

## → BUILDING MAINTENANCE

→ Balcony collapses - prevention and protection

→ Electrical safety - what you need to know

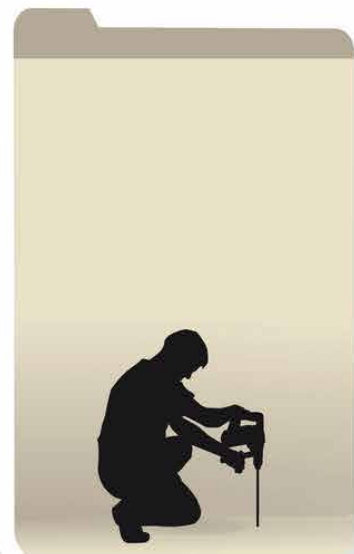
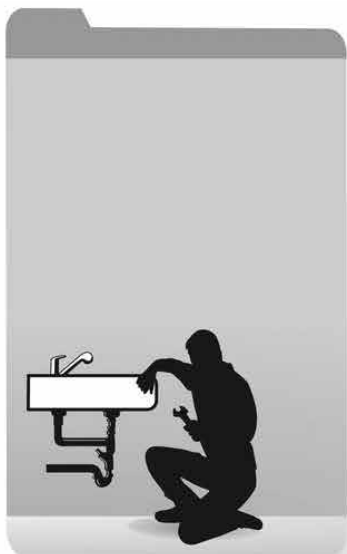
→ Water damage cost to apartment owners

→ Tips on choosing the right energy partner



→ Is strata title keeping up with higher density?

→ Low carbon concrete the answer to resilient building





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# StrataVoice

ISSUE 11 — JUNE 2013

## Building Maintenance

Strata Voice is a quarterly e-book sent directly to Strata managers, body corporates, selected unit owners and real estate agents.

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# Counting the costs of growth

by Jenny Goldie, National President, Sustainable Population Australia

In the late 1980s, Canberra was expanding rapidly at its southern end, seemingly with a new suburb every week. As soon as the roads went in, even before one house was built, playgrounds would appear. From a distance all you could see were colourful playgrounds alone in the paddocks.

Playgrounds are but one form of infrastructure that people need, along with houses, shops, schools, roads, buses, trains, hospitals, workplaces and recreational spaces for adults as well as children. Maintaining quality of life in a city requires that infrastructure keeps pace with population growth. If the population doubles yet public transport stays the same, you get twice as many people on the bus or the train every morning. If population doubles but health services stay the same, waiting times to see a doctor or find a hospital bed get even longer. With no extra education funding for the extra children that come with population growth, class sizes get bigger and makeshift classrooms clog school playgrounds.

Of course, a bigger population will increase the tax base to fund infrastructure, assuming most of the new workers are employed and paying taxes. The problem is: infrastructure needs to be in place before people arrive, just as the Canberra suburban playgrounds were before people came to live there. All people, whoever they are, need to be housed, fed, schooled, transported, cared for medically and provided with workplaces and recreational facilities.

As Dr Jane O'Sullivan of the University of Queensland points out, however, infrastructure doesn't last forever. On a rough average, every 50 years, worn-out facilities must be replaced and items whose technology or design has been superseded, modernised. Thus, in a population whose numbers are stable, replacement of old infrastructure demands two per cent of GDP annually. In a growing population, however, the costs of supplying the new must be added to what is required for replacing the old. Australia has a very high population growth: 1.7 per cent, three times the average rate for industrialised countries. This means an extra 1.7 per cent of GDP must go to providing new infrastructure every year. It means the government infrastructure burden is 85 per cent more than it would be if population were stable.

Infrastructure for each new person costs about \$200,000. State governments already struggle to replace existing infrastructure – add the extra numbers and they are often forced to sell off public assets to pay for the costs of supplying the new. Or they are defeated, as was the Queensland government of Anna Bligh who had to contend with a high population growth rate and was unable to cater to public demand for infrastructure.

Any economic advantages from a growing population must be weighed against the costs. Net overseas migration currently accounts for 60 per cent of Australia's population



growth rate. Surprisingly for some, the 2006 Productivity Report on Economic Impacts of Migration and Population Growth found that the 'overall economic effect of migration appears to be positive but small' but with most of the advantages accruing to migrants themselves, not the existing population.

The economic benefits and costs associated with a high population growth rate, however, is only one side of the coin. The other side is the

environment, and there are few if any benefits from a growing population. Most are costs, in the form of increased pollution, not least greenhouse gas emissions, and loss of habitat and biodiversity from urban expansion.

Australia just passed the 23 million milestone. The current growth rate will have us pass 24 million in two and a half years' time, in late 2015. It would be in the country's interest if that next milestone were delayed by some years.

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# Scammers call from Nepal offering energy rebates

by NSW Fair Trading

The quick actions of a dutiful son-in-law have saved a Coffs Harbour great grandmother from scammers who repeatedly called her, telling her she was entitled to \$5,000 in energy rebates.

NSW Fair Trading Commissioner Rod Stowe said Chris Spencer, the CEO of the Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Land Council, was now spreading the word across the local community about the scam to help prevent any other local consumers from being duped.

"In this case, this savvy consumer's mother-in-law was called repeatedly and instructed to go to her local Post Office and transfer \$200 by Western Union to Kathmandu in Nepal to a person called Buddimaya Rai at 12 Royal Street," he said.

"It's a right royal scam and nothing less.

"The scammers told her they were calling from the finance department of the Federal Government.

"They told her to collect a blank Western Union transfer from the post office, then call 02 8007 5535 for assistance completing the form.

"Trading on older people's trust in government is reprehensible.

"It's heartless, but in many cases unfortunately it is highly effective because it can seem plausible that seniors might be entitled to some form of rebate on energy bills.

"It also relies on the inherent trust many Australians have in government."

Mr Stowe said governments aren't in the habit of cold calling consumers to offer them money back.

"The prefix used was 02 800.....which is a Skype number, the often preferred medium for scammers," he said.

"Scammers use hit and run tactics and when Fair Trading attempted to call the number, our officers



were repeatedly bumped from the queue or the number did not answer.

"Once scammers know people are on to them, they modify their tactics.

"To stay a step ahead of scammers, consumers need to have a 'trust no one' approach to cold callers."

## For more Information

For more information about Fair Trading go to the [Fair Trading website](#).  
Follow Fair Trading on Facebook [here](#) and Twitter by [clicking here](#)

# Warning on recall - Winplus Australasia Pty Ltd Cocoon Baby Monitor Power Adaptors

by NSW Fair Trading

NSW Fair Trading Commissioner Rod Stowe is warning consumers about a recent recall that could cause consumers to be exposed to live wires.

He also warned consumers to check regularly on the Australian Government recall website at [www.recalls.gov.au](http://www.recalls.gov.au) to help self-protect against goods found with major and life threatening faults.

"Consumers need to be safety conscious in the modern market and I recommend they make a habit of checking the recalls site to make sure products they have purchased are safe for use," he said.

## Winplus Australasia Pty Ltd Cocoon Baby Monitor Power Adaptors

### Product description

Borasan 240V AC Power Adaptors (2 units per pack) provided with Cocoon Baby Monitors

### Identifying features

BX - 0500500

### What are the defects?

The power adaptor may pull apart when the customer removes it from a socket outlet, exposing live wires.

### What are the hazards?

If the wires are touched while the unit is plugged in to an outlet there is a risk of electric shock.

### Dates available for sale

7th November 2012 - 27th March 2013

### Where the product was sold

New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria

### Traders who sold this product

Aldi Stores



Above: Recalled Cocoon Baby Monitor Power Adaptor

### Supplier

Winplus Australasia Pty Ltd

### Supplier's web site

[www.winplus.com.au](http://www.winplus.com.au)

### What should consumers do?

Customers should cease using the power adaptors and contact Winplus Australasia for replacement power adaptors. Customers can still use the baby monitors using non-rechargeable batteries.

## For more Information

Please contact Winplus Australasia Pty Ltd on 1300 663 907 9.00am - 6.00pm Monday - Friday (within Australia) or + 613 8727 7600 (outside Australia) or [email us](#) for further information or to arrange for replacement power adaptors.

# StrataVoice

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# How many stories?

by Terry Sarten - The Children’s Hospital at Westmead



There are many stories about children falling from windows and balconies. Perhaps one of the most well-known was the death of Connor Clapton in 1991. The son of Eric Clapton, guitar player extraordinaire, the toddler fell out of an open window of a New York high rise apartment. The grief that follows the death of a child was eloquently expressed by the musician in the song “Tears In Heaven”.

Here in NSW, on average, two children are admitted to hospital with serious injuries sustained in a fall from a window or balcony every month, although the numbers go down during the colder winter months.

Each one of these hospital admissions takes an enormous emotional toll on families and can have lifetime health consequences for the child. The average cost of trauma treatment and care for a child can be \$50,000 or more depending on the severity of the injuries. Compared with the time and cost of fitting child safety devices on windows, prevention is clearly a better option.

Both the Australian Building Code Board and the NSW Minister for Fair Trade have recognised this and have developed regulatory responses that will improve child safety in residential buildings.

The recently announced new national construction standards specify that all windows in new residential buildings will be designed with window safety as a priority to reduce the risk of child falls. As from 1 May 2013, the code will require all bedroom windows located 2m or more above the ground in new residential buildings to have a barrier or a device that limits the opening of a window to no more than 12.5cm. This dimension is considered by the ABCB as sufficient to prevent a small child from falling out a window. They have noted they will be looking at the other related measures such as those for balconies and balustrades with an eye to future amendments of the building code.

The NSW Fair Trade Minister has also taken on the safety message, calling for all existing residential buildings to be retrofitted with appropriate window safety locks or barriers.

While the media have provided excellent coverage of incidents where children have been admitted to hospital after falling out of apartment windows, some of the comment chains that follow on from these stories have been surprising. Comments have included attacks on parenting, suggesting that this is where the fault lies. There have been bizarre comments such as “nobody will be able to open their windows anymore”. Others have declared the current moves to regulate window safety in the building code as another example of the ‘Nanny State’ undermining personal responsibility and interfering in people’s lives.

Do they think the Nanny State is some kind of bossy version of Mary Poppins? Perhaps they should think of the state as being more like a Nana to its child citizens than a Nanny. The state, along with its citizens, has a specific duty and obligation to protect the most vulnerable, particularly children, from obvious harm”.

The majority of falls from windows have been children under 5yrs. Toddlers are at that

developmental stage when they are quick on their feet, curious and busy exploring. They are too young to understand the risk of falling out of a window or off a balcony so the task of keeping them safe is one that relies on adults - whether that is parents and family, the community, landlords, tenants, politicians, architects, city planners or the building industry.

Tenants need to know that they can confidently window-safe their home without repercussions. The majority of landlords and strata owners corporations are responsible citizens and will respond accordingly, acknowledging that the wellbeing of small children is part of their social contract.

The new window safety regulations will be a win-win all -round. For small children, it will reduce the likelihood of serious injury and in an environment where growing numbers of families are opting for high rise living, the selling point of a child safe home will become an asset.

For further information go to the **Kids Health website** Or contact: [terry.sarten@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:terry.sarten@health.nsw.gov.au)  
Kids Health - Children's Hospital at Westmead

# Ahoy, would you like to know how to reduce levies?

by Alan Buckle - Development Director - Vesture

**Saw a great storey recently which went like this:-**  
*A giant ship engine failed. The ships owners tried one expert after another but none of them could figure out how to fix the engine.*

*Then they brought in an old man who had been fixing ships since he was young. He carried a large bag of tools with him and when he arrived he immediately went to work. He inspected the engine very carefully from top to bottom. Two of the Ships owners were there watching this man, hoping he would do something.*

*The old man reached into his bag and pulled out a small hammer and gently tapped something.*

*Instantly the engine lurched into life, the engine was fixed. A week later the Owners received a bill from the old man for \$10,000. “What” the others exclaimed, “he hardly did anything”.*

*So they wrote to the old man saying please send me an itemised bill.*

**The man responded by saying:-**  
1. *Tapping with a hammer*      \$2  
2. *Knowing where to tap*      \$9998

**Effort is important, but knowing where to make the effort is all the difference.**  
This is no truer than for an owners corporation/body corporate looking at lowering its levies.

**Where should you put your effort for it to work?**  
Our team have highlighted these effective ways of reducing costs which have directly enabled a lowering of our clients levies.

**Sean Dumigan (Body Corporate Manager – Ernst QLD) says:**

- Being on top of levy arrears can increase cash flow, improve balances of bank accounts (and increases interest earned) and reduces levy collection charges; and
- Implementing high interest cash investment arrangements. This works at its best following a cash flow analysis, reviewed directly after the levy due date and with regular sweeps from the operating account to investment account as cash is needed. Please note: interest earned is non-mutual income and is taxable at company rates.

**Adam Stankevicius, Pedzi Mawande and Wayne Hewitt (Body Corporate Managers – Ernst QLD) all say:**  
Engaging an energy consultant to reduce the impact of the Carbon Tax and Electricity price hikes by tendering the supply of electricity to a building, is very successful. We estimate nearly a million dollars in community power has been saved by our clients adopting this approach.

**Roderick Smith (General Manager - STM NSW) says:**

- Taking the Lift contract to tender due to service companies being more competitive nowadays;
- LED lighting installation throughout all common areas via the current ESKY program on offer by the government;
- Introduction of special bylaws to put burden of certain items onto the respective owner such as false fire alarm call outs and air conditioning system repairs/replacements;
- Reverse auction process to sourced cheaper contracts for electricity for community power; and
- Tender and contract review for the major administrative fund line items such as cleaning contract, garden contract and insurance

renewal. The general market is keener with their prices.

**Richard Eastwood (General Manager - VBOS VIC) says:**  
Many of my counterparts mentioned above is in place, but from VBOS’ perspective, conversion of owners communication from hardcopy mail to electronic mail has seen substantial cost benefit for our clients as well as a time saving measure for us.

**Ian Alfred (General Manager – Ernst QLD) says:**  
Movement sensors in passageways and basements enable a long term reduction of electricity consumption as lights are not operating when not needed.

**Mark Neilen (National Insurance Manager - Vesture) says:**  
Obtaining new insurance valuation to ensure the building is not over insured and paying for it, is proving extremely effective.

So, remember the message brought out in the Storey at the beginning of this article. **Effort is important, but knowing where to make the effort is all the difference.**



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- We continually invest in our team members to ensure you are receiving timely and accurate advice;
- Our focus is on savings, the protection of your asset and the promotion of a harmonious community for your property;
- We work closely with you and your existing service provider to facilitate a smooth transfer and conduct a health check of your records to ensure they are accurate.

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# Smart, sustainable, flexible and affordable

Romilly Madew, Chief Executive, Green Building Council of Australia

With the highest concentration of Green Star-rated buildings in the country, Melbourne's Victoria Harbour has emerged as one of the most sustainable precincts in Australia.

While Victoria Harbour is fast becoming the location of choice for some of our nation's best known brands, until now the Green Star benefits and rewards have been most often associated with big name players with big budgets to match.

The Stable Group and Lend Lease have bucked this trend, however, introducing Australia's first 5 Star Green Star – Office Design v3 rated strata title office into the Victoria Harbour precinct.

Lifestyle Working Collins Street has been designed to enable small businesses to reap the benefits frequently enjoyed by larger organisations occupying big tenancies. Here, shared meeting rooms and collaborative spaces, leading-edge voice and data technology and sustainable building features can be enjoyed by small business owners.

Victoria Harbour Project Director Claire Johnston says that the precinct is setting a global benchmark for urban development and environmentally sustainable design of built and open space.

"In developing Victoria Harbour, we are aiming to create a welcoming and safe place to live, work and visit – a place that promotes healthy lifestyles, embodies a strong community spirit and where our environment and heritage are celebrated. Lifestyle Working Collins Street will contribute to the diversity of Victoria Harbour's vibrant commercial offering and is a fitting and welcome addition to our precinct," Johnston says.

According to Stable Properties' Group Chairman, Ed Horton, the Lifestyle Working concept is an equitable response to "the demands for commercial buildings to be genuinely sustainable, and in-step with contemporary community and business expectations. As work practices and work places are redefined a new standard in modern office buildings is emerging."

## Clearing the air

Small businesses and sole traders may have limited ability to influence indoor environment quality (IEQ) within their retail or office tenancies. Many businesses rely on inefficient air-conditioning solutions designed for residential use, or outdated whole-of-building solutions that are operated without considering the individual's needs or use of their tenancy. Similarly, small businesses may be forced, through leasing conditions or financial necessity, to use existing fitout components that were not installed with occupant health and wellbeing in mind, such as carpets, paints and furnishings that emit harmful chemicals and contribute to 'sick building' symptoms. At the same time, small business owners are often the least able to afford sick days.

The design of Lifestyle Working Collins Street prioritises the health and comfort of building users, with a focus on optimising thermal comfort conditions, air quality, acoustics and lighting.

"Choice and flexibility are hallmarks of the Lifestyle Working concept - how we work, where we work, when we work and how we manage and control our environment," says Ed Horton. Occupants have the option to engage their highly efficient and cost-effective variable refrigerant volume (VRV) air-conditioning unit within the space, or increase the fresh air to their work area through operable louvred windows. This helps people to regulate the temperature of their workspace, but also significantly reduce tenants' reliance on mechanical air-conditioning systems with their associated energy costs and emissions.

"Passive solutions to indoor air quality management have a financial benefit to building occupants and also empower them to better manage how they control the quality of their air temperature and comfort levels," Horton explains.

Lifestyle Working's design gained all available points under the Green Star 'Volatile Organic Compounds' and 'Formaldehyde Minimisation' credits through the selection of low or zero off-gassing paints, carpets, adhesives and wood products and materials. The elimination of these toxin-emitting products will ensure that Lifestyle Working's occupants enjoy a healthy work environment and are less likely to suffer the headaches and allergies so often associated with 'sick building syndrome'.

## Energy efficiency at its best

Lifestyle Working's design incorporates a number of energy-efficient features that will not only reduce the building's greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on grid energy, but will also help to reduce utility and owners' corporation costs for both tenants and owners.

The installation of efficient T5 and LED lighting, electrical sub-metering, motion and daylight sensors will all decrease energy-use across the building. Photovoltaic (PV) array systems have been installed to serve the base building and strata offices with clean solar energy.

The base building's PV system allows renewable energy to complement the grid supply for Lifestyle Working's common area uses, with separate 'Solar Lots', as they are known at Lifestyle Working, also available for purchase. Setting a precedent for commercial buildings, these strata-titled Solar Lots will supply clean solar energy to individual suites, reducing the environmental impact and energy bills for Lifestyle Working occupants – a first of its kind, allowing individual office tenants to be wholly or partly self-sufficient when it comes to energy during daylight hours.

"All of our usable roof area of some 2,000 square metres is dedicated to our 'City Solar Farm'. The system is designed to supply as much as all the



base building energy needs during daylight hours," Horton says.

## Water-wise technology at work

Lifestyle Working joins other Green Star buildings around Victoria Harbour in prioritising water-use reduction. High-efficiency 4 Star WELS-rated dual flush toilets, waterless urinals and 5 Star WELS-rated tapware reduce the amount of water consumed at Lifestyle Working each day. Rainwater is collected and stored onsite in a 45,000 litre tank, and then used for non-potable uses such as landscape irrigation and toilet flushing. Vegetable oil-based waterless urinals further reduce water consumption. Based on Australian Bureau of Meteorology data for rainfall in the Melbourne area over the last decade, it is estimated that Lifestyle Working's rainwater harvesting system will collect more than 1.3 million litres of rainwater for reuse across the building each year.

Cooling towers are traditionally a major source of water consumption in commercial office buildings, with thousands of litres of water a day used to keep air conditioning systems operating effectively. Relying on clever, passive design techniques, Lifestyle Working has no cooling tower, avoiding water-wastage with no common area heating or cooling and, of course, no related cost.

## A glimpse into the future

The central location and proximity to a range of public and low-emissions transport options - including buses, trams and bike paths - is also helping to reduce Lifestyle Working's environmental impact.

"To be genuinely sustainable, buildings need to support a reduced reliance on the motor car. They need to be well-located in relation to good public transport nodes and have sufficient parking for customers and clients of tenants and owners," Horton explains.

The building has no dedicated car parking, which encourages tenants to leave their cars at home. This scored Lifestyle Working full points under the Green Star 'Provision of Car Parking' credit.

In line with the Lifestyle Working's sustainable and communal approach to office design and office work, tenants will also have free use of shared electric motor scooters, which are charged from solar energy, during business hours. A fun and sustainable way for building users to get around the CBD, the scooters will help keep Victoria Harbour's streets free of congestion from single-occupant vehicle use and associated carbon emissions.

Lifestyle Working is a highly efficient building in terms of both energy and space utilisation. Meeting rooms, which at Lifestyle Working are called 'privileged spaces', are available at no cost to tenants and owners through a centralised, self-serve booking system. 'Semi-privileged' spaces, located principally on the central bridges spanning the central courtyard, are perfect for impromptu or informal meetings. Lifestyle Working Collins Street also provides free wireless internet in common areas and to each suite within the building. Smart, sustainable, flexible and affordable, this green strata title office opens up a new future for owners and tenants alike.





# Is strata title keeping up with higher density?

By Alan Davies

More and more city-dwellers choose to live in apartments so they can live in more accessible locations. In the order of three and a half million Australians now live in multi unit housing.

Living at density with shared ownership of common property provides many benefits, but it also presents big challenges. The strata title system was introduced in the 1960s to address those problems but it's getting old and creaky.

A new report prepared by the City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales reveals a litany of difficulties with NSW's strata titles system. It shows there are worrying inadequacies in the way multi-unit buildings in Sydney are managed and maintained.

The researcher was undertaken by Dr Hazel Easthope, Prof Bill Randolph and Sarah Judd. They consulted 1,550 individuals including 1,020 strata owners, 413 executive committee members, 106 strata managing agents and 11 peak body representatives.

They found a high incidence of building defects, a lack of engagement by owners in the running of their strata schemes and inadequate financial planning for repairs and maintenance in a lot of buildings. Many strata owners do not understand their responsibilities and rights and resolving differences can be a bitter and unhappy process.

The most striking finding is 72% of owners say their building has had one or more defects. The figure rises to 85% when only buildings completed since 2000 are considered.

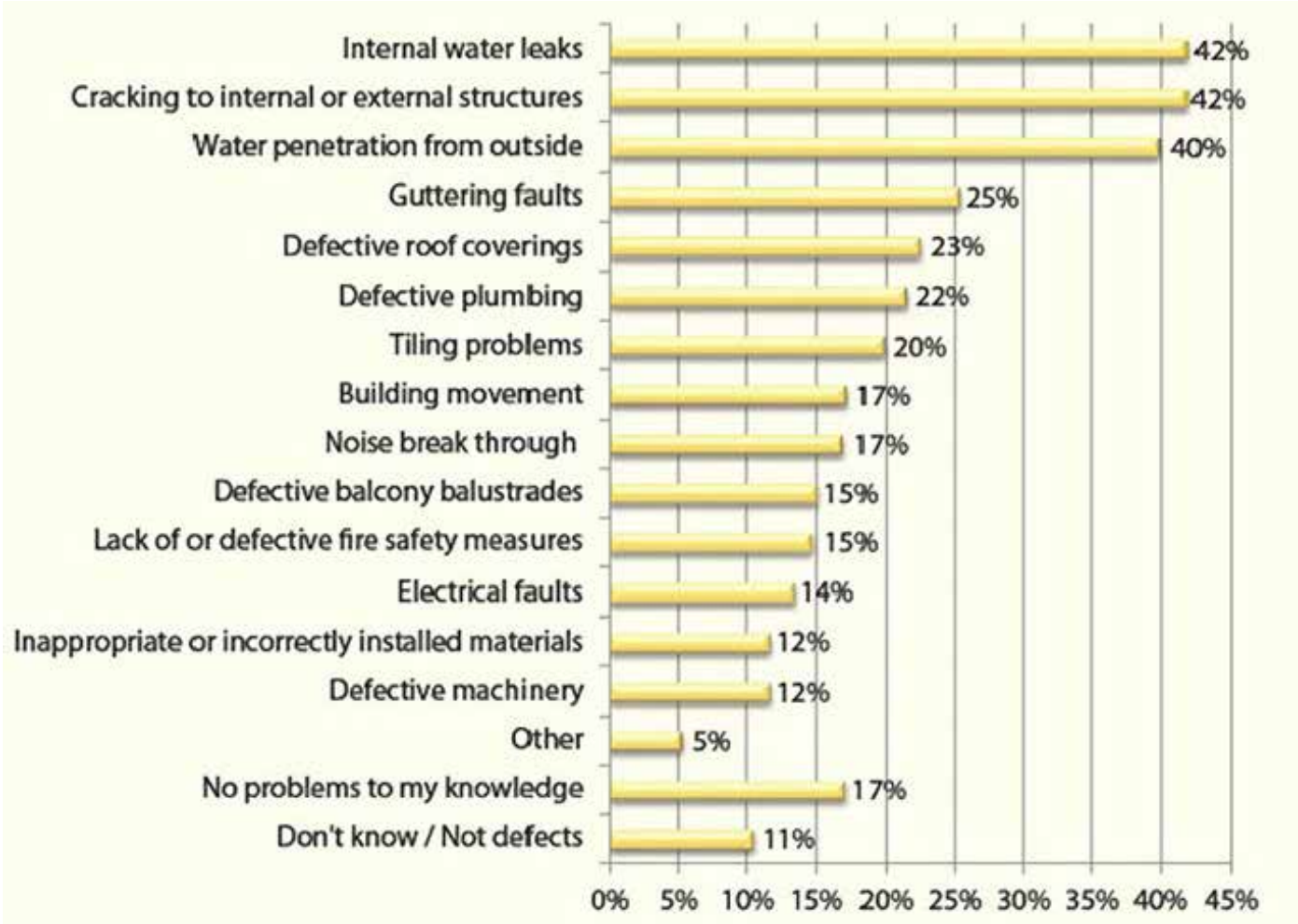
It can be argued there'll inevitably be issues with any building project, so that's not necessarily a big deal. However what's shocking is three quarters of those 85% report one or more defects have never been fixed.

Nor are these minor problems like maintenance issues. The three most commonly cited defects are water entering the interior of the building from outside, water leaking within the building, and internal and external cracks (see exhibit).

Just as alarming is the finding that many owners have problems identifying the boundary between their property and common property! It's got to be hard to define rights and responsibilities when an owner and the committee can't be sure where properties begin and end!

The building inspection system appears to be implicated in this debacle. Yet Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts reduced the warranty period for apartment owners last year. There are some obvious parallels with the building inspection fiasco that came to light in Victoria earlier this year.

More than half of management agents interviewed said there were aspects of design that made management more difficult.



1,011 owners of strata title properties were asked "To your knowledge, have any of the following defects ever been present in your strata scheme?" (multiple responses permitted)

Besides defects such as inadequate waterproofing, the most common problems raised were poorly located services which are difficult to access for maintenance.

Designers need to think harder about the long-term ramifications of their decisions. What might be treated as a minor issue down the track by a large housing authority can be much more difficult to resolve happily where multiple owners with different priorities and capacities to pay are involved.

It's not just design and construction-related issues however that seem to dog multi unit housing developments. Reaching agreement over matters of collective interest like maintenance seems very fraught. A large proportion (39%) of the committee members interviewed said there had been problems in reaching agreement.

The most common issues resulting in disagreements were those relating to major expenditures, including major repairs. The most common explanations given for these disagreements related to personality clashes and the competing interests of individuals in a scheme.

Disputes are accordingly a major issue. People disagree over parking, pets, noise and a host of other issues. New terms like "smoking drift" and

The most striking finding is 72% of owners say their building has had one or more defects. The figure rises to 85% when only buildings completed since 2000 are considered.

"hotbedding" indicate there are new challenges with collective forms of tenure. The competence of strata managers is also a perennial concern.

When owners were asked about disputes, 51% said there had been disputes in the time since they'd purchased their unit, mostly about parking, noise and breaking by-laws. In 40% of disputes, formal measures were taken in an effort to resolve the issue.

Parking disputes were most commonly caused by cars parking illegally on common property, particularly in visitor car spaces and the difficulties experienced in trying to enforce parking rules.

Regarding noise, while some owners pointed to the behaviour of other residents as a reason for noise problems, many identified noise issues that resulted from the quality and design of the buildings in their schemes.

More than a quarter of Sydneysiders already live in strata title developments and this will inevitably rise. One estimate puts the proportion at 45% by 2030. The proportion of residents of other Australian cities living in strata title developments is also increasing as more residents seek to live in accessible locations.

It's therefore extremely important that the quality of construction of new developments is improved. It's just as important that the strata title legislation is suited to the exigencies of modern living and is able to provide ways of resolving disputes effectively, cheaply and fairly, preferably before they escalate to formal processes.

The NSW Government is currently undertaking a major review of the legislation. A discussion paper on strata and community title law will be issued later this year.

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# Sub-Metering with “Branch Feeder Technology” enhances Retrofitting

Sub-Metering for Electrical usage in data-centres, commercial office buildings and multi-unit residential buildings is been driven by a multitude of mandates to establish better improvements and awareness of energy consumption to improve energy efficiency. In achieving measurements to provide energy performance guidelines the deployment of sub-metering plays a significant role to achieve base loads provide benchmarks and improve energy performance. Today's technology with SATEC's "Branch Feeder Monitor" (BFM136) provides improvements for solutions for new and existing buildings where sub-metering needs to be installed.

While software solutions are paramount in collecting data such as energy usage, temperature, HVAC data, etc via Building Management Systems (BMS) or other Energy

Management software solutions, the interaction of software relies heavily on hardware devices deployed to provide the necessary data and information so that the software can make informative decisions.

The installation of multiple hardware devices for sub-metering can prove to be challenging for space issues, wiring challenges, communication issues, cost deployment along with budget restraints.

SATEC (Australia's) "Branch Feeder Monitor" (BFM136) provides technology for the reduction in hardware cost per metering point, reduction for installation space, reduction in wiring, reduction in installation time, improved bandwidth for electrical data transfer. These advantageous provide for the reduction in the total cost of installation providing a better return

on customer's investment for sub-metering.

Technology enhancements for sub-metering include energy readings of Class 0.5 which is an important factor with the continuation of rising energy cost's ensuring devices are at a high accuracy level ensuring credibility and maximising cost returns. SATEC's BFM136 has the capability of reading down to 0.1% of the CT current range providing measuring capabilities unsurpassed in the industry while maintaining 0.5% Energy reading accuracy.

The provision of data logging profiling ensures other critical data with date/time stamping is readily available during communication outages. Future proofing for time of use (TOU) for tariff readings on board the meter ensures data is not lost should communication issues transpire with the metering hardware and management

software this becomes critical for the billing of clients.

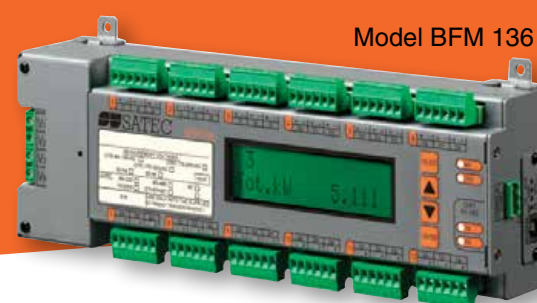
SATEC's BFM136 provides ease of installation for retrofitting with the use of split core CT's, further advantageous are obtained where customers have existing CT's already deployed allowing the use of the BFM136 with SATEC's interfacing CT's.

The deployment of SATEC's BFM136 technology supporting modbus TCP/IP or serial provides for ease of interfacing with any third party energy management software solution.

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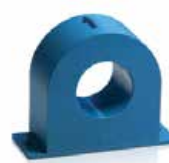


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# Water Damage Major Cost to Apartment Owners



Apartment owners across Australia face repair bills of tens of thousands of dollars or more in repairs because of faulty workmanship, poor design or poor quality materials in relation to water leaks, Archicentre, the building design, inspection and advice service of The Australian Institute of Architects said today.

Archicentre says water leaks are one of the biggest issues facing the ongoing boom of apartment building as major cities consolidate with high rise buildings and suburban areas undergoing revitalization with increased apartment developments.

Archicentre ACT & NSW General Manager Ian Agnew said the organisation was not surprised by the findings of a new report titled 'Governing The Compact City: role and effectiveness of strata management report' released this week by the University of NSW which found that eighty five per cent of owners in buildings erected since 2000 said there had been one or more defects in their buildings.

Mr Agnew said, "As one common example, balconies constructed above another unit only need one leak caused by a poor sealing job or a broken tile or a blocked drainage point to cause substantial damage to an adjoining property."

The replacement of defective tiling on a number of apartment balconies as the balcony waterproofing had failed and water leaks were being experienced.

Archicentre recently inspected balconies in an apartment block with over 100 balconies, nearly all of which had a similar leak impacting on the apartments below. Intrusive inspections of selected balconies revealed waterproofing problems leaving the property owners with substantial repair bills.

Mr Agnew said since the drought had broken and rainfall had increased, the level of complaints and costly issues facing apartment owners over leaks had increased.

Water has a number of ways of impacting on apartments including:

- Poor sealing of balconies.
- Lack of roof maintenance.
- Lack of maintenance of windows.
- Deterioration of tanking for below ground car parks and basements.

Mr Agnew said, "With 3 million Australians living in apartments and that number set to increase

with an ageing population and the general population increasing, the maintenance of both old and new apartment buildings will place an increasing financial pressure on Owners' Corporations and their property managers".

"Apart from water damaging plaster board and causing structural timber rot, it can also have a major safety impact on an apartment if water enters electrical fittings and a major health impact caused by damp and mould."

"As part of Archicentre's pre-purchase property inspections on apartments for prospective buyers, signs of water damage are high on the agenda because of their potential high impact on a buyer's investment," Mr Agnew said.

"It is important for people buying into apartment complexes to realise they are not only financially responsible for their own apartment but also for common areas which can include car parks, basements, lifts, lobbies and recreation areas."

**Archicentre - 0417 329 201**  
[www.archicentre.com.au](http://www.archicentre.com.au)

# Balcony Collapses – Prevention and Protection for You and Your Clients

The recent balcony collapse in Lane Cove that injured 12 youngsters is a critical reminder to everyone to ensure their decks and balconies are safe enough to hold large gatherings. While this incident was highly alarming, luckily no-one was critically injured.

Unfortunately this was not the case in Queensland in 2008, where a coronial inquiry was required after a death resulted from one balcony collapse. These worrying cases are becoming more and more common - we've seen injuries resulting from balcony collapses in Rye, Hurstbridge and Lorne during the last few years alone. We expect more as winter abates and people head outdoors to enjoy the warmer

weather. Another factor contributing to an expected spike in balcony collapses is the trend for more people to incorporate balconies and decks into home designs as a way of adopting the 'alfresco' lifestyle.

So the time for due diligence in checking these structures is now - figures published by the Building Commission estimate that as many as 40% of properties have an elevated deck or balcony. While most of these are built and maintained correctly, many are not and sadly the price paid is often very high for the injured individuals, who are often innocent and young.

The challenge to home owners and Owner's

Corporations (when responsible for a balcony or deck) is to find out which ones present a safety hazard before a collapse occurs.

Here are some tips to help ensure that your clients aren't exposed:

1. Check Documentation - buyers should ask to see evidence of building approval before purchasing a property as decks can easily be built without the statutory checks and balances.
2. Check Timber - have timber decks checked for rot and rust as timber or metal fixing failure can trigger a collapse.

3. Check Concrete - have concrete balconies checked for cracking or flaking as water may penetrate here and corrode steel reinforcing, particularly in coastal areas.

4. Be Wary of Loads - Large, well-watered pot-plants can accelerate timber deterioration whilst a gaggle of guests grouped for a photo in one corner of a deck can bring a party to an abrupt end.

As well as the trauma of a collapse and the injuries, there is the cost to repair damage and even the possibility of legal action as claims are taken out against the owner or Owner's Corporation, so make sure your decks are checked.

# Warning on Deck and Balcony Safety

Figures published by the Victorian Building Commission estimate that as many as 40% of properties have an elevated deck or balcony. While most of these are built and maintained correctly, many are not and sadly the price paid is often very high for the injured individuals.

One of our architects recently inspected the balcony of a unit after the resident's foot disappeared through a tiled floor. Their

findings were frightening...unsuitable materials and un-checked construction had resulted in extensive substrate rot and the inevitable failure. Even more worrying was the continual water leakage through the balcony structure on to an electrical light fitting below!

Clearly this was a disaster waiting to happen and the situation is likely to be the same at every unit in the development.

Our advice in such a situation is obviously to recommend that access be restricted to all suspect balconies until they can be professionally inspected and any necessary repairs undertaken.

Unfortunately we are being called in to inspect more and more apartment balconies and the problem is often the same...poor workmanship or inappropriate material selection that has not been checked during construction. In some cases a lack of maintenance compounds the problem.

The challenge to property owners and managers when responsible for balconies or decks is to find out which ones present a safety hazard before a collapse occurs.

As well as the trauma of a collapse and the injuries, there is the cost to repair damage and even the possibility of legal action as claims are taken out against the owner or Owner's Corporation, so make sure your decks are checked.

If in doubt, an Archicentre Maintenance Advice can check the condition of decks and balconies...a small price to pay for peace of mind.

Archicentre is committed to assisting you with property management and building issues. If you require any further information or want to speak with a building expert please call Archicentre on 1300 134 513.





# Don't waste time and energy when choosing an energy consultant

Energy Action highlights tips on choosing the right energy procurement partner for your business

With the cost of energy steadily increasing and the introduction of the carbon tax, it is more important than ever that Australian businesses make sure they are getting the best price for energy they possibly can. Many businesses are turning to procurement partners to help them achieve this.

It is vital for businesses find a reputable energy consultant that can help them secure a suitable contract. But it can be difficult to know which partner to select. Energy Action, Australia's leading independent energy management company, provides advice on choosing an energy consultant.

## 1. Choose a partner who is transparent and provides comparative quotes

Some consultants only provide you with their top recommendation. Go for a partner that is transparent and willing to give you all the information, so you can make an informed decision according to your business needs. The lowest prices do not necessarily equate to the best option for you, as there are many other factors to consider such

as environmental charges, network tariff optimisation, operational changes and contract duration.

## 2. Go for a clear commission structure and establish who pays

Understand your costs up front. Ensure that the partner you select receives the same commission from all energy providers. This ensures there is no favouritism involved. Additionally, choose a partner that does not charge multiple stakeholders for the procurement initiative. For example, some consultants may charge a percentage commission to the retailer and then also to you for a nominated percentage of your savings secured.

## 3. Don't select a partner that has quotas to fill with providers

If a company has quotas with providers, then it may be difficult for them to remain unbiased. To ensure unbiased advice, choose an independent partner. Often a consultant who only provides one option (the "best option") could be trying to fill a quota.

## 4. Ensure your partner is licensed to provide you with advice – ask if they hold an AFSL

Particularly when looking at forecasted prices and future contracts, ensure you are dealing with an energy management company that holds an Australian Financial Services License (AFSL). This means they are licensed to provide your business with financial advice in relation to the wholesale electricity market, which ultimately impacts retail pricing. This license requires the broker to have an in depth understanding of the National Electricity Market and financial products. Certified brokers regularly undergo market training and must act in accordance with ASIC regulations, maintaining the highest levels of compliance.

## 5. Make sure your partner can tailor their services to your business needs

Since deregulation, there are many competitive retailers willing to provide a price based on business specific energy requirements. An experienced broker or energy management company can

develop a customised specification for a business's energy profile and advise a suitable time to take your contract to market. They will then review and analyse the various offers, giving all the information necessary to make an informed decision.

### About Energy Action

Energy Action is Australia's leading independent energy management company, offering comprehensive buying and management services aimed at reducing energy usage and saving businesses money. Visit [www.energyaction.com.au](http://www.energyaction.com.au) now and maximise your energy savings today.



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# Low carbon concrete the answer to resilient building

It's Fernando Martirena's second trip to Australia with The Australian Green Development Forum.



Fernando Martirena

The Forum hosted him in 2008 for its 2008 “Running on Empty” National Roadshow which took the Santa Clara University, Cuba professor to Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney where he inspired attendees with his story of his country and its environmental, social and economic survival against the odds.

This time, Resilient Building in a Changing Climate, has taken him to Perth, Brisbane and Townsville.

And he's spreading the word about the best practice in resilient building – concrete. Low carbon concrete.

Speaking from the Qantas Lounge at Perth Airport, Mr Martirena says Australia faces the same climate challenges as Cuba such as severe storms, fires, floods and cyclones and it was important to be able to build resilience in the context of climate change.

And concrete has the potential to do that.

“We started by trying to develop a use for clay but a few years ago we diverted into the direction of concrete,” he said.

“It's a material, when you look at its chemical composition, it is like the earth's crust. It has the same elements.

“And it can be produced anywhere in the world.”

That's important because, for developing countries, and potentially countries like Australia, it cuts down on transport miles.

And it's already proving itself around the world thanks to Mr Martirena and his work at the Centre for Research & Development of Structures and Materials.

He is known as “the motor” of the centre which has championed “Ecomaterials in Social Housing projects” since 1996.

One of its main projects project involves the development of a system for the local

manufacture of “ecomaterials” – building materials made with low embodied energy, often through recycling wastes.

These include micro-concrete roofing tiles, lime-pozzolana cement, pre-cast hollow concrete blocks, gravel and sand suitable for use in concrete – produced in portable crushing facilities, low-energy fired clay bricks using bio-wastes as fuel and the use of bamboo in construction.

Suitable for both rural and suburban areas, the technologies developed by CIDEM are geared towards small-scale production, with a focus on stimulating the local economy through the creation of new job opportunities.

“It has such a huge potential and now we are at the industrial stage. We need to develop standards and assess the long-term durability.

“We are so happy to have the cement industry in India already on board. India, China and Brazil make 80 per cent of the world's cement.

“But it will take three or four years before we can launch this.”

Mr Martirena is also keen on recycling construction rubble which currently is mostly turned into road base, which is “the worst thing you can do”, he says.

“Engineers in the past have been reluctant to use rubble because it could compromise their projects but there are now technologies available which can ensure it is clean.”

Mr Martirena said there was a building in New Delhi which was torn down and rebuilt using 90 per cent of its original materials.

That is amazing, he says.

“I have personally visited this building and they recycled the interiors. There is a huge water curtain on one wall which is cooling down the entire building.

“It was hot outside but inside we didn't need air conditioning, just a fan.”

Mr Martirena said eventually the cost of energy and transport will force people to look are reusing rubble and the contents of buildings that are past their life span.

And after 20 years looking at ways of sustainable buildings, he says he is optimistic about the future of the planet.

“It is not a road paved with roses and we are going to face challenges,” he says.

“But industry is getting on board and governments are getting on board.

“Australia is very encouraging – you do know what you need to do.

“We need to get industry on board and to do that they need to make a profit.

“So we have to educate people – and that starts in the cradle. We do that in Cuba.

“And those aged 20 to 30, they grew up with this green, and they are seriously concerned.

“And they are the customers. They will buy green.”

In 2011, the UN-HABITAT granted CIDEM the award “Scroll of Honor 2011” for its contribution in the field of housing in Cuba and other parts of the world.

The submission is below.

**Name of the project:** Ecomaterials for Social Housing in Cuba  
**Institute nominated:** Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de Estructuras y Materiales, CIDEM, Cuba

## Background

CIDEM stands for Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de Estructuras y Materiales (Centre for Research & Development of Structures and Materials). It is a Research & Development Institute attached to the Faculty of Construction at the “Universidad Central de Las Villas”, and while it is part of the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education, it has operative freedom. It manages several foreign currency bank accounts, sells its services in the local market (to Ministries and firms) and internationally (consultancies and contracts for planning in Latin America and Africa).

As well, CIDEM is a Project Center of the Faculty for Construction and has specialised in the practical application of ecologically and economically sustainable construction materials and technologies. Its status of being part of the University and being able to count on its staff and installations, but having achieved a high degree of self-financing through marketing their services and know-how within and outside of Cuba to Ministries, Municipalities, Commercial firms and NGOs, gives them a high degree of operational independence and allows flexibility.

CIDEM addresses different areas of construction with a practically minded approach. The main thrust is in the field of sustainable technologies for the manufacture of ecomaterials. The scope of CIDEM's work is very wide, and includes fundamental and applied research, technology development and practical implementation, mainly in social projects. The fundamental research is carried out in close connection with Universities in Europe (Germany, Switzerland) and North America (Canada). The applied research is basically done in Cuba and other countries of the region, and includes development of the hardware (machinery) for the manufacture of the newly developed materials. Implementation and follow up is often done in collaboration with other institutions, mainly NGOs

or local governments, through donor projects for vulnerable communities, where disaster preparedness and mitigation have a great priority.

The technologies developed are oriented to small-scale production, suitable for rural and suburban areas. This type of small-scale production would stimulate the local economy through creation of new job opportunities. Furthermore, the environment is protected since potential threats in the form of wastes are profitably and/or effectively used. Great success has been reported in the production of Microconcrete Roofing Tiles (MCR), Lime Pozzolana Cement (CP-40), and precast concrete elements of small format (hollow concrete blocks). There are currently 48 ecomaterials workshops in full operation throughout Cuba, and another 15 outside Cuba, mostly in Central America (Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Guatemala), South America (Colombia, Ecuador), and Africa (Namibia, Nigeria, Mozambique).

Cuba is moving slowly towards an economy where market shall play an important role. The party congress in 2011 has approved a series of measures that will introduce real changes in the municipal economy. However, this is not being implemented as an economic shock, the measures will be solidly planned and implemented within the framework of the constitution and defined in laws (not in decrees). One of the decisions is that by 2015 the construction activities will be 70 per cent by non-state actors and only 30 per cent by the state, already in 2012 they plan to have 40 per cent of the GNP produced by the non-state sector (the term used to describe private and cooperative endeavours). CIDEM has been called to provide advisory service at a very high level at the Cuban government and at Parliament level, to implement a new housing program based on the use of local resources, and a clear emphasis on the non-state productive sector.

CIDEM was founded back in 1992, initially as a R&D unit, and in 2004 was recognised as an independent Center for Research by the Cuban Ministry of Science. The work with communities began in 1995 and the first project implemented in 1996. At present it has been involved in the implementation of 12 international projects, funded by international donors, such as GTZ (Germany), SDC (Switzerland), AEICI (Spain), Swiss Red Cross (Switzerland), DESWOS (Germany), EU-Werkhof Verein e.V. (Germany), DAAD (Germany), Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Germany), and CIDA (Canada).

CIDEM has been widely awarded nationally and internationally. In 2007 it received the UN Habitat-BSHF World Habitat Award. Later in 2008 CIDEM was one of the three finalists for the Energy Globe Award. In Cuba in 2005 the National Academy of Sciences awarded CIDEM the National Prize for Science, and in 2008 CIDEM was granted the National Prize for Technological Innovation.





CIDEM is an active member of the EcoSur network (Network for an Ecological and Economical Habitat, [www.ecosur.org](http://www.ecosur.org)) which includes different institutions (NGO's, Parastatal, private companies) from 13 different countries of Latin America and is active member of the BASIN network (Building Advisory Service and Information Network, led by GATE, ITDG, SKAT and CRATerre).

### Description of the initiative or project

From 1959-1988, the system for housing provision in Cuba was based on the centralized production of building materials in large, automated facilities operated by the Ministry of Construction. Prefabricated building materials were produced and supplied by road or rail to areas far from the industrial centres; it was an energy-intensive system based upon the supply of cheap oil from the former USSR.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and East European socialist states had a dramatic effect on the system: energy became scarce, roads deteriorated because of the lack of maintenance, the fleet of trucks became obsolete and the supply of spare parts was threatened. This had a great impact on the construction materials industry, which was no longer able to maintain a steady supply of building materials, particularly to areas distant from the production centres. The lack of availability of building materials led to a decrease in new housing construction and a rapid deterioration of existing housing stock due to lack of maintenance, as the population did not have the means to renovate or maintain their homes in good repair.

The new situation prompted a fundamental shift from centralized production based on long-distance transportation, to the local production of building materials in order to lower energy and transportation costs.

The work of the CIDEM research and development institute since it was established in 1991 has consisted of developing and implementing technologies to support this change at the grassroots level.

The project involves the development of a system for the local manufacture of "ecomaterials" – building materials made with low embodied energy, often through recycling wastes. These include micro-concrete roofing tiles; lime-pozzolana cement (CP-40); pre-cast hollow concrete blocks, where Portland cement has been partially replaced by CP-40; gravel and sand suitable for use in concrete, produced in portable crushing facilities; low-energy fired clay bricks using bio-wastes as fuel; and the use of bamboo in construction. Suitable for both rural and suburban areas, the technologies developed by CIDEM are geared towards small-scale production, with a focus on stimulating the local economy through the creation of new job opportunities. The project's main features include:

- An innovative process of technology development and transfer, which has resulted in a set of appropriate technologies for the manufacture of building materials at municipal level. The whole process has been organized as a south-south endeavour, as machinery and know-how come from Cuba and other countries in Latin America. Ecomaterials

workshops are carried out that include personnel training and a post-sale advisory service.

- A large-scale decentralised program for production of building materials at municipal level, which contributes to providing affordable and accessible building materials in a sustainable manner, particularly in areas where hurricanes have caused serious damage and a quick post-disaster response is required. This model has been embraced by the Cuban government as the model for housing development, and since June 2009 it has become the official approach of the Cuban government for housing at municipal scale. Donors like the Swiss Development Cooperation and CIDA Canada are strongly supporting this initiative. The Cuban Government is matching these funds with local funds and various resources.
- Creation and further improvement of a new decentralized management model for housing renovation, which gives local authorities new opportunities to act independently as well as increase their capacity for resolving urban renewal issues. The model includes the new legal framework for small and medium enterprises working on private (non-state) or collective (cooperative) property, and the launch of pilot projects that stimulate this new production sector in the Cuban society.

There are currently 48 ecomaterials workshops in full operation throughout Cuba, and another 16 worldwide, including Latin America (Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti), Africa (Namibia, Nigeria, Mozambique), the Middle East (Yemen) and Asia (Bangladesh).

CIDEM has also been involved with the development of projects for the mitigation and prevention of damage to housing in the event of hurricanes and other disasters. The results of this work can be seen in the fast recovery after hurricanes Michelle (2001), Dennis (2005), Gustav and Ike (2008) which struck Cuba between 2001 and 2008, and in partnership with EcoSur in Haiti (2010) after the earthquake.

### Main partners

Swiss Development Cooperation: main sponsor of the project, and main counterpart. They have provided approximately CHF 1.5 million through the official cooperation channels between Cuba and Switzerland.

Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA: they have partially sponsored the project with funds around \$C220,000, through the University of Calgary, Canada

CARE International in representation of the private firm Bouygues International: they have partially sponsored the project by providing EUR 300,000 to set up production facilities in 5 municipalities severely affected by the 2008 hurricanes.

Latin American Network for the Sustainable Habitat, ECOSUR: they have provided in kind assistance through advisory service and experts exchange. They are CIDEM's main international partner.

Werkhof Verein and the European Union: they



funded the very first part of the project (2000-2005) with EUR 180,000, channelled through the NGO "Werkhof verein"

Cuban Ministry of Construction: they have funded all salaries of productive personnel, all production facilities, as well as raw materials and resources to undertake production in all workshops. These funds exceed CHF 5 million for the period 2008-2011. They have participated through the National Housing Institute in all phases of the project, planning, implementing and monitoring.

Cuban Ministry of Higher Education: they have funded the salaries and infrastructure of scientific personnel, and most of the expenses carried out in research and development work during the whole period 2000-2011.

### Impact

#### Beneficiaries:

- 5300 constructive actions directly for the families in all municipalities where the project was implemented; year 2010 (4000 total houses) and 1300 total houses on year 2011.
- 137 small non state enterprises in sustainable operation in the production of various materials (bricks, tiles).
- 325 new jobs created during 2009-2011, 48 jobs occupied by female (15 per cent)
- Three training centers established at the universities (Villa Clara, Holguin, Santiago de Cuba), 292 trainees (45 per cent female)

A contribution to the gradual migration from a centralised production model based on state-owned, subsidised enterprises to a decentralised production model based on non-state, market oriented production figures operating at municipal scale: 48 municipalities equipped with facilities to locally produce approximately 65 per cent of the materials needed for their own housing programs; a national program for the Local Production of Materials launched by the Ministry of Construction, with funds allocated to progressively expand the model to the rest of the municipalities in Cuba (70 per cent of productive infrastructure for housing shall be "non-state" in 2015, according to official statement)

Experiences gathered at pilot scale in the implementation of the framework for the operation of the new production figures at municipal scale: legal regulation for issuing production licenses for the use of commodities like clay, stones, tufts, firewood in the local manufacture of ecomaterials; technology, know-how and advisory service available for the implementation of local production schemes

for at least 12 production lines (aggregates, tiles, blocks, bricks, briquettes, etc.) in all 48 workshops; legal background for new production figures like construction cooperatives, private contractors, masons, electricians, plumbers, etc. approved, with credit lines provided by the bank.

A contribution to the improvement of the housing situation in 48 municipalities in the context of disaster mitigation. 70 per cent of these actions targeted families affected during the 2008 hurricane season. This represents 48 per cent of the constructive actions reported in the municipalities object of this project.

### Sustainability

Since June 2009 the Cuban Government has officially recognised the importance and impact of CIDEM's approach to tackle housing problems, and has created a Task Force, led by the Minister of Construction, to disseminate the productive model in all municipalities in Cuba, under the approach known as "Traje a la Medida" (Tailored Suit), which means that the availability of local resources has to be proved prior to deciding which technology will be implemented.

In 2010 CIDEM was officially appointed as advisor for the Parliament in issues related to housing policies. Later this year, CIDEM started to take place in meetings held at the maximum decision level in the country (Office of the Vice President of the Council of Ministers and the Council of State), to provide advisory service on matters related with the decentralized model for the production of ecomaterials and the construction of houses.

In the first half of 2011, after a year of trials, a National Program for the decentralized production and sales of building materials was officially launched, with funds allocated by the Cuban government. This program includes the creation of production facilities in all municipalities in Cuba, at a growth rate of 40 municipalities a year, by also the creation of incentives for the new non-state entrepreneurs that will undertake production of materials and house constructions, as well as the legal and economic environment for new economic figures like small credits schemes, provision of construction services, local sales in the municipal market and many others. CIDEM is permanent advisor of the Directorate of this program and takes an active part in its implementation.

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# Electrical Safety – What You Need to Know



It's an alarming statistic - about 1/3 of the homes Archicentre inspects have some kind of electrical fault. This is usually one of 3 things:

1. An original meter box without safety switches (required for all new homes and recommended for old ones)
2. A dodgy power point or two (incorrectly wired, loose or damaged)
3. Home wiring (electrical wiring has to be done by a licensed electrician)

If you're arranging work on a property make sure the electrician is licensed and make sure they are going to provide a Certificate of Electrical Safety on completion. If the answer is "no" to either of these questions find someone else!

Certificates of Electrical Safety must be issued for either Prescribed electrical work (up to the

meter) which must be inspected or for Non-Prescribed electrical work (within the home) which may be inspected. The COES will be either \$5 or \$20 depending on which sort of work it is.

According to Energy Safe Victoria, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 requires a landlord to ensure that rented accommodation is maintained in good repair. "Good repair" includes all electrical appliances provided by the landlord. These must be safe to use and properly maintained.

### There are two critical areas relating to electricity safety:

1. Proper installation of new or replacement electrical appliances.
2. Correct maintenance and use of existing appliances by following manufacturers' instructions.

Under the act both tenants and landlords, together with their agents, have a number of responsibilities. Tenant's responsibilities are related to the reporting appliance faults to the landlord or the landlord's agent.

The landlord and the agent should work together to ensure that a safety check is done at agreed intervals and at least every two years.

### The landlord's responsibilities:

- Ensure only licensed persons do all electrical work.
- Before re-letting, ensure all appliances are safe and any unsafe appliance is repaired or removed.
- Ensure electrical appliances are cleaned regularly in accordance with manufacturers' instructions - particular attention should be paid to dust build-up on cooling fan inlets and all parts of heaters.
- Check electrical appliances for damage to plugs, leads and casings that may expose 'live' parts or cause a fire.
- Ensure electrical wiring, socket outlets and switches are maintained in a safe condition.
- Ensure all ventilation openings are clear and unobstructed.
- Record all safety checks and details of work carried out on a licensed electrical installation.

### The tenant's responsibilities:

- Use appliances appropriately and stop using appliance that is obviously faulty.
- Allow reasonable access for the landlord's contractor to carry out electricity safety checks.
- Report any fault or malfunction to the landlord or agent.
- Do not illegally install, remove or tamper with any electrical appliance.

- Do not use damaged appliances - they can cause fires and injuries.
- Do not use multiple or cascaded power boards as a substitute for permanently installed socket outlets.
- Ensure that portable heaters are kept away from combustible materials including paper and curtains.
- When replacing electrical fuses or fuse wire, only use the specified rating. Oversized fuses may cause the fixed wiring to fail resulting in electric shock or fire.

Energy Safe Victoria recommends that an electrical Home Safety Inspection of a property is arranged before it is leased, or between tenancies, to ensure that wiring and other electrical installations are safe for tenants, their families and visitors to the property. Inspections should be carried out every five years and the cost will usually be in the order of \$300-\$400.

When was the last time one of your properties underwent an electrical safety check?

If you require any further information or want to speak with a building expert please call Archicentre on 1300 134 513

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# Multi-unit residents seek protection against smoke drift

Energy Action highlights tips on choosing the right energy procurement partner for your business

**M**ulti-unit residents are urging the NSW government to reform strata laws to protect them from a serious health hazard: tobacco smoke drifting into their homes from neighbouring units and balconies. As of January 22 more than 1500 residents and supporters have signed an online petition to the O'Farrell government to protect strata residents, including children, from this toxic contaminant.

The petition urges the government to amend the NSW Strata Act to include tobacco smoke under the legislative definition of "nuisance" and "hazard", explicitly recognising that second-hand smoke drifting into a residential lot is serious threat to health and amenity. It proposes that if strata law and related judicial, complaint and dispute processes protect residents against loud music and barking dogs, there should be at least as many safeguards against tobacco smoke – and arguably more.

Residents feel tobacco smoke needs to be clearly defined as a nuisance and a hazard so they have clearer supported avenues to seek protection from its poisons – particularly for their children, who are often their chief concern. ASH Australia and other health groups report a growing snowball of resident complaints, residents sometimes in tears with concern for the health of their babies or children.

A recent NSW survey showed over 12,000 people in NSW aged 45-64, mostly non-smokers, are routinely exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes for at least an hour per day; and over 7,000 for at least eight hours a day.

The survey also showed multi-unit dwellers, women, and people facing social disadvantage, are significantly more likely to be exposed. Over 2,500 multi-unit dwellers with children under 18 are exposed for at least an hour a day, including over 1,200 for at least 8 hours a day.

Worldwide evidence shows such repeated exposure, even at low levels, can cause serious health harm including cardiovascular and respiratory disease, cancers, mental, sexual and reproductive harm. Children are especially vulnerable.

NSW Minister for Fair Trading Anthony Roberts held a two-stage public review of strata law in 2012, in which smoke drift was acknowledged in the first round of submissions as the largest single concern. ASH recommended to the review that:

1. Legislation should provide definitions of "nuisance" and "hazard" for the purposes of the legislation, recognising that tobacco smoke drift from lots including balconies is both a nuisance and serious health hazard; and that smoking in a building also increases fire risk to all residents and guests in the building.
2. There should be no defence of reasonable or lawful use or enjoyment of a lot where an activity is causing hazard, as smoking does.
3. A model smokefree by-law should be included in the Strata Schemes Management Regulation 2010 (Part 9.27, Schedules 2 - Model by-laws for residential strata schemes).
4. Smoking-related Orders should be included in Strata Schemes Management Act 1996 (Chapter 5, Part 4, Orders of Adjudicator).

5. The legislation should effect the recommendation of the Commonwealth Government-appointed National Preventive Health Taskforce 2009 that:  
*All state governments ... legislate to require leases for multi-unit apartment buildings and condominium sales agreements to include the terms governing smoking.* Strata schemes should be required to draft a short mission statement, to be attached to the plan or front page of their by-laws, drawing attention to the smokefree or smoking-permitted status of the scheme.
6. The legislation should require that all new strata developments comprise sections of developments that are subject to mandatory smokefree environment rules. The scientific evidence supports separation between smokefree and smoking-permitted whole buildings, not merely between units.
7. Any proposed strata by-law involving protection of residents from a physical hazard, such as tobacco smoke or smoking-related fire risk, should require no more than a simple majority vote of residents to be passed; and in votes involving physical hazard such as from smoking, not just owner-residents but all residents should be eligible to vote.
8. As retirement villages include a high proportion of aged residents with health conditions acutely susceptible to aggravation by even low levels of tobacco smoke, legislation should require all retirement villages to be 100% smokefree at least in all indoor areas. As an interim measure, retirement villages should be required to separate smokefree from smoking-permitted buildings, designating at least some buildings smokefree and informing all prospective residents of the smoking status of the accommodation available.
9. Just as the recent Tobacco Legislation Amendment Act 2012 allows local health districts to enact smokefree bylaws relating to health sites, so we recommend NSW strata law be amended to allow local housing and especially community housing areas to enact smokefree bylaws covering multi-unit residential buildings.

If meaningful reform of strata law is achieved in NSW, giving more protection from smoke drift, it may have flow-on effects to other jurisdictions - so residents and their allies are hoping for a good result including effective legislation during 2013.

Australia's ratification of the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2004 included a commitment by all Australian governments to protect all people from exposure to tobacco smoke. Reform of strata laws could help achieve this.

## More Information

NSW smoke drift petition at [www.stopthesmoke.org/](http://www.stopthesmoke.org/)  
Health evidence and more information:  
ASH online guide [www.ashaust.org.au/pdfs/SFHousingGuide.pdf](http://www.ashaust.org.au/pdfs/SFHousingGuide.pdf) and webpage  
[www.ashaust.org.au/lv4/housing.htm](http://www.ashaust.org.au/lv4/housing.htm)

## Stafford Sanders

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Australia and Protecting Children from Tobacco coalition of 44 NGOs

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# Rental Report

by Dr Andrew Wilson, Senior Economist, Australian Property Monitors

### Key Findings.

- **Sidelined first home buyers lift Sydney unit rents**
- **Perth rents continue to skyrocket**
- **Melbourne still best value for tenants**
- **Brisbane and Perth standouts for investors and top yields**

Although rents for houses remained flat in most capital cities, unit rentals have surged over the March quarter. Nationally, median weekly asking rents for houses rose by just +0.4% however unit rents rose by +2.2% over the quarter.

Sydney, Melbourne and Perth were the big movers in unit rents over the March quarter with only Perth of all the major capitals recording a rise in house rents.

Sydney median asking house rents were again steady over the March quarter at \$500 but remained the highest rents of all capitals except Darwin. Sydney house rents have now recorded no growth over the past year.

Facing high house rents, Sydney tenants appear to be switching their preferences to units with rents rising by +2.2% over the quarter and up by +4.4% over the year. With first home buyers numbers currently at record lows, demand is increasing for already scarce rental accommodation, particularly at the more affordable end of the price spectrum.

The differential between house rents and unit rents however is quickly closing with the real prospect looming of rental parity between these accommodation types.

The Melbourne market recorded a surprising lift in unit rents over the March quarter despite the recent significant increase in new apartment

supply, particularly in the CBD. Melbourne unit rents rose by +2.9% over the quarter and by +1.4% over the year. This was the first rise in rents recorded for either houses or units in Melbourne for some time. Despite the latest increase, Melbourne remains highly affordable for tenants compared to the other mainland capitals with only Adelaide more affordable. Melbourne house rents are 28% lower than Sydney's.

The Brisbane rental market paused over the March quarter with no rises recorded in the median weekly asking rentals for both houses and units. Given the recent growth in rents in Brisbane and the tightening rental market potential homebuyers are perhaps being activated by low interest rates and low entry-level home prices taking some demand away from a highly competitive rental market.

The extraordinary rise of Perth house and unit rents continued over the March quarter driven by record levels of new arrivals seeking accommodation.

Perth median asking weekly house rents rose by +4.3% over the March quarter with unit rents up by +3.8%. Perth house median house rent is currently at \$490 a week and looks set to overtake Sydney

as the most expensive of all the major capitals.

Similarly to Perth, the Darwin rental market continues to record surging house rentals up +7.7% over the March quarter. Darwin remains the most expensive capital city rental market over the March quarter with houses at \$700 a week and units at \$550 a week.

Upward pressure on rents is set to continue in Perth, Darwin and Sydney as a chronic shortage of housing continues to put the rental bite on tenants in those cities. Increased demand for unit accommodation will continue in Sydney and Melbourne driven by affordability constraints and lifestyle preferences however in Melbourne, new apartment growth will act to offset rental increases. Rental growth in Adelaide, Hobart and Canberra will remain subdued over the remainder of 2013 reflecting the under-performance of those local economies.

For investors, Perth and Brisbane are both performing well. Perth gross yields for units at 5.82% are the highest of all the major capitals with house yields at 5.20% just behind the leader Brisbane at 5.22%. Brisbane unit yields are just behind Perth at 5.55% with plenty of potential upside for capital gains in a recovering market environment.

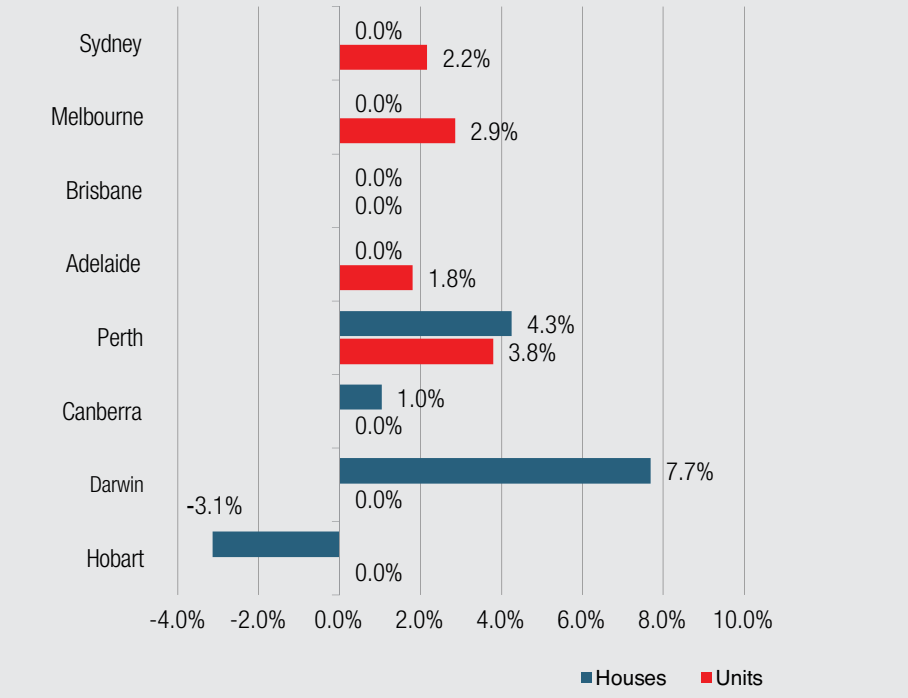
Gross Rental Yields - Houses

	March-13	Dec-12	Mar-11	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	4.64%	4.61%	4.68%	0.7%	-0.8%
Melbourne	4.36%	4.31%	4.23%	1.3%	3.0%
Brisbane	5.22%	5.19%	5.13%	0.5%	1.7%
Adelaide	4.91%	4.86%	4.81%	0.9%	2.1%
Perth	5.20%	5.11%	4.73%	1.8%	10.0%
Canberra	4.97%	5.05%	5.01%	-1.5%	-0.8%
Darwin	5.33%	5.34%	4.84%	-0.3%	10.2%
Hobart	5.42%	5.20%	5.36%	4.2%	1.1%

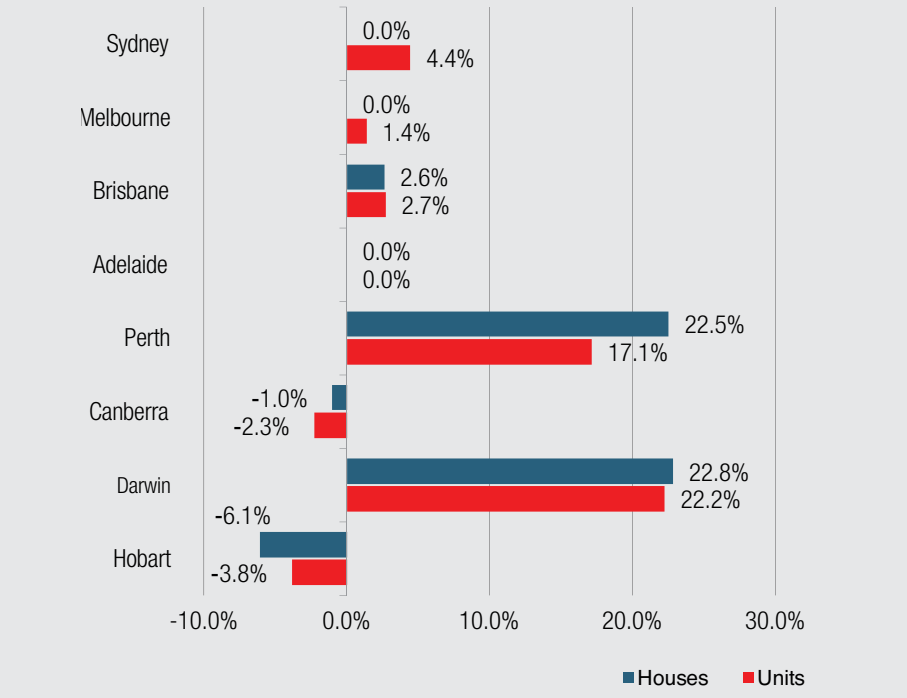
Gross Rental Yields - Units

	Mar-13	Dec-12	Mar-11	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	470	460	450	2.2%	4.4%
Melbourne	360	350	355	2.9%	1.4%
Brisbane	375	375	365	0.0%	2.7%
Adelaide	280	275	280	1.8%	0.0%
Perth	410	395	350	3.8%	17.1%
Canberra	430	430	440	0.0%	-2.3%
Darwin	550	550	450	0.0%	22.2%
Hobart	250	250	260	0.0%	-3.8%

Asking Median Rents (Qtr on Qtr % Δ)



Asking Median Rents (Yr on Yr % Δ)





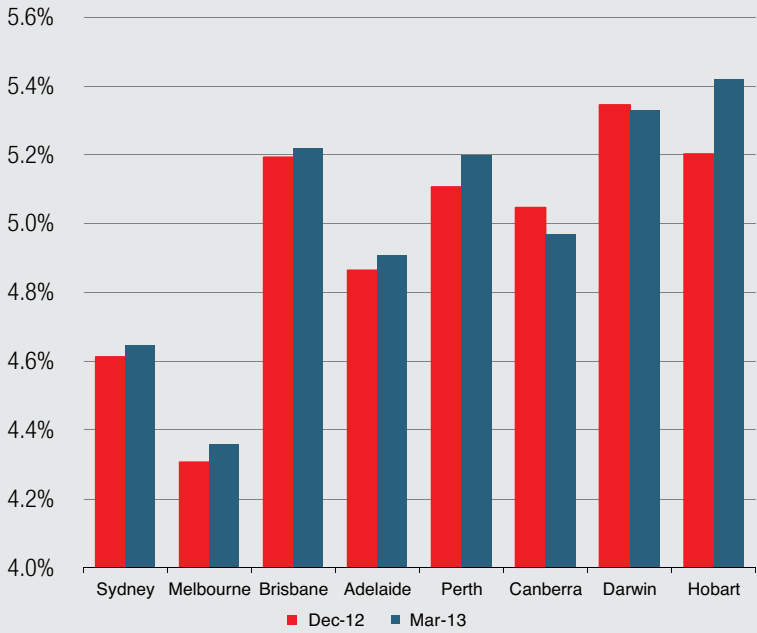
Gross Rental Yields - Houses

	Mar-13	Dec-12	Mar-12	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	4.64%	4.61%	4.68%	0.7%	-0.8%
Melbourne	4.36%	4.31%	4.23%	1.3%	3.0%
Brisbane	5.22%	5.19%	5.13%	0.5%	1.7%
Adelaide	4.91%	4.86%	4.81%	0.9%	2.1%
Perth	5.20%	5.11%	4.73%	1.8%	10.0%
Canberra	4.97%	5.05%	5.01%	-1.5%	-0.8%
Darwin	5.33%	5.34%	4.84%	-0.3%	10.2%
Hobart	5.42%	5.20%	5.36%	4.2%	1.1%

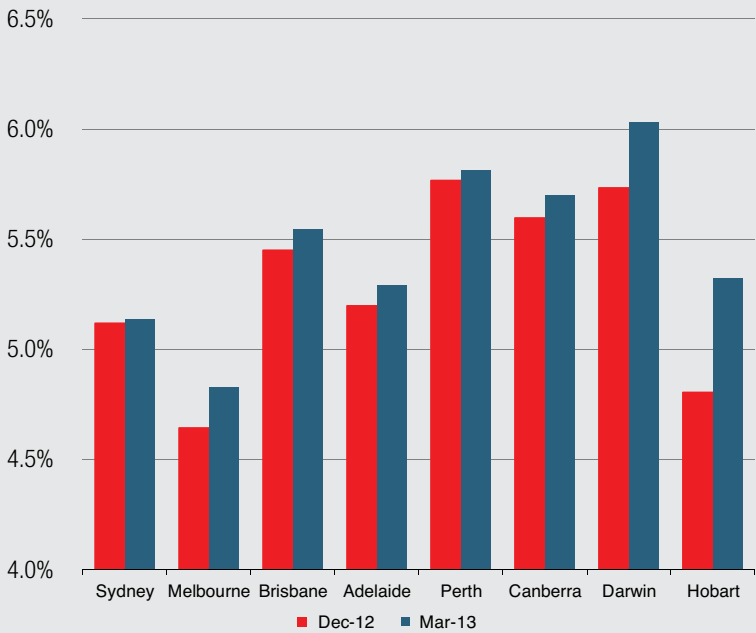
Gross Rental Yields - Units

	Mar-13	Dec-12	Mar-12	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	5.14%	5.12%	5.12%	0.4%	0.3%
Melbourne	4.83%	4.64%	4.68%	3.9%	3.2%
Brisbane	5.55%	5.45%	5.32%	1.8%	4.2%
Adelaide	5.29%	5.20%	5.11%	1.9%	3.5%
Perth	5.82%	5.76%	5.22%	0.9%	11.4%
Canberra	5.70%	5.60%	5.65%	1.9%	0.9%
Darwin	6.03%	5.73%	5.57%	5.3%	8.3%
Hobart	5.32%	4.80%	5.18%	-10.9%	2.7%

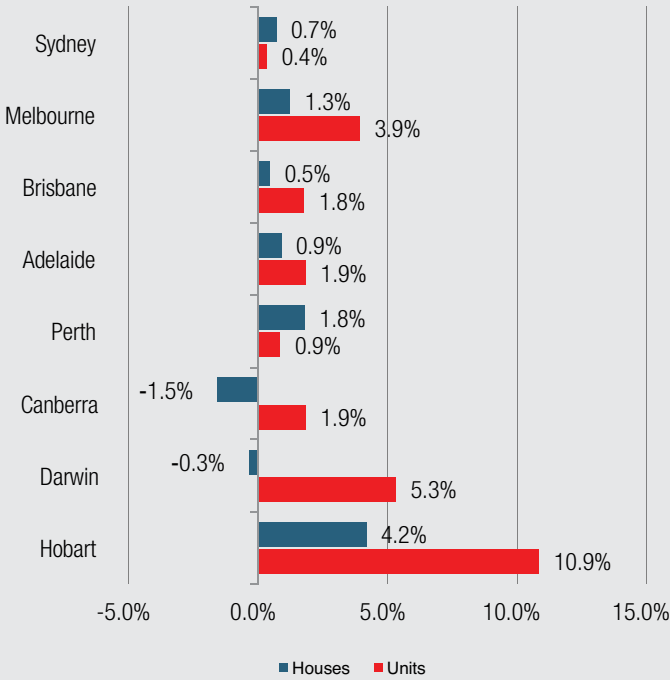
Gross Rental Yields - Houses



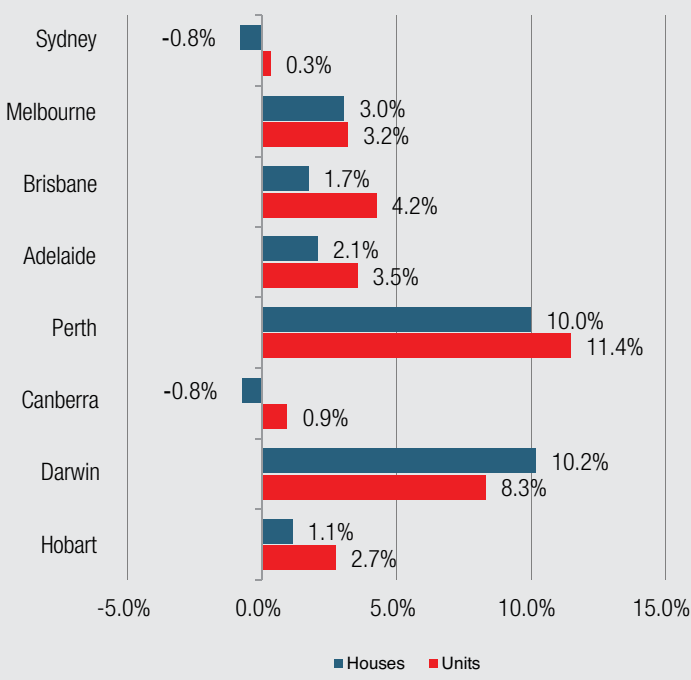
Gross Rental Yields - Units



Gross Rental Yield (Qtr on Qtr % Δ)



Gross Rental Yield (Yr on Yr % Δ)





# House Price Report

by Dr Andrew Wilson, Senior Economist, Australian Property Monitors

## Key Findings

- The national median house price has now risen solidly for two quarters in a row, up by +1.7 % over the March quarter
- Sydney housing market now expanding with prices at record levels over consecutive quarters
- Melbourne records the best capital city quarterly result up by +3.6%, its best result since March 2010
- Brisbane house prices increase for the third quarter in a row for the first time in three years
- Adelaide and Canberra buck the national trend with median house prices falling over the March quarter



## Capital City Results

### Sydney

- House prices rose by +1.6% over the March quarter following a +2.6% rise over the previous quarter
- Unit prices fell by -1.6% over the quarter following a strong rise of +3.6% in December
- Sydney's median house price is at a record \$673,681 with the median unit price at \$473,808
- Annual house prices have increased by +4.2% with units up by +1.7%

### Melbourne

- Melbourne house prices rose strongly by +3.6% over the quarter
- Unit prices in Melbourne rose for the third consecutive quarter also up strongly by +2.6%
- Melbourne house prices have risen by +3.7% over the year ending March with units up by +1.7%
- The median house price for Melbourne is

now \$538,922, with the median unit price \$402,197

### Brisbane

- Median house prices rose for the third quarter in a row for the first time since September 2010 - up by +0.5% over March
- Brisbane unit prices fell by -3.3% over the quarter
- Annual house prices are now up by +1.4% with unit prices however down by -5.3%

### Perth

- House prices rose for the fifth consecutive quarter over March up by +1.3% with unit prices up marginally by +0.3%
- Annual median houses prices for Perth have surged by +5.2% with unit prices up by +1.4%

### Canberra

- Median house prices fell by -0.4% and unit prices down sharply by -3.5% over the quarter
- Houses prices are up by just +0.1% over the year to March 2013 with units down by -2.3%
- The median house price for Canberra stands at \$567,768

### Adelaide

- Adelaide house prices fell by -0.8% over the March quarter and are down by -1.7% over the year
- The median price for units fell by -1.1% over the quarter and down -2.0% over the year
- The Adelaide median house price is again the lowest of all the mainland capitals at \$427,523

### Hobart

- Hobart's median house price rose by +0.5% over the March quarter but annual prices are down -3.3%

- The median house price for Hobart is now \$309,089

### Darwin

- Darwin's median house price rose by +1.8% with unit prices up strongly by +3.6% over the March quarter
- Darwin's annual median house price rose by +5.4% with units up by +6.3%

"The Australian housing market continues to rise with consecutive quarters of solid growth in the national median house price. The impact of low interest rates and rising confidence is consolidating the general recovery in activity evident over the past year.

The national house price rose by +1.7% over the March quarter following a rise of +1.8% over the previous December quarter. The national house price is now just +1.0% below its previous peak recorded in June 2010.

National unit prices decreased slightly by -0.7% over the quarter but is up +0.7% over the year.

Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Darwin all recorded significant increases in median house prices over the March quarter. Melbourne was the standout performer with house prices rising strongly by +3.6% to \$538,922 and unit prices also up sharply, increasing by +2.6% over the quarter. This is the best performance by the Melbourne housing market since the March quarter of 2010. Melbourne's median house price has now risen by +3.7% over the past year but remains -4.2% below its previous peak level.

The Sydney housing market continues to move from strength to strength recording a +1.6% increase in the median house price over the March quarter to \$673,681. Sydney has now posted consecutive quarters of record level median house prices to clearly move from the recovery phase that commenced early in 2012 into a solid expansionary phase of cyclical house price growth. Sydney unit prices however adjusted downwards by -1.6% over the March quarter following the extraordinary rise of +3.6% to record levels over the December quarter. Lower first homebuyer numbers may have also contributed to this adjustment.

There is also positive news for the Brisbane housing market with a rise of +0.5% in the median house price over the March quarter. Brisbane has now recorded three consecutive quarters of growth in house prices for the first time since the

September quarter of 2010 indicating a market at last on the upswing.

The resource capitals of Perth and Darwin continue to record hefty increases in median house prices as strong, low unemployment economies attract high numbers of workers from interstate. Perth house prices rose by +1.3% over the quarter and +5.2% over the year with Darwin up by +1.8% in the quarter and by +5.4% in the year.

Adelaide and Canberra bucked the national trend each recording falls in median house prices over the March quarter, down by -0.8% and -0.4% respectively. Unit prices were also down with Adelaide falling by -1.1% and Canberra unit prices plunging -3.5% over the quarter. Subdued house and unit price growth in these cities reflects the struggling local economies particularly in regard to relatively high unemployment.

Although Hobart recorded an increase of +0.5% in the median house price over the March quarter, that market remains subdued and is -9.2% below its previous peak which is the worst performance of all the capitals.

The national housing market has recorded its best start to a year since the strong market conditions of 2010. Strengthening auction clearances rates and increased residential lending activity have translated into rising house prices over the March quarter.

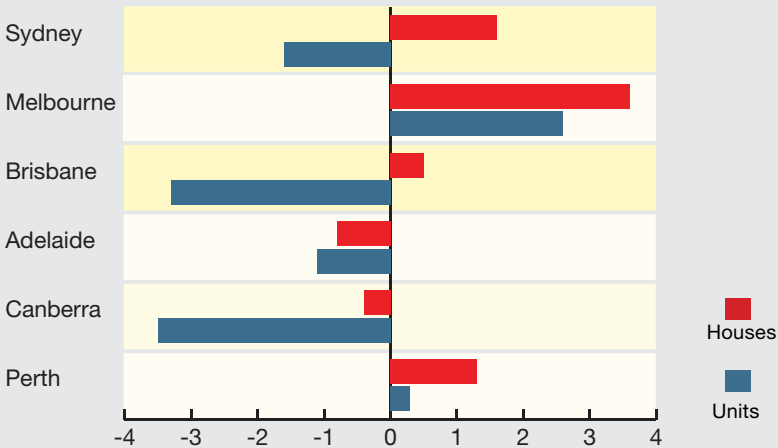
A general housing market recovery is consolidating although activity levels vary between capital city markets and market segments reflecting the mixed impact of local supply and demand drivers.

Buyer activity is set to increase through the remainder of 2013 driven by growing optimism and record low interest rates that have likely bottomed out, but much will depend on the performance of both the national and local economies."

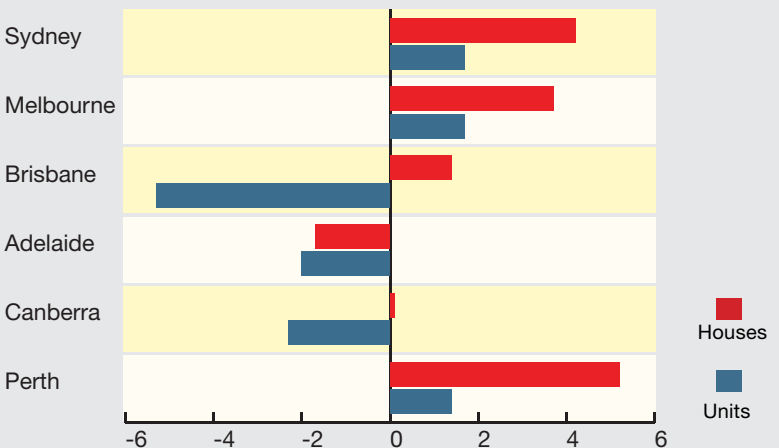
### About Australian Property Monitors (APM)

APM is a leading national supplier of property price information to home buyers and sellers, professional real estate agents, mortgage brokers, valuers, banks and financial markets. APM has been helping Australians make informed decisions about property since 1989.

Median price % change - quarter on quarter



Median price % change - year on year





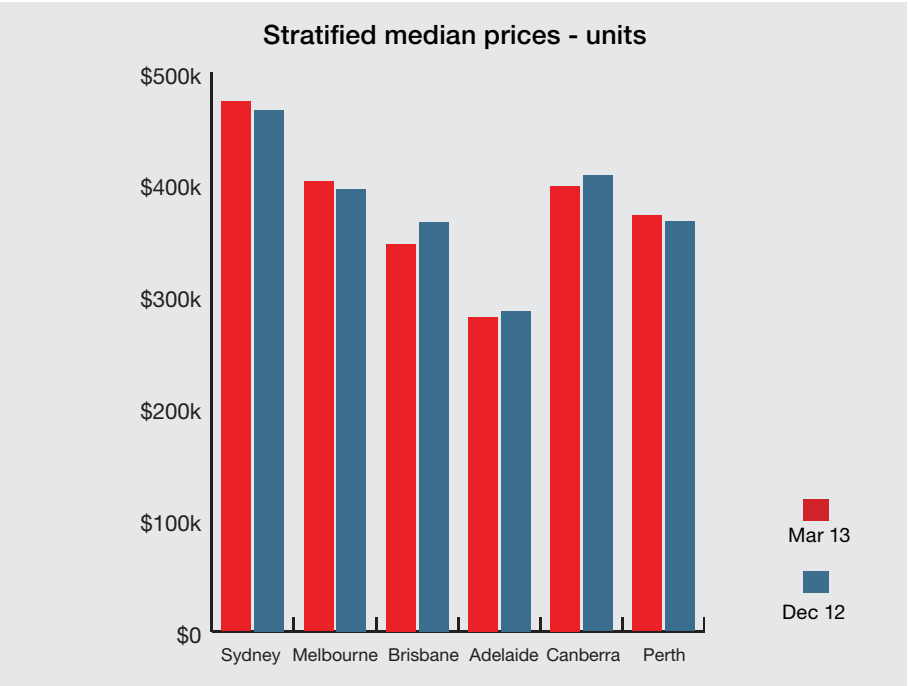
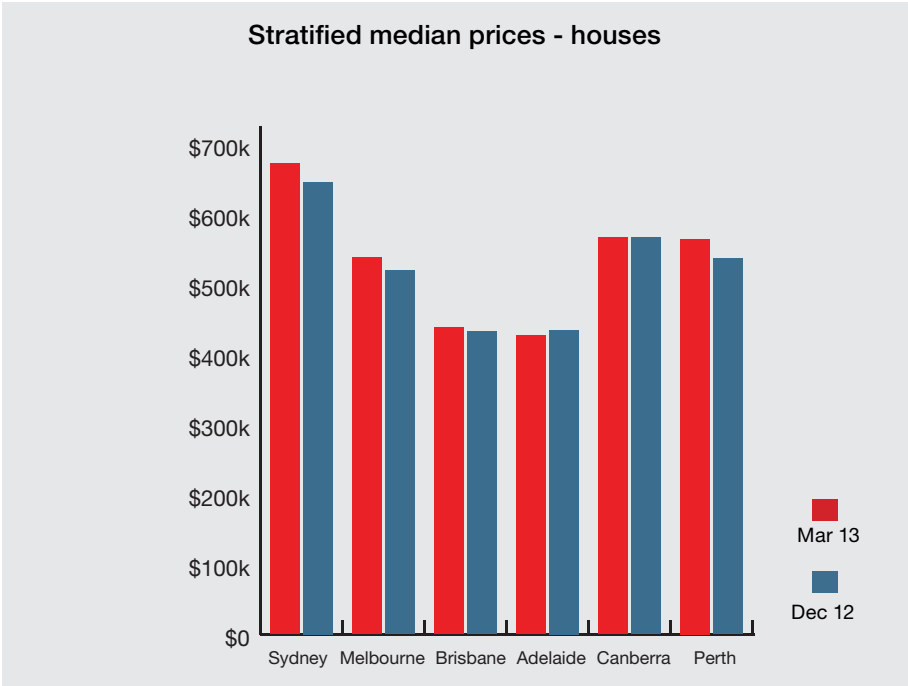


Stratified Median Housing Prices (quarterly) (\$)

Houses	Mar-13	Dec-12	Sep-12	Mar-12	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	\$673,681	\$663,008	\$645,986	\$646,813	1.6	4.2
Melbourne	\$538,922	\$520,368	\$513,580	\$519,911	3.6	3.7
Brisbane	\$438,857	\$436,484	\$435,171	\$432,768	0.5	1.4
Adelaide	\$427,523	\$430,884	\$427,388	\$435,043	-0.8	-1.7
Canberra	\$567,768	\$569,771	\$561,635	\$567,090	-0.4	0.1
Perth	\$565,152	\$557,968	\$545,049	\$537,070	1.3	5.2
Hobart	\$309,089	\$307,488	\$304,606	\$319,774	0.5	-3.3
Darwin	\$652,957	\$641,531	\$623,006	\$619,624	1.8	5.4
National	\$551,685	\$542,419	\$533,040	\$534,712	1.7	3.2

Stratified Median Unit Prices (quarterly) (\$)

Units	Mar-13	Dec-12	Sep-12	Mar-12	QoQ % Δ	YoY % Δ
Sydney	\$473,808	\$481,592	\$464,792	\$465,817	-1.6	1.7
Melbourne	\$402,197	\$392,167	\$389,158	\$395,355	2.6	1.7
Brisbane	\$346,379	\$358,323	\$364,770	\$365,793	-3.3	-5.3
Adelaide	\$280,805	\$283,785	\$275,074	\$286,437	-1.1	-2.0
Canberra	\$398,104	\$412,742	\$399,655	\$407,308	-3.5	-2.3
Perth	\$371,543	\$370,332	\$358,212	\$366,287	0.3	1.4
Hobart	\$269,505	\$283,689	\$236,408	\$263,601	-5.0	2.2
Darwin	\$425,172	\$410,234	\$414,552	\$400,103	3.6	6.3
National	\$417,723	\$420,819	\$411,055	\$414,738	-0.7	0.7





# Is it risky business working with a developer-appointed strata manager?



**S**o you have bought a new property in a new development! Decisions made by the developer in the initial establishment period of a strata property can have a major effect on the quality and liveability of both your property and common areas within the scheme.

One such decision is the appointment of the strata manager at the first Annual General Meeting (AGM). Having a knowledgeable and proactive strata manager is vital for a new development, especially when it comes to making sure that building defects, which will inevitably occur, are rectified.

Committees frequently ask “whose team is the strata manager on?” This is because strata managers are often engaged by developers, with the arrangement that they conduct the consultancy work required to establish the owners corporation/body corporate at no cost, and in return are appointed at the first AGM.

Often new owners have limited understanding of the role and responsibilities of the owners corporation/body corporate, and as such rely on the advice and guidance of a strata manager. This can raise concerns about whether there is a conflict of interest and a breach of fiduciary duty.

In new developments there can be a period of conflict between the developer and the committee. Common concerns committees have are:

- Is the strata manager working in the best interests of our property, or do they still have vested interests in maintaining the developers interests?
- Can the strata manager be relied upon to advise us about time restrictions applicable to building defects?
- What if we are left with a strata manager who made errors in budgeting and lot entitlements to make the development look more attractive during the sales process?

This is not to say that being managed by a developer-appointed strata management company is doom and gloom. On the contrary, some companies excel in their ability to manage the two relationships (with the developer and with the owners corporation/body corporate) completely separately. However, it does highlight the need for owners in new developments not to be complacent about the process and raises the question – how can you know if the developer-appointed strata manager is any good?

Owners may feel that they have no control at the first AGM when the strata manager is

Strata managers are often engaged by developers, with the arrangement that they conduct the consultancy work required to establish the owners corporation/body corporate at no cost, and in return are appointed at the first AGM.



appointed. This is not necessarily the case and it is worth finding out your rights. Luckily, there is a company serving New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, Strata Match, which provides a free service to owners corporations and bodies corporate – making sure they are working with the right strata manager for their property.

Owners corporations and bodies corporate that need advice on the appointment of a strata manager – whether it be for the first AGM or at the end of the developer-appointed strata manager's fixed term – can contact Strata

Match for advice on how to transfer to the right strata manager for them. Strata Match works with committees and owners to get an in-depth understanding of what the committee wants and the property needs, and will invite only the most suitable strata management companies to tender. This ensures that strata property is matched with the best service provider at the most competitive rate.

## For more Information

Please contact strata Match on 1300 93 6282 or [www.stratamatch.com.au](http://www.stratamatch.com.au)

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# Smart Blocks creating impetus for energy upgrades

By Cameron Jewell

City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore officially launched the Smart Blocks program to a packed audience in central Sydney on 13 June 2013



City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore

**S**mart Blocks is a national program aimed at helping owners and managers of apartment buildings improve energy efficiency by helping to overcome barriers to upgrading. Already, over 70 buildings across the country have signed up.

The financial case for energy efficiency upgrades in apartments is strong. However, these upgrades often aren't occurring. What Smart Blocks does, through an interactive online toolkit, is try to make the process of upgrading as straightforward as possible. It's about empowerment and capacity building – taking the low-hanging fruit of energy efficiency and putting it straight in the mouths of those living in apartments.

"Australia is known as a suburban country but this is changing," City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore told the audience during her launch speech. "Apartments now account for 35 to 40 per cent of all new homes."

Ms Moore said over the past five years 150,000 households had made the switch to apartments. She said strata living was the fastest growing sector in NSW and that within 20 years half the state would be living under a strata scheme.

"It means we have to build smarter, more

sustainable offices and apartments, and retrofit existing building stock which will be with us for another generation, at least," she said.

Smart Blocks tackles energy used in common areas of apartment buildings. Audits by the group found that almost half of energy consumption was due to these common areas, which is a reason why apartment dwellers are responsible for 25 per cent more emissions than house dwellers.

The program's key feature is an interactive online toolkit where people can discover energy efficiency improvements that can be made to common property in their buildings, including lighting, water systems, pools and amenities, heating and cooling, and ventilation. It then guides them step-by-step on what needs to be done to get a particular project approved.

Capacity building is a key theme for the Smart Blocks site, which includes practical advice on everything from preparing a motion for an annual general meeting to getting quotes and calculating payback times. This allows a watertight financial case to be mounted through the correct channels in a convincing way.

Smart Blocks Program Manager Brenden Carriker said that much effort had gone into

researching barriers needed to be overcome to empower apartment dwellers and managers.

He said people generally understood the value of energy efficiency upgrades, but the problem was they didn't necessarily know how to implement opportunities.

He noted four barriers to getting upgrades done. The key one being tackled by Smart Blocks was knowledge – knowing where to find information on upgrades and, most importantly, knowledge of how to implement change within the strata context. He said apartment owners needed to know who to engage with and when.

Other barriers included the physical building stock, access to financial products and governance issues.

Allan Hoy, building manager of Hyde Park Towers, gave a case study on savings he'd made in his building.

"It means we have to build smarter, more sustainable offices and apartments, and retrofit existing building stock which will be with us for another generation, at least,"

He mounted a strong financial case for energy efficiency, saying the net total project cost for LED upgrades in Hyde Park Towers was \$23,713, and the payback was only 19 months.

The reduction in power bills has been dramatic.

"If we had not undertaken the initiatives we have, we've estimated our power bill would be around \$15,400 a month, or \$184,000 a year."

After the upgrades, they determined a budget of \$117,000 a year for electricity, and with less than a month of the financial year to go, they are well under budget.



Hyde Park Towers

"It certainly is worth your while," Mr Hoy said.

"The important thing to take from this meeting is that all apartment buildings can fine-tune energy in their common areas, whether it's through using energy differently, through retrofitting or upgrading systems, or by replacing them with more energy-efficient products," Ms Moore said.

The program is particularly important to the City of Sydney's sustainability plan, which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70 per cent by 2030. Apartments make up a third of the City's building stock, house three-quarters of the city's residents and contribute 10 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. And with trigen now on the backburner, tackling these efficiencies has become even more important.

The Smart Blocks program has some very keen participants already. Even before the official launch, over 70 buildings had signed up to the program, and many more are expected to join in the coming months.

Smart Blocks has been developed in partnership between Strata Community Australia, City of Sydney, City of Melbourne, Owners Corporation Network of Australia and Green Strata.

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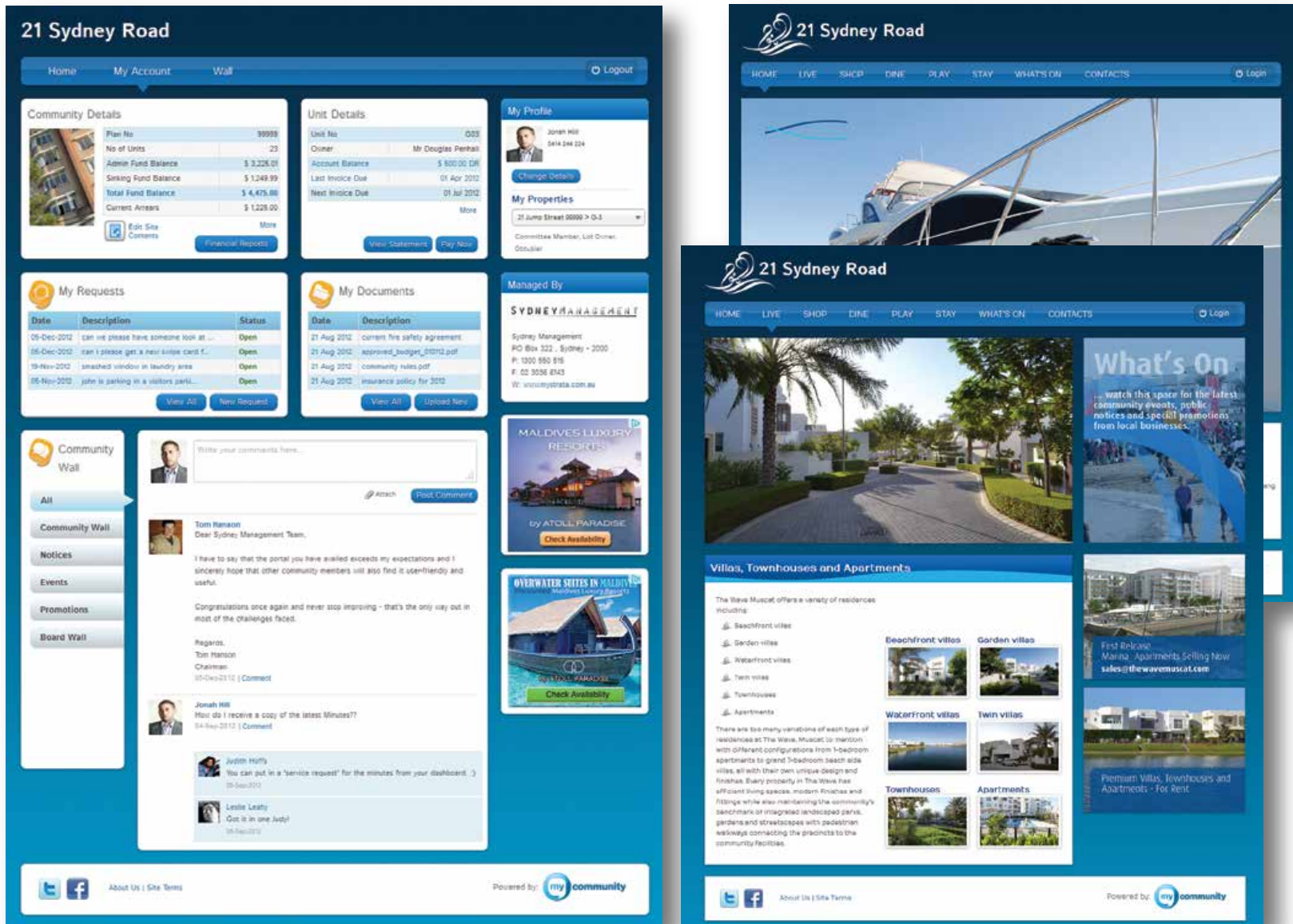
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# The Future of Service Delivery in the Strata Management Industry

By Gary Bugden OAM DUniv ((Chairman, Mystrata Pty Ltd)

The time has come for strata management businesses to seriously look at the technology they use and decide whether it will position them to cope with and benefit from the technology revolution which, contrary to common belief, has only just commenced.



As an indicator of the likely future pace of change, let's contemplate the impact of technology on business and the community over the past 10 years. To list a few of the areas where the impact on business has been greatest:

- Main stream businesses migrated to the internet, initially through internet connectivity but more recently using cloud computing technology.
- Banks drove fundamental change to their service delivery model (from face-to-face service to self-service via Automatic Teller Machines and the internet).
- Airlines, hotels and travel companies moved their booking systems on-line.
- On-line retailing mushroomed and in 2011 represented around 3.9% of all retail sales.<sup>1</sup> This is increasing at a rate of over 8% per annum.
- Social media became a business tool for companies of all sizes.
- Tablet devices penetrated business and IT Departments had to adapt to accommodate them.
- Internet connected smart phones became the norm with unprecedented speed of uptake.
- "Contactless" payment systems were introduced with the prospect of replacing the current swipe card technology.
- E-books emerged as an alternative to print for business, leisure and education.
- Global positioning technology became common in motor vehicles, smart phones, digital cameras and other portable devices.

- Governments around the world moved to internet based information and services, again using the self-service model.
- Electronic transactions became common, aided by electronic transaction laws in many jurisdictions.
- E-mail communications were embraced by a huge percentage of the population as an alternative to paper mail.
- Company reporting and billing moved from paper based to electronic, delivered via e-mail and web links.

The above list does not take into account advances made in biotechnology and nanotechnology, nor medical science, aviation, space research and industrial production. By any test, the impact of technology on business and ordinary citizens in the past 10 years has been extraordinary.

The experts tell us that the progress of the last 10 years will be nothing compared to what is in store for the next 10 years.

It is hard to imagine the world we will be living in 5 to 10 years from now, but if we believe only part of what the experts are telling us, it will look something like this:

- Cheques will have been replaced by a wide range of electronic payment options.
- Mobile devices (e.g. telephones and tablets) will have replaced credit cards, driver's licenses, passports and a range of other "plastics" that we now carry.<sup>2</sup>
- Television sets will all be connected to the internet and we will choose when we watch our favourite shows without any regard to television programs.

- Hard line telephones will be a rarity.
- To surf the internet we will not have to take our mobile device out of our pocket or look at a screen – content will be scanned directly to our retina (which will have replaced the earlier Google glasses).
- Cloud Computing and the SaaS (software as a service) model will dominate.<sup>3</sup>
- The skill-sets in Information Technology Departments will have changed dramatically as they focus on the ability to identify and leverage resources.<sup>4</sup>
- Voice recognition will have substantially replaced the conventional keyboard.
- The desk-top computer as we currently know it will have ceased to exist.

One needs only to "Google" the words "Technology in 2020" and follow the major links to understand the magnitude of the technological revolution that has just started.

- In-house servers will be much less common with most data being stored in public or private clouds.<sup>5</sup>
- Electronic commerce will account for a very substantial proportion of retail spending.
- Shopping Centres will be in the final stages of converting to Entertainment Centres as they prepare to disappear entirely in their current form.
- Daily newspapers will have been substantially replaced by news delivered through internet enabled devices and Apps.
- Most of the population in the developed world will prefer to self-serve themselves to save money.
- Minute electronic tags will track commercial goods, consumer buying patterns and individual movements for security and targeted advertising.
- Minute cameras will be monitoring communal public areas with huge quantities of content being stored and analysed using text, facial



and voice recognition techniques.

- Internet searching will utilize new capabilities to locate not only text phrases, but semantic phrases, pictures and video (through both meta representations and exemplars).<sup>6</sup>

The above list can go on and on. One needs only to "Google" the words "Technology in 2020" and follow the major links to understand the magnitude of the technological revolution that has just started. This is a revolution that will have a fundamental impact on the way business is conducted in the modern world. As business people we can deny it, ignore it or embrace it.

The team at my company, Mystrata.com, embrace it. We are excited by it and we plan to exploit it to the maximum extent for the benefit of ourselves, our strata management customer base and their unit owner stakeholders.

Over the years ahead we are committed to drive strata management service delivery to a full self-service model and provide the impetus to change the sector's revenue model and improve profitability. Cloud technology will be the means to this end and with over 10 years' experience in building this type of technology we have the skills and experience, both in technology and industry terms, to deliver.

If you share our vision and enthusiasm – please join us! You will be most welcome!

<sup>1</sup> "Online Retailing in Australia" 2011 Urbis.  
<sup>2</sup> See "Computer Troubleshooters Global Newsletter – January 2012".  
<sup>3</sup> See "What Every CEO Need to Know About the Cloud", Harvard Business Review – November 2011.  
<sup>4</sup> See "How Cloud Computing is Changing Many Job Descriptions", Joe McKendrick; Forbes.com 26/12/2011.  
<sup>5</sup> See "A CTO's take on cloud" by Barb Darrow, 24 January 2012, GIGaom.com.  
<sup>6</sup> For this and a number of the above "impacts" see Technical Report of RAND Corporation entitled "The Global Technology Revolution 2020, An In-Depth Analysis" sponsored by the United States National Intelligence Council. (Available on the RAND web site at www.rand.org).



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Now, a new product is available in Australia that is prefabricated, effective and durable, eco-friendly and non-toxic, and best of all low-cost. Prelasti EPDM membranes are the market leaders with over 6 billion metres sold worldwide. The official Australian installer of Prelasti, Mr Noli Samson of NJ Samson, says, 'In any new build, your job is sure to involve tiling wet areas and will require membraning of external areas exposed to water or weather... So you'll want to do it right the first time.'

In the course of their work on existing buildings NJ Samson repeatedly saw examples of jobs not done right, and it's their experience in remedial work that has made them one of Australia's premier waterproofing specialists.

NJ Samson wanted a better product to fit with their 'Triple Seal Process' – installation of membranes above and under the screed, and application of a seal on top of grout and tiles.

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Prefabrication eliminates the possibility of on-site error and reduces the time and cost of installation.

When the environment is a priority, Prelasti ticks all the boxes.

Prelasti is tested and approved for green roofs and sensitive uses such as ponds. No harmful chemicals are released from the product either in manufacture or on site, and postuse it can be recycled or incinerated. The membrane has a 20 year warranty, but its expected lifespan is over 50 years.

NJ Samson regularly sees common issues such as calcium, building movement, and pooling in the screed leading to potentially disastrous results like leeching, failed membranes, damage to amenities, concrete cancer and failure of structural components.

Dealing with these problems can be disruptive and expensive. But with Prelasti entering the Australian market, NJ Samson hopes these types of issues will soon be ancient history.

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