above was that your neighbour

was breeding trout in an above-ground swimming pool?" she said.

"(And) keeping pets without permission is the third most complained about issue - but using a small inner-city strata block as a horse stable is not only thoughtless, it's cruel."

Another complaint pertained to a woman who watered her garden naked. The men in the complex were eventually overruled and action was taken to ensure the nudist neighbour remained clothed while in common areas.

"Fair Trading receives approximately 1300 mediation applications from NSW's 65,000

strata schemes each year," said Ms Judge.

"While applications increased by 10 per cent in 2008, Fair Trading successfully mediated 70 per cent of those cases, with the remainder adjudicated by the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal."

Top of the list of complaints was noisy neighbours, followed by water penetration repairs, issues with pets, victimisation or harassment, car parking disputes, objections to levy increases and unauthorised renovations.

But there are other, more serious things to consider when buying a strata property.





One buyer, who wished to remain anonymous, was forced to walk away from her dream property after discovering structural problems and a severely depleted sinking fund – less than \$10,000.

This left the strata manager powerless to carry out the required maintenance work.

She said the building report did not reveal anything out of the ordinary.

But it was her solicitor who did some detailed research before exchanging the contracts, as well as her conversations with the occupants of neighbouring properties, which revealed the chronic water leaks, issues with flooding and the fact the building did not comply with Australian building regulations.

Despite the complaints and unfortunate experiences of a select few, the majority of people living

in apartments believe that strata-titled property offers a pleasant, enjoyable lifestyle, according to David Ferguson, president of the Institute of Strata Title Management (ISTM).

“Living in a strata apartment is

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like living in a vertical village, with a community all around you,” he said.

“Instead of the chat over the back fence, living in an apartment can mean a chat in the hallway.

“Security is also a feature of many apartments with intercoms,

security doors and, in some cases, a concierge.”

Mr Ferguson said other benefits of strata-living can include additional facilities like a swimming pool or gymnasium, which are fully maintained through the strata levies, and the majority of strata properties are located in close proximity to transport corridors, such as railway lines.

“All these elements make strata living a great way of life. How do I know? I also live in a strata-titled property with my family,” he said.

Mr Ferguson urges buyers looking at strata-titled properties to get a strata inspection report done before signing contracts, to avoid any hidden surprises.

More information on buying strata property can be obtained from the Fair Trading brochure *Buying into a strata scheme?*

