

**Publication Date: 2 October 2025**

## **YSP Podcast Transcript: 464 - Use this hack to streamline committee decisions**

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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.

**Amanda Farmer:** Hello, and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer, and I have with me today, the Reena Van Aalst from Strata Central. Hey, Reena.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Hi Amanda, how are you?

**Amanda Farmer:** I'm doing very well. It's great to be back with you. It's been a little longer between for the two of us. We've been busy, ladies.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Exactly.

**Amanda Farmer:** Nice to have you back on the pod, sharing your challenges and your wins with us. From your perspective as a leading strata manager, Reena Van Aalst, what has been challenging you this week?

**Reena Van Aalst:** Well, I think as most of both owners and committee members as well as managing agents are aware, there's been the recent reforms in the legislation that came in from the 1st of July with further ones that are coming in from the 27th of October we now find out relating to many other things that were already earmarked earlier and it's, I actually had a chat with one of my colleagues who works in a large agency of about certain schemes that they manage across a number of different branches and she mentioned to me that they had an audit from Fair Trading.

So I think a number of companies have had audits. I'm hearing from Fair Trading. So there's obviously been an increase in that aspect for many agencies in terms of checking their compliance with the statutory requirements under the various acts that we're governed under. And what she said to me, which I found surprising, was that when they receive their insurance renewals from the broker or direct, they actually send them to the strata committee three quotes, whether it's possible to get three quotes.

And then the strata committee obviously considers those having, as to acknowledge the commission if there is one given, and then gives instructions to the manager to renew with the insurer of choice. But what Fair Trading apparently said was that not sufficient, and therefore they had to actually hold a committee meeting that they're sending the email wasn't sufficient and they had to hold a committee meeting to actually approve the insurance renewal. And on first glance, I thought, well, why would you have to do that? Because you're disclosing to the owners corporation by the strata committee the quotes you've received.

But then I realised maybe it's because owners wouldn't be aware of the renewal, which is - we all understand - the insurance renewal can take place at any time, which doesn't always align with the AGM. So when the AGM is confirming the insurances, they're usually not there to ask owners whether or not they agree; it's just to endorse what's already been taken out and to make any changes if they deem necessary.

So I thought to myself, maybe they want owners to know that the insurance renewal is taking place, not just the committee. And then obviously there'd be a meeting, which again, on the notice board, if most schemes would have notice boards, and it would go out to be put on the notice board, and then all owners would then get the minutes once the committee had approved the actual renewal.

But, and she said to me, "Remember, that's like, for our company, that's kind of remaining we have to have". And I said, "Obviously, you can have them in writing," which is true. But the thing is, I mean, the extra workload that's now been imposed on strata managers is really great. I mean, now with the further reforms coming into place shortly, it's just putting a much higher administrative burden, which obviously may be necessary in some cases.

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However, I think that now will increase the cost because people think, "Oh, you know." And it's funny, when you're working on this side of the fence versus, say, the consumer, people don't really realise how much work you actually have to do. And I had a friend of mine who came in who actually works as a paralegal in one of the big accounting firms, and I, looking at her coming into the practice, and I said to her, "Why don't you just spend two days, and see what strata is like, whether you like it or not."

And, you know, she was just overwhelmed with the amount of information, the amount of tasks, the knowledge that we have to have. And she said to me, "Oh, my God, I'll never, ever look at an apartment the same way again. It's the dream. Like, I own, I have an investment apartment. I just never thought that there was so much in the background that has to be done in order for a manager to present and do their job."

And I suppose it would vary depending on the complexity of the scheme. However, I just feel that this increased administrative burden will increase the cost to the consumer. And obviously, I think it's something that has to be taken into consideration now by owners when they want more things done for them, as well as statutory requirements. That means that we all have to have further meetings just to approve these insurance renewals.

**Amanda Farmer:** Okay, so let's take a step back about this insurance renewal. The question is, what authority does the strata manager have to give the instruction to the broker to process the renewal? And the strata manager, I agree, would usually get their authority from the committee, and a committee should be confirming its instructions in committee meeting minutes. But the strata manager may also have authority under their agency agreement to do this job of placing the insurance renewal.

And if they have that as one of their agreed services, and if they have full delegation or partial delegation, that includes doing this job, and that's in the schedule to the agency agreement, I don't think they need a committee meeting resolution. What do you think? Do you usually have that delegated authority in your agency agreement to..

**Reena Van Aalst:** Well, ours is a partial delegation, Amanda, and it says renew as instructed. So..

**Amanda Farmer:** Okay, so you do need the instruction.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes.

**Amanda Farmer:** Well, then I agree committee should be resolving. And one way to deal with this, I think, and we do this with my committee, is that at the very first committee meeting after the AGM, when you've just been elected as the new committee, you can decide on how you are going to instruct the strata manager. So here's an example. What we do in our building is the strata manager is instructed to process, without needing a separate approval process, all regular and recurring invoices for utilities.

So the electricity bill, the water bill, the cleaners, the usual stuff that comes through. The committee doesn't need to see that. Committee doesn't. The treasurer doesn't need to push the button to approve that on the portal. Strata manager can just pay that. And we resolved at that first committee meeting that the strata manager has the committee's authority to do that. I don't see why you couldn't resolve, at that first committee meeting, that the strata manager has authority to place the insurance renewal.

We don't need to have a separate committee meeting to deal with that. So why don't you have a think about those types of things that are definitely going to come up in the space of the next 12 months and authorise, if the committee's happy to, and if they're not, they're not. But authorise the strata manager to do those things, so you don't have to have another meeting. So you need to get your authority from somewhere.

It either comes from the agency agreement or it comes from that meeting resolution. Whether that's, or, as you say, general meeting's not required. Some things, yes, does need to be general meeting resolution, but I think Fair Trading is right. If you don't otherwise have that somewhere that you can point to having that authority, you need to get it.

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**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, but the thing is, I mean, as you know, Amanda, committees instruct us all the time to approve quotes, to do things. You can't stop and have a meeting every Time you need to do something otherwise, especially with the largest schemes where you need, you know, all owners to get copies of the agenda, which becomes 14 days notice. I mean, what we normally would do is we would ratify that renewal at the next meeting. But what they're saying is, I don't know if this agent was ratifying at all or not.

So I can't really maybe if they ratify that, there might have been some record in a formal meeting that that had been undertaken. So I think they were renewing it based on instructions they were given from the strata committee. So they weren't working outside their thing. I think it was - I'm not sure if it's to do with whether or not, because it wasn't minuted as such. So I suppose, I think it's a great idea that you're suggesting, because we had that motion on our first meeting post AGM with the new committee to resolve procedures, protocols, communication, et cetera, and what the committee is happy to proceed with for that period that they're members, we could add to that one, including the renewal of the insurance that the strata committee authorised the managing agent, upon their instructions, to renew with broker.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes, because it's so important that it happens on time. Obviously, we don't want to be left uninsured. And it doesn't mean that the strata manager is making the decision. It means that the strata manager can then do an email around to say, "Okay, these are your two quotes I recommend to go with this one, or the brokers recommended that you go with this one. Do I have your instructions?"

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, and that's what they're doing about it. So they're getting instructions. Yes, but I mean, I've had ones where I get it the day before because there's a problem or something's happened, and like, you know, so sometimes you could, even if you wanted to, you couldn't even have the committee meeting to actually renew it.

So I think, yes, so maybe for strata managers out there, perhaps look at your agency agreement. And I think, I mean, as we know, Amanda, we have a colleague of ours that said he's got 20 AGMs in October now, end of the day, that's on top of everything else. So how's someone going to be able to have the time to, yes, so it's just.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes. I think we have to be thinking a little bit more creatively about how we tackle this. You're absolutely right. There are more decisions now to be made. Strata managers are being held to a higher standard. That's not a bad thing. But it does mean that these administrative processes are going to become more burdensome unless we find ways to be more efficient.

So I do think, from a legal perspective, I do think that's one of those ways at that very first committee meeting, which you're always going to have.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, you have to have that one. Yes. Even which even the others don't have. That means that colleague of ours that we're talking about would never, probably have any other committee meeting after that. That would be the only one for the whole year. So, yes.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes. Which is a problem in itself. But we also don't want to be having committee meetings once a month just because we need to give simple instructions. So how can we - and we bulk instruct our strata manager both within the agency agreement and at that first committee meeting.

Yes, thanks for sharing that one, Reena. I'm sure we've got plenty of committee members, strata managers listening, going, "Yes, this is a problem for me too." And thanks for highlighting that. Fair Trading is looking at this and looking for this instruction. So good for others to know.

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The challenge I wanted to bring this week relates to sustainability infrastructure resolutions. It's a certain type of resolution we have in New South Wales for those buildings who want to improve their energy efficiency in a building, install electric vehicle charging, install solar panels, where that type of infrastructure is going in, being approved.

We have a provision in our New South Wales legislation that makes it a bit easier to get those proposals across the line. A sustainability infrastructure resolution has a lower threshold of approval than a normal special resolution. I always say, basically, the way to think of it is it's just like an ordinary resolution, but you need to calculate that on a unit entitlement basis. But more and more, often, I'm getting questions about what types of improvements can we define as sustainability infrastructure?

Because it is easier to get these proposals across the line. We don't need that higher threshold of approval that a normal special resolution would need. Owners and in some cases, committees are wanting to be a bit creative about this, and are asking if things like blinds and awnings that owners might want to install on their balcony could be considered sustainability infrastructure resolution.

**Reena Van Aalst:** As in with the bottle would be added.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes. So if the external appearance of a building is going to be changing because we're putting up blinds or awnings, we need a by-law, we need a special resolution. One of the questions I was asked was, yes, specific to blinds. Amanda, is there a way that we could classify this as a sustainability infrastructure resolution? Meaning we'll get it across the line if most people attending the meeting and voting are in favour.

And it caused me to go and have a look at the relevant section in our New South Wales legislation. Section 132B in the Strata Schemes Management Act has the definition of sustainability infrastructure. And in order to be sustainability infrastructure and get approved by sustainability infrastructure resolution, the change to the common property has to be for any one or more of the following purposes. And there are six purposes listed.

It is sustainability infrastructure resolution. If the installation is going to reduce the consumption of energy or water or increase the efficiency of its consumption, if the installation will reduce or prevent pollution, if it will reduce the amount of waste that is being sent to landfill, if the installation is going to increase the recovery or recycling of materials, if it's going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and finally, if the installation will facilitate the use of sustainable forms of transport, for example, EV charging stations.

So if it falls into any one of those six categories, then it is sustainability infrastructure. And a sustainability infrastructure resolution can be used to approve it. So, going back to my blinds or awnings example, I had an owner saying to me, "Well, we're going to install these blinds because we are going to prevent the western sun from coming into the apartment. And that means that the apartment is going to be cooler, and that means that we're not going to use the air conditioning."

**Reena Van Aalst:** I could actually - I was just seeing that. Before you even open your mouth, Amanda, I can see the rationale and the thinking.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes, so we're going to reduce the consumption of energy or water. So, can we argue that this is a sustainability infrastructure resolution? And going back to this definition, I've said, "Well, is that the purpose of the installation?" Right? Because that's the terminology that's used in Section 132B.

The purpose of the installation has to be to reduce the consumption of energy. And I think there's a good argument both ways with that installation. The purpose might be so we can sit out on our balcony and enjoy the view without having the sun in our eyes. That has nothing to do with reducing the use of your air conditioning inside your apartment, right? Whereas you can imagine another apartment design where maybe there is no balcony.

We are talking about blinds on the western facade. And it is known that all of these units on this side get really, really hot in the afternoon. The aircon is blasting. We don't necessarily want to be doing that. So the purpose of installing these blinds is to reduce energy consumption. It's one of those situations where, as lawyers like to say, "It depends." And I think for a few of these ideas, it might be easy to show that you're being a little bit opportunistic, trying to class it as a sustainability infrastructure resolution.

I want to give a shoutout to Tonja Gibson at Strata Answers, who I was chatting to about this very recently as we're recording this. Tonja was at the event that I spoke at for Canterbury Bankstown City Council this week, and Tonya was asking me the question of where we're improving our bin bays and bin rooms, which was a topic of discussion at this event. Isn't that a sustainability infrastructure resolution?

And I promised Tonja that I'd go and have a closer look at this. And I think you've got to look at these words in Section 132B. Are we reducing the amount of waste being sent to landfill? If we are improving our bin bays and our bin rooms, sometimes not. Sometimes we're adding more bins. We're not reducing the amount of waste that's being sent. Are we increasing the recovery or recycling of materials?

Well, maybe we are. If we're adding more recycling bins, we might be increasing the recovery and recycling of materials. And, you know, you might be listening, thinking, "Oh, gosh, does it really matter, Amanda?" Well, in some communities it does, because it's the difference between getting this kind of proposal across the line, and not because we have this lower threshold of approval, which, for sustainability infrastructure resolutions. So I think improving your waste management system generally may or may not be a sustainability infrastructure resolution. You really want to have a close look at those words in Section 132B.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Amanda, when people ask you those questions, it's already a red flag, because there obviously is a reason why people are using a lower threshold resolution, because it's obviously a problem in the building where someone doesn't want that awning, or it's because on the face of it, why would anyone say no to an awning that's in keeping with the building that's reducing the sun for that particular owner?

So, on the face of it, it sounds that special resolution in the current special resolution definition should pass. Usually when people are asking, it's because there's a problem and there's either politics or there's either a reason that someone doesn't want the awning, or, yes, I mean, usually I think there's more to it when people have to use sort of technicalities or other forms of passage of motions to try and get something across the line, it usually means there's a problem in the scheme.

So it's already a red flag to me. It's like, okay, something's not right there, because you should be able to get it through easily. It's not affecting anyone. It's not like, you know, you're not sort of adding the Taj Mahal or anything to the building.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes, maybe, maybe not. That was definitely a topic of discussion at the event that I have mentioned. Getting everybody on board before you're even putting your motion forward is so, so important for any improvement.

**Reena Van Aalst:** That's right.

**Amanda Farmer:** Any addition to common property, whether it's your own reno or whether it's adding a rooftop garden or fixing up the bin room, having those conversations with other owners as a first step. This is what I'm thinking about. What do you think? Would you be on board with this? Would you be willing to support this? And when you're finally down the track, because it is down the track.

Once you've done all your homework, got your ducks in a row going to that meeting to get that resolution, it really should just be a matter of box ticking, that you know, that you've got most owners who are going to be their president voting on board, and that it's going to go through without much, if any, objection. So getting that special resolution shouldn't be hard.

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**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, well, I normally tell owners when they apply for things to make sure that, first of all, the strata committee's on board, because the strata committee will always be a good advocate for owners, because normally, if people are happy with the strata committee, they will trust their judgment and advice and say, "Okay, well, if the strata committee is happy with this application and it ticks all the boxes, then we're happy as well."

So that's another way. I think that's why I would say to people like, you know, you're not giving me enough information. You're not helping your cause when you, you know. Because the committee really can't make a decision unless you do A, B, C or D. Recently, we had one bathroom renovation where someone, you know, was urgent because tenant moved out and it was. We found it was leaking into the apartment below, which is part of another issue with, not Tribunal, but it's going that way.

But anyway, and so, he had to get it done quickly. And I said, "Now you need a by-law." So he got his lawyer to do it in two seconds, and it had the wrong lot number. But then I looked at the identification and I thought, no, it's not strong enough, because I've just had other buildings where people have, you know, drilled into the bathroom and then they burst the pipe.

And I mean, it said the owner was responsible, but didn't give the corporation much authority. So anyway, he agreed to change it and everything. So the committee was on board with that. So it's always best to get your committee on board, and they'll support the application at the meeting and that always helps.

**Amanda Farmer:** Great tip. Thank you. All right, onto your win for this week. Reena.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, it's such a bit of a strange win, Amanda, because like one of my clients rang me because obviously we had the insurance renewal and everyone's now looking at the commission even though it's been disclosed at every single AGM, talking about \$2,000 or some sort of amount like that anyway.

And they said, "Oh, you know, this new committee member hadn't been on the committee before and, you know, was asking me questions about the percentage and all that." And first I was thinking, "Oh my God, you know, did we get more than we're supposed to?" And then I checked it, and of course, we didn't. But I don't really, I mean, I don't sort of focus on these types of things anyway.

And so then she rang me and said, "Would you be happy to. We've got a three-year agreement which will end, I think, in. So, I'm only first year into the three-year agreement. So she said, "Would you be happy to go into a new agreement, increase your fee and go for a further three years?" And I said, yes, I said, I mean, I'd actually prefer that that would be better than having to get a commission.

So, and I think part of the problem, I think that a lot of people don't understand, is that, and I think maybe some of your listeners, Amanda, based on what I've seen on your postings, think that commission is cream on the cake. And I said to her, "Commission is not cream on the cake, it's part of the cake." And so it's always been that way. And I think when I look back on it, I think that Australian managers probably haven't done a very good job of explaining that from the beginning.

And even when the commission was on the agenda of the agent, which has been on for a long time now, it hasn't - it's not a new thing. And people just, every AGM, yes, you know, you confirm the commission and training services, et cetera, et cetera. But I think at the time, you know, it's never really been explained, and I think a lot of managers don't really understand why there's an insurance commission.

I think that the average manager, especially if you're a younger manager, I mean, I think the older people understand it more from like, you know, the 60s and 70s of how this practice came into inception and how it formed part of the structure of remuneration. But yes, but I think that managers, for obvious reasons, haven't really explained how the commission has subsidised their fees.

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And it's only come to light now because of the increasing premiums, which are now obviously going back down again and stabilising, and also the recent media attention of certain companies in double-dipping and not being transparent in their enumeration. So, yes, I mean, today we'll go for a further term. So.

**Amanda Farmer:** So this is a situation where the owners corporation will agree to enter into a new agreement with you now, even though they don't have to on these new terms. Yes, that's really interesting. And there's a tip there for managers to be offering that to their builders. You know, if you're brave, if you believe that you've been providing great service to your clients, and you want to call out the elephant in the room, you know, the SCA has made its announcement that from the 1st of January, its members should not be entering into new contracts that allow the receipt of insurance commissions.

And these arrangements are going to be phased out. Why not get ahead and offer it? You know, clients might say, "Oh, that all sounds too hard. You know, we're happy for you to keep taking the commission for the next two years, and we'll sort it out later." But thank you, strata manager, for suggesting that. We appreciate it. We appreciate you being upfront and transparent and giving us that option. I like it.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, so there you go. I was a bit taken aback, but anyway.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes, awesome. Good for our listeners to know that that is happening out there with your clients. Reena Van Aalst. And that leads me into what I wanted to share as my win this week. And that is our VIP day that is happening on Friday, 17th February of October in Sydney. That is a day where I am hopeful that the strata managers in the room at the VIP day are going to hear more of these types of tips, experiences, stories from Reena Van Aalst, who is one of our VIPs attending on the 17th of October.

These days, we did our first VIP day in March this year in Mudgee. Reena was there at the table sold out VIP day where I had the idea to bring together a small exclusive group of strata managers, leaders in their space, business owners, senior strata managers, to talk about the challenges that you're all facing, to share some strategies for improving the way that you do business, for the way that you work with your teams, the way that you work with your clients.

And I was blown away by how much each and every manager got out of that day in Mudgee. You know, I thought this might be something. Will it work? Getting a group of people who are essentially competitors all in the same room, talking about how they do business and how they plan to do business better. And, you know, you tell me, Reena, but what I walked away from with that day was this is something that we need and need more of.

**Reena Van Aalst:** Oh, a hundred percent, Amanda. It was like one of the best days that I've been to in a very long time. And I think also it was very thought-provoking. And the presentations were so insightful, especially, I think, one that Michael Teys did and I, it's funny, I was referring to it on the weekend with my husband and one of my colleagues during the week about, you know, having even, like, looking at your different staff and their skill sets and how sometimes we put the wrong people into the wrong box in terms of their skills.

And some people aren't good at, say, multitasking or doing work that requires you to stop one thing and start another because something happens. Whereas some people need to have more focused or different types of work, and the examples that Michael gave us in the presentation. So even those things, as I said, I'm using it just like this week and on the weekend, so. And I've got the handout, and so it's one thing I like about the VIP day, Amanda.

It was that there were takeaways that you could perhaps not focus on at the time, but then when you do have the time or something happens, you're like, "Oh, hang on, I remember we talked about that." Go back to the notes and the slides, and the presentations and proceed. But the other thing I also wanted to mention was one of the managers that did attend, his company didn't even pay for it, like he paid for it himself, because he believes that.

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Which is something I've sort of mentioned in one of the LinkedIn posts, and there's been a bit of back and forth about it, but in terms of the professionalism of strata managers and the perception that people have when someone's saying, well, I can say it was Tim Sara from Strata Choice said that an architect or a lawyer wouldn't think twice about charging or - whereas a strata manager we should be charging.

And one of the owner advocates said, 'Yes, but you're comparing strata managers to these other professions where they have tertiary education, tertiary qualifications, which strata managers don't,' which is what I've said. And I've just had done some further interviews, you know, with people that are looking at getting an assistant. And I asked people the question, various technical questions that aren't outside the remit at their level. And what I find is that most of the time, when I ask people 99%, "How did you learn this?"

"Oh, it was a manager that taught me." And again, coming to your VIP day, it helps people understand that. Where to look for resources, how to be educated. And this is why this particular, our colleague that we're referring to is paying for himself, because he hasn't been educated, he's just been given a portfolio, which is what everyone. You start, you get given so many buildings on your way, the person you manage is there, trains you a bit here and there, and then you find out that the source of truth is all you're doing, then you teach the next person the wrong thing and. And on it goes. So such a worthwhile thing.

**Amanda Farmer:** Yes. And that's really. You're right. That's what it's about, finding that inner circle of highly skilled, experienced strata managers, those who are in there with you, facing the same challenges, or those who have been there. People like you, Reena, and yes, Tim Sara is going to be at our Sydney VIP day as well. People like Tim, who you can learn from, who can be mentors for you.

And we've got a couple of VIPs who are not business owners, they are employed strata managers. And you're right, they pay their own way because they know how valuable it is. They want to be in that room with people like you and like Tim, learning directly from your experience. So, yes, we're going to have a couple of presentations at our VIP day. It's all happening at the Kimpton Margot Hotel in Sydney. Gorgeous hotel.

We have lunch by Luke Mangan happening on that day as well. And look at the time this recording is going out. Hopefully, we still have, I think, one, maybe two, if I can squeeze them in, seats left. So we are almost sold out for Sydney. We've got a stellar group of managers together from across the country. I'm going to say we've got an interstate manager attending who reached out to me and said, "Amanda, I watched your Burnout to Boundaries Webinar, and I heard all about the VIP day, but I'm not in New South Wales. Is this going to be suitable for me?"

Absolutely. Yes, it is suitable for our interstate managers. And I know there's a couple of others out there who were joining in from Queensland who were saying, "Amanda, bring it to the Gold Coast. Come on down to Sydney."

**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, exactly. There's enough conferences up in the Gold Coast, Amanda.

**Amanda Farmer:** That's enough. That's right. So I look forward to seeing you there, Reena. Those of you if that extra seat is yours, then head over to [yourstrataproperty.com.au/vip](https://yourstrataproperty.com.au/vip) and check it all out, all the details there on the page, and come and join Reena and I in person for the day in Sydney.

**Reena Van Aalst:** That sounds wonderful, Amanda.

**Amanda Farmer:** Thank you so much for our chat today, Reena. Lots there for our listeners to ponder over. Feel free to post a comment under the episode on the website or a question, or your own experience, or a debate, a disagreement. Reena and I love that.

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**Reena Van Aalst:** Yes, we do.

**Amanda Farmer:** Let's jump into it. Have a great week in strata.

**Reena Van Aalst:** You too, Amanda. Bye.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property, the podcast which consistently delivers to property owners reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode via the show notes at [yourstrataproperty.com.au](https://yourstrataproperty.com.au).