

Publication Date: 13 September 2016
**YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 027. Why the ABMA Building Management Code is
the Key to Maintaining Your Strata Property - with Lynda Kyriadakis**

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Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property. The podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate, and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source. To access previous episodes and useful strata tips, go to www.yourstrataproperty.com.au.

Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer and this is Your Strata Property. Lynda Kyriadakis is the Senior Managing Director of the 'Diverse' group of companies. These companies are currently engaged in facilities management contracts with over 30 commercial properties in Queensland, specialising in building management and advocacies services, compliance management and project management of capital works.

Lynda is also a Director of ABMA, which stands for Australian Building Management Accreditation. ABMA develops and regulates the ABMA Building Management Code. The Code is produced and maintained under the direction of the ABMA independent review panel.

The primary goal of the ABMA Code is to achieve a nationally consistent minimum standard of delivery in building management activities, including compliance with third party contracts as well as associated acts, standards, regulations, and codes of practice.

Today I am delighted to welcome Lynda Kyriadakis. Welcome, Lynda.

Lynda Kyriadakis: Hello. Thank you, great to be here.

Amanda Farmer: Such a pleasure to have you Lynda, and I was talking to you only recently when the ABMA Code was being launched down here in New South Wales – after a very successful launch in Queensland – and I was just so impressed with your knowledge of the Code and your experience in the building management industry and I thought “Lynda, you have to come on this podcast, we have to share this knowledge”, so thank you so much for joining us.

Lynda Kyriadakis: It's great. Thank you, that's very kind.

Amanda Farmer: I'm going to start Lynda by asking you to tell us a little bit about how the ABMA Code came to be developed.

Lynda Kyriadakis: Okay, well, it is a bit of a long story but I'll try to keep it brief – I tend to waffle on when I'm talking about my passion [laughter]. About 5 years ago, a group of us here in Queensland got together to discuss issues emerging around compliance and the maintenance of common property.

So there were a couple of lawyers, some brokers that sold management rights up here, and some consultants around compliance and we sort of had a whinge fest for a few hours, and at the end of it we all sort of stood there a bit deflated with an accord that issues were rising out of lack of knowledge, lack of training, and nowhere to go to define an objective standard around the maintenance of common property.

So we decided to convene another get-together about 3 or 4 months later and it was just the same thing, we went round and round in circles... but what we did leave feeling is that, at that stage, you know 4 or 5 years ago, there were no facilities management focused training programs available, there were certainly no guides or assistance around maintenance.

So a group of us set about putting together a little guidebook basically for facilities managers so, you know, I have some staff and I was sick to death of repeating myself, so I thought “oh, I'll write this down” and it grew and last year, Paul and I got together and we decided “well let's just make this beneficial for everybody” and we pulled together an independent review panel of about 25 experts in our industry, so this was a cross-sectorial collaboration.



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We had lawyers practising in both spheres of our space representing facilities managers, or others representing community body corporates. We also had representation from all the major membership associations like the SCA, ARAMA, the Chinese building managers association called 'Australian Property Managers Alliance', and Build Service Contractors Association... we had 25 odd people.

So we provided a manuscript, a draft, of about 300 pages and we worked for about 2 months and harvested feedback and then we edited, pulled bits out, put bits in, and lo and behold we had the first edition of the ABMA Building Management Code, which we published on the 1st of January this year.

Amanda Farmer: It's amazing that you were able to do so much with so many, and involving so many experts from different sectors, in such a short space of time. I think it's amazing, and I've seen the finished product, the Code, and how lengthy it is, how detailed it is and how spot on it is and hats off to you and Paul Cooper to have put all of that together so quickly.

Lynda Kypriadakis: Well as I said, it has been going on for some time. I mean the guiding principles and the Building Management Code are universal around the world, it's exactly the same guiding principle to maintain the common property of any building anywhere in the world, but we now have state specific codes because obviously, each state has different state legislation. So the tricky bit is just interpreting the legislation in a way that we can practically use it on a committee really.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and I suppose the Code is for building managers, for strata managers, for committee members, and for owners, is that right?

Lynda Kypriadakis: Absolutely. It's for anybody who's involved in the maintenance of common property, so if you're a strata manager coordinating and arranging quotes and service contractors, you need the Code. If you are a mum and dad unit owner in apartment 501, you need the Code. If you're sitting on an owners corporation, executive committee or a body corporate committee, you need the Code. If you're a facilities manager, handyman, or a building manager, this is your go-to reference guide for your industry.

Amanda Farmer: And what is it that makes it so critical? What is it that is in the Code that makes it so important for all of these different stakeholders to get stuck into?

Lynda Kypriadakis: Well Amanda, you would probably be the best person to understand that there are over 100 acts, regulations, and codes of practice that impact on the compliant maintenance of common property. So if you are a lot owner or sitting on a committee organising the maintenance of common property, you either need to go and refresh yourself with over a hundred pieces of complicated legislation, or you get yourself your handy Code which is your guidebook to that legislation.

So you either go and get a law degree to understand all of that, or you get one book which pulls it all down into practical terms. For example, work health and safety legislation: the Act is about 700 pages long, the Regulation is another 700 pages... there's about 1500 pages right there of Act and Regulation and then there's another 20 or so Codes of Practice. So for mum and dad sitting on the committee, working out what their obligations are and how to discharge those obligations under work healthy and safety legislation, the reality is that there's only about 7 or 8 actions that you need to take and keep records of, but what are you going to do? Spend a year reading complex legislation trying to think how we could practically take action to discharge your obligations? No, just go to page 17 of the ABMA Building Management Code. These are the few things you have to do, and you have to keep doing them in this format. So yes, it makes it easy for everybody.

Amanda Farmer: Great, and the Code has been in use up in Queensland for a little while now, I think? Is that right?

Lynda Kypriadakis: Yes, well we published it and we got subscriptions underway around January this year. So yes, we're promoting it here. It's been a fabulous uptake in Queensland. It's been unanimously embraced by all factions of our sector.



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We do get people who are a bit confused about what it's all about, but once they understand and we give them a little explanation, it's just a no-brainer. It's so easy for everyone.

Amanda Farmer: Have you got any stories about some buildings or some managers up there in Queensland or anywhere else who have been using the Code and have been doing it successfully? What are some success stories?

Lynda Kypriadakis: Well Amanda, I could go on all day with the stories, but I'll tell you the stories from this week.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, wow!

Lynda Kypriadakis: So this week, I had a building manager calling in a panic. The Work Health and Safety department had issued the body corporate, up here in Brisbane, with an improvement notice for failure to provide a documented safe system of work for the common property.

They were like "oh, what do we do? What do we do?" and I said well look at Chapter 17 of the ABMA Building Management Code, you need to do all of these things. So, within 2 days, the committee and the building manager were able to work... they subscribed, they got their Code delivered to them in the post the next day, and they sent a draft to me to review of their safe system of work, 2 days later, a couple of tweaks here and there, and then off they went, so that was one example. I had another young fellow, who has just purchased his first set of management rights here in Queensland and he wanted to develop and implement a building management plan for the scheme that he's now working on. So in the ABMA Code, there's actually a recipe for how to develop a site-specific building management plan. So he was just asking about the ABMA templates that we have for building management plans, so there was another day to day.

I had a phone call yesterday afternoon: a chairperson for a body corporate committee here in Brisbane again, he was letting me know that the facilities management arrangements that they had for 3 years with one service contractor are coming to an end, and he wanted to understand what intellectual property records so on and so forth should be harvested from the outgoing facilities manager to hand over to the incoming facilities manager.

So I referred him to chapter 5 of the Building Management Code, which lists all of the documents that committees should be ensuring are going from one service contractor to another service contractor.

Amanda Farmer: Great.

Lynda Kypriadakis: So the list goes on and on, it's just a day to day reference guide.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, sounds like it. As you travel around the country and you're introducing the Code to the different states, are there any misconceptions about what people think the Code is, and it isn't? You know, now's your chance to clear those up.

Lynda Kypriadakis: Of course. You know there's as many perceptions on things as there are humans in the world... but one of the common misconceptions is that there is a belief or a fear, that the ABMA Building Management Code may be introducing new standards, or that all of a sudden I'm a caretaker and now I have to do more work. So there is a misconception around that, so I just want to make it clear to everybody that the ABMA Building Management Code is a guide to existing standards, to existing legislation.

We're not introducing any new standards. Some people would say, "Oh I don't need the Code because it's not mandatory" and absolutely it's not. But if you open every page, every page contains information relating to mandated standards.

Amanda Farmer: Yes.

Lynda Kypriadakis: So, please don't think it's imposing additional duties on you. As one lawyer practising in the body corporate

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space here in Queensland said recently: if you aren't doing what is written in the Code, then you're not doing your job properly.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and tell me about the review panel. How does the review panel fit into all of that?

Lynda Kyriadakis: So the independent review panel, as I said earlier, is a cross-sectorial collaboration. When Paul and I were building up our business plan about 18 months ago, we identified that there is a large number of breakaway factions within our industry, and we saw an opportunity to pull those factions together. We felt that the industry had lost focus of what was best for the building, so we've got, in terms of building management team, we've got the building owner and it's committee, we've got a building manager or caretaker, handyman or facilities manager, we've got service contractors doing maintenance of the fire protection services and plumbing and electrical work, we've got a strata manager assisting with the administration under the strata legislation, we've got from time to time lawyers, sinking fund forecasters, project managers, engineers... there's a big group of people.

We were finding that there was a tendency for the stakeholders in the building management plan to be a little bit self-focused. We wanted to restore the focus back on to what is best for the building. What is sustainably the best thing for the building and the investment that we all rely on, at the end of the day?

So we thought that the only way to engage all stakeholders was to form a group where the upper echelons of each faction could be invited to contribute, so that's the very first thing we did. So we thought "well let's get the body corporate lawyers in, let's get the building manager lawyers in, let's get all the industry associations" and we had 7 or 8 lawyers in the same room, which is really...

Amanda Farmer: All getting along, I hope!

Lynda Kyriadakis: All getting along swimmingly. So we're quite proud to say that we now routinely are able to bring together various sections of the industry, and some of the things that we're working on are really dependent on these factions collaborating. For example, the ABMA, we see ourselves as a regulatory bridge, we bridge the gap.

Amanda Farmer: Yes.

Lynda Kyriadakis: So, when there's a change to the fire legislation or Australian standards around maintenance of fire protection systems, you don't see the regulator giving information to the industry, you fumble around in the dark trying to work it out for yourself.

So the ABMA supports the regulatory bodies by dumbing down – no offence people – complex legislation in ways that make it easy for us, so we need to collaborate with everybody to ensure that the message gets out and we deliberately set about maintaining integrity. We don't have members, or we don't sell anything other than the Code, and we don't take sponsorship, so we're completely independent.

Amanda Farmer: That's important.

Lynda Kyriadakis: Yes. We are the impartial voice of the whole industry, and we only deal with what's best for the building and what can be justified under the legislation.

Amanda Farmer: So Lynda, there's probably some listeners wondering how they can get their hands on a copy of this Code. What states is the Code covering at the moment, which of our listeners in which state are going to get some use out of the Code? Can you just fill those gaps in for us?

Lynda Kyriadakis: Sure. Look, we did our test area in Queensland so we have a hard copy version of the ABMA Building Management Code available. Purchases are very easily done online with a credit card, you can purchase an e-version – just a digital version if hard copies are not your thing – or you can purchase both the digital version and the hard copy here in Queensland. We now have released the e-version, the digital version, of the New South Wales edition and the Victorian edition.

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Amanda Farmer: Oh, great.

Lynda Kypriadakis: They are available. We won't print the hard copies until 2017. This is an annual renew I should tell our listeners that the Building Management Code is an annual subscription because legislation changes like underpants really.

In order to keep up with all of that, we publish a new edition on the 1st of January every year. So we will have hard copies and digital copies of the 2017 version for the whole of Australia, for every state and territory in Australia, available around December this year.

But if you want to go straightaway now and start benefiting from the guidelines in New South Wales or in Victoria, just go to www.abma.com.au, click on the 'Code Order Form' tab and you can purchase an e-version straightaway.

Amanda Farmer: Fabulous.

Lynda Kypriadakis: And yes, hard copies in Queensland only at the moment.

Amanda Farmer: I always ask the guests on the podcast to let us know what the action steps and the quick wins are for our listeners, and I think today this one is a simple one: go out and grab yourself a copy of the Code and have a look through.

Lynda Kypriadakis: Yes, well that is definitely the first thing to do to. Equipping yourself is instant. One of the wonderful things about our technological age is that there's instant access to e-versions of books. But what we're finding is that people are really excited to implement the Code to enjoy the benefits and the efficiencies and get their compliance in order as quickly as possible, and it is a daunting document – it's some 500 pages long – so we have partnered with training organisations that are doing little half-day utilisation workshops.

Amanda Farmer: Great.

Lynda Kypriadakis: These are tailored specifically for committee members. A trainer will come to your scheme, to your meeting room, to your committee meeting, and just walk you through the utilisation of the Code, so that it's relevant to your scheme. So there is a service around Australia where we are partnering with trainers to provide that, it's very cost effective.

Amanda Farmer: Good idea.

Lynda Kypriadakis: Yes, and then you get to really tailor it to your scheme straight away.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, get the most out of it. Is that something that the listeners can find out through your website? You've got the information about the training there as well?

Lynda Kypriadakis: Yes, we've got more ways of contacting us than you can poke a stick at. So you can go onto the website, we've got a free call number, we've got a help email, we've got a public comment form, which I wouldn't mind saying that, unlike other legislative publications or guidebooks, this is a community document. If you are reading it and you don't agree with something, or you're confused, or you'd like more information, we have a public comment form where anybody at all can register a comment, recommendation, suggestion, or a question. All of our public comments are reviewed by the independent review panel at each quarterly seating.

We do reply to you straight away, but if it's an addition to the Code, we do get the independent review panel to consider it, so we want the whole of Australia providing their feedback because this is a first go at this, so if we've forgotten something or we've missed something, we look to your listeners to contribute and get the most out of it.

Amanda Farmer: Definitely. Now, I first heard about the ABMA Code when I had Kelly Wright, a fellow Queenslander, on the show

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and I asked her this question: Kelly, what books have you been reading lately and she said, well, I have this very interesting document on my desk: it's called the draft ABMA Code, and she told us all about it.

And of course, now it's completed and out there having been birthed into the world, and congratulations on that. But of course I want to ask you, Lynda, what books have you been reading? What books have had an impact on you?

Lynda Kyriadakis: Well, if Kelly is relaxing reading the Building Management Code, I'm probably just as boring as her to be honest. My reading tendencies go towards non-fiction and ancient history as well.

Amanda Farmer: Oh, lovely.

Lynda Kyriadakis: I just finished reading *The Queen of the Desert*, I don't know if you've heard of that, it's a biography of a woman born into a wealthy English family in the 1860s, and she did not want to be married and have children. There were 4 women that graduated from university in England, there were 4 of them that went together and she was one of those first 4, and she got a university degree. She actually went to the university with T.E. Lawrence.

Yes, and they went off and did quite a bit of work, not together but they bumped into each other, in the Arabian desert where they mapped out landmarks for the World War I and so on and so forth.

Amanda Farmer: Wow.

Lynda Kyriadakis: She became very powerful in the monarchy of Iraq and I know this is all very boring but I love this sort of stuff. I love the stories of these women that branch out, they follow their hearts, they defy tradition. She was highly supported by her dad, and I had a very similar dad that really encouraged me to be a little bit left of centre. I just noticed when I was in a hotel room recently that *The Queen of the Desert* is now a feature film with Nicole Kidman!

Amanda Farmer: Oh, there you go! I haven't heard about it.

Lynda Kyriadakis: It's not a very exciting movie.

Amanda Farmer: We'll read the book first.

Lynda Kyriadakis: Yes, so I love the stories of women that are doing something different, and really enjoying their lives.

Amanda Farmer: Great. Thank you for sharing that Lynda, I will make sure there's a link to that one in the show notes so our listeners can check it out. Now, before we wrap up and say goodbye, is there anything else that you want to add and how do we find out more about you?

Lynda Kyriadakis: Well I'm just so happy to speak to anybody, and please just go to www.abma.com.au. I'm bit of one of those zombie type workaholics and all I really do is live for my work and I'm happy to help people in any way that I can, so please don't be shy, ring me, send me a request on LinkedIn, or just keep in touch, happy to chat to you.

Amanda Farmer: That's great.

Lynda Kyriadakis: It's great to be here.

Amanda Farmer: And thank you so much for chatting with us today, Lynda. I'm sure there are many listeners out there who will be making contact and wanting to learn more about the Code. I've seen it, I highly recommend it as a strata lawyer here in New South Wales. I recommend it to building managers, to committees. I know there are a few lawyers out there snatching up copies as well, so go and check it out. Thanks so much for your time, Lynda.

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Lynda Kyriadakis: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

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