



## **SUBMISSION TO AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT COVID INQUIRY**

I am writing to express some of the frustrations experienced by apartment dwellers during the early COVID-19 lockdowns. This is relevant to the Term of Reference for the inquiry relating to “Mechanisms to better target future responses to the needs of particular populations”. I am currently Chairperson of the body corporate for the building in which I live; during the COVID years I was Treasurer and Secretary of the body corporate. I make this submission on my own behalf.

Obviously, movement restrictions caused frustrations for people. That is not what I am referring to here. Rather, the frustrations I am referring to relate to the difficulty apartment dwellers had in establishing how the rules apply in the apartment context, and the lack of information provided on the subject. It was obvious in the early days of the lockdowns that nobody who was designing the rules had any understanding of apartment living. Things got better as time went on, but some of the issues were never fully resolved.

An example of the frustrations was that we were never advised on any practical way of enforcing social distancing rules and lockdowns in the lifts. Advice was received that lifts should be limited to two people – but what about families with children? Two families, or no more than people from two households, would have made more sense – but this was never communicated.

Other examples, which did get better over time, were the definitions of various facilities. For example:

- our building has a small “library” in a common lounge room area. Did this fall into the category of the libraries that were closed during the lockdown? In which case why would the “library” be closed but not the lounge room? Ultimately, sensible rules about the number of people permitted in the given space were promulgated – but this took time
- ditto the gymnasium in our building
- in relation to our outdoor pool, we were advised that people shouldn’t use the pool, but there was no restriction on being in the pool area. This made little sense given that chlorine helps kill the virus.

A related issue is that the Government agencies concerned did not use the information networks available in the strata community to publicise the requirements. Many of the legal firms and strata managers provided their own take, but this was their own interpretation.

These networks could have been useful. Body corporates and their interstate counterparts manage common property and so need to know what the rules are. More broadly, the body corporates and building managers could have played a positive role in informing people of the requirements and even as an early enforcement mechanism. The inquiry may wish to consider recommending that all body corporates include a relevant provision in their by-laws authorising such activity. My body corporate for example has adopted the following by-law:

In the event of a Public Health Declaration applying to [REDACTED], the committee will work to support the observance of any and all requirements, through, for example: cleaning common property, informing occupiers and visitors of those requirements, particularly as they apply to access and use of common property; support for affected individuals; and closure of facilities.

I trust these comments are of assistance.