

# STRATA & COMMUNITY LIVING

AUTUMN 2019

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## WHAT IT TAKES TO WIN AN AWARD

Each year outstanding contributors to the NSW strata sector are recognised at the SCA (NSW) Strata Community Awards across several award categories. One of the award categories recognises a strata scheme that is working to reduce their impact on the environment. The winner of the 2018 Strata Community Environmental & Engagement award went to strata scheme 'Generation W', which was once a commercial store house that has been retrofitted and now embraces the principles of re-use, sustainability and community.

Generation W is located in Woolloomooloo and consists of 35 units with three residential floors and 140 square metres of roof space.

The active strata committee rallies the owners as it pursues innovative solutions aimed at the efficient and responsible use of resources including energy, waste and food. To achieve this the owners corporation initiated a sustainability plan and has acted enthusiastically on the recommendations.

Activities undertaken to increase energy efficiency include an upgrade to the common hot water system for the apartments to a heat pump system. Solar thermal hot water solutions were also investigated.

For this property heat pump technology demonstrated the greatest savings potential. The central location of the existing water boilers in the basement car park was ideally suited to a heat pump implementation and advantage was taken of existing piping infrastructure. The existing location of the

boilers was sound proof and well ventilated for efficient operation. Heat pump technology is often overlooked, so this project serves as a useful demonstration for other strata schemes.

The strata committee also followed through with an LED lighting upgrade in common areas including basement carpark, fire escapes, stairwells, corridors, and external lights. Dimmable enlighten Chamaeleon lights were used where appropriate to maximize the savings impact.

Solar PV, smart meters and batteries have also been investigated with various solutions explored. The current Solar PV proposal involves development of unused roof space for 12kW of Solar PV panels while allowing for a proposed communal BBQ in another area of the roof.

In addition to energy efficiency, water and renewable energy projects, the strata committee has also established an extensive community vegetable and herb garden. This includes implementation of a new food waste composting system and a worm farm.

The main ground floor common area now hosts a thriving open air communal garden which is used for growing food including: strawberries, paw paw, olives, asparagus, lemons, sweet potatoes, rhubarb, limes, kaffir limes, passionfruit, beetroot, eggplant, pumpkin, tomatoes, rocket and chillies. The herb garden includes parsley, thyme, oregano, sage, chives, basil, rosemary and bay leaves.

The use of the common area for a vegetable and herb garden has been a tremendous boost to community engagement and services as a food source, waste recycling as well as learning and social outlet. This has broken down barriers and raised enthusiasm in the discussion of other projects including energy efficiency, water, waste, transport, and renewable energy projects. Strata committee meetings are enlivened by discussion around these various projects and are now better informed about the attitudes and feelings of owners and residents in the community.

With all these projects the strata committee has been able to overcome barriers and holds regular committee meetings, documents progress, engages professionals, and distributes findings to the community via email. The strata committee has found that because of the sense of community that has evolved residents make the extra effort to read reports and findings and be involved in both informal and formal discussions.

The strata scheme has also committed to obtain a NABERS for Apartment Buildings rating to formally show other strata schemes what is possible and how to achieve sustainability goals.

If you believe your scheme has that special something why not consider entering the 2019 Awards. Details on how to enter will be on the SCA (NSW) website <https://nsw.strata.community/> soon.



## Good communications creates great communities

Our lift broke down recently and was only working intermittently over two weeks. That's not all that broke down.

Non-existent communications left all residents in our block wondering what was going on. It also led to a potentially dangerous situation.

In the weeks prior to the lift breaking down, the building manager had asked all residents to ensure their contact details were up-to-date. The note left under our door said that doing this would "ensure you receive vital communications".

Yet when vital communications were needed, they were nowhere to be seen. A quick straw poll of our neighbours confirmed this.

In 2012, City Futures Research Centre, which is part of the University of NSW, released research findings which included the fact that "good communication is the most important factor influencing satisfaction with managing agents and executive committees."

The report "Governing the Compact City: the role and effectiveness of strata management" found that "good communications between managing agents, executive committees and owners are essential for the good governance and management of strata schemes. Communication was an important reason for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with managing agents and executive committees."

During the course of the research, it was noted that "the most commonly identified reason for satisfaction with their strata managing agent was their responsiveness to inquiries and good communications."

Whether you're a strata committee member or strata manager it is vital that residents get regular communications, but this escalates when there is a problem that will clearly impact the residents way of living in the short-term, like a lift malfunction. In our case we had to put off delivery of some furniture. Another neighbour was concerned about her elderly parents getting up and down the stairs.

To encourage better communications here are some simple to follow steps in writing that all important notice, email, SMS:

- State the problem – do this as soon as possible.
- State when a solution may be provided – if that's unknown say so but undertake to give an update.
- Provide the audience with some solutions if possible – in the case of the lift breaking down how residents get about using the fire stairs as these could be locked off impeding access.
- Keep residents updated – even if there is no update, sending a note that says this is better than nothing.

Simple communications are often the most effective and, in the end, build better relationships.

# HOW THE OPAL TOWER DISASTER MAY BRING CHANGE

In NSW it is not uncommon for strata schemes to have horror stories about defects. One of the most public ones of late is that of the Opal Tower, a 36 storey apartment tower located in Sydney's Olympic Park precinct. It was completed in 2018 with residents moving in not long after.

On Christmas Eve 2018, residents heard loud noises, including a 'bang'. Investigations found large cracks in a load-bearing panel on level 10. Further investigations found cracked structural concrete on level 4. Over four days, residents were evacuated, allowed back to their apartments and then evacuated again.

An interim report was prepared following an investigation into the possible causes. The report's Executive Summary provides answers to some of the common questions that have been asked.

The report indicates that overall the building is structurally sound and not in danger of collapsing. However, the report says that significant rectification works are needed.

In addition to the rectification works, a number of design and construction issues have been identified that together have probably caused the

damage to some structural parts of the building. This will require further investigation.

Recommendations include that independent qualified structural engineers be engaged to check the final proposal in detail before major rectification works commence. As well, further analysis should be undertaken of the structural design with some construction elements strengthened as they occur throughout the building.

Of course the unseen damage is to residents and owners who have had to move out of their relatively new homes and to the reputation of the property developers and the building itself. For example, apartments are now worth 50 percent less according to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 20 January.

On 22 February 2019 the NSW Government released its final report into the issues surrounding the Opal Tower building failure.

The final report found:

- a number of structural design and construction issues, including non-compliance with national codes and standards were responsible for the observed damage at Opal Tower.

- some of the as-constructed hob beams and panel assemblies were under designed according to the National Construction Code and Australian Standards, leaving the beams prone to failure.
- construction and material deficiencies likely contributed to the damage to the hob beams on levels 4 and 10.
- the building is overall structurally sound and the localised damage to the building can be rectified to ensure the building is compliant with the National Construction Code.

Final recommendations include the creation of a new Building Structure Review Board to establish and publish the facts relating to major structural damage of buildings arising from structural design and construction, to investigate their causes and to recommend regulatory changes as needed.

A full copy of the final report is available at: <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/finalopalreport>.

The NSW Government's full response to the Shergold Weir Report is available on the Fair Trading website <https://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/resource-library>



# STRATA UPDATE

## Cladding Update

The deadline to register certain residential and public buildings on a NSW Government portal if it may have external combustible cladding was 22 February 2019 for buildings occupied before 22 October 2018. If you missed this deadline you should talk to your strata manager as fines may apply for non compliance.

Registration and identification of these buildings helps Fire and Rescue NSW to respond accordingly in the case of a fire and educate occupants about additional fire prevention steps that can be taken. It also helps councils to decide whether any assessment or rectification actions are necessary.

Owners of new buildings will be required to register their building within four months of the building first being occupied.

The registration requirements are simple and building owners only need basic information about their building to register. You do not need to engage an expert for this.

For more information on the regulation go to the Department of Planning's dedicated website <https://www.claddingregistration.nsw.gov.au/>

## SCA (NSW) Strata Owners Day - Save the Date

Join other strata owners and residents attending the 2019 Strata Owners Day at the Swissotel Sydney right in the heart of the CBD.

Strata Owners Day offers strata owners and those interested in buying into strata, opportunities for education about strata matters, to receive updates and to have their queries answered by strata professionals.

Speakers will cover topics such as:

- owners and tenant rights
- common property
- strata manager selection and termination and much more.

With a range of trade exhibitors showcasing the latest products and services combined with an exciting program, this is a day not to be missed.

**When:** Saturday, 22 June 2019

**Time:** 9.00am – 4.00pm **Where:**

Swissotel Sydney, Blaxland B Room  
– 68 Market St, Sydney, 2000

**Registration:**

Strata Owner Chapter Members  
– \$40

Non Members – \$60

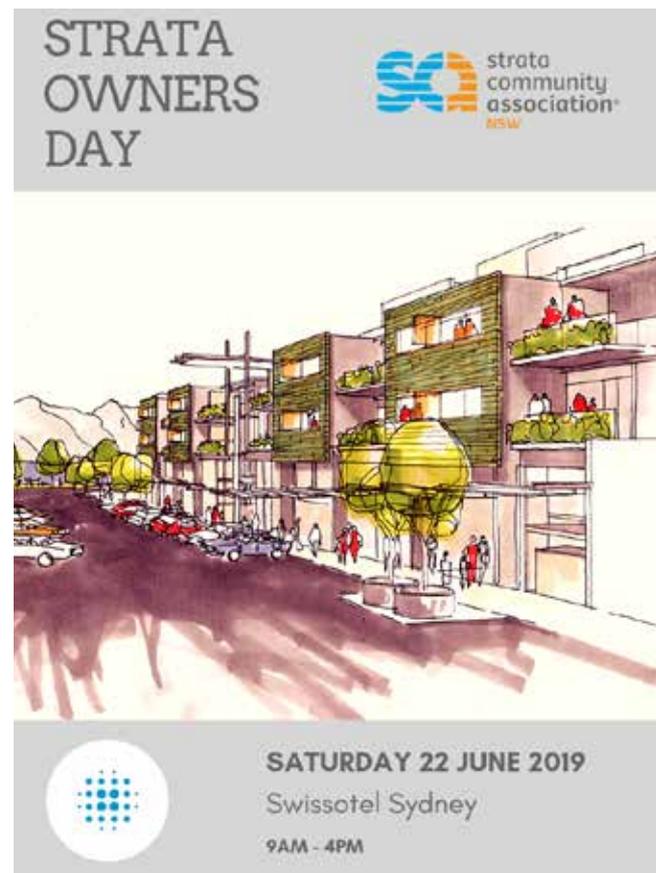
Registrations will be opening soon <https://nsw.strata.community/2019-owners-day/>

The registration fee includes full access to all sessions, exhibition area, event bag, trade passport draw, lunch and coffee breaks.

**Non Member Registration offer**

All non-members will receive an individual complimentary membership to the SCA (NSW) Strata Owner Chapter, which is valid to 30 June 2020.

Please note you must return a completed application form by no later than 30 June 2019 to qualify. Application forms are available on the SCA (NSW) website.



STRATA OWNERS DAY

strata community association<sup>NSW</sup>

SATURDAY 22 JUNE 2019  
Swissotel Sydney  
9AM - 4PM

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