

Publication Date: 30 October 2025
YSP Podcast Transcript: 467 - The 1 Question SCA Wants You to Ask

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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 to this week's podcast episode. I'm your host, strata lawyer, Amanda Farmer, and the guest I have for you this week is Alisha Fisher.

Alisha is the CEO of SCA Australasia, a position she's held for over seven years now. She has almost three decades of experience in the not-for-profit sector, having worked closely with professional membership associations throughout her career. A couple of weeks ago, SCA launched a new marketing campaign across Australia and New Zealand, encouraging strata owners to ask one, three specific questions when they're looking to engage a strata manager.

Now, I'll leave it to Alisha to share in this chat what that one question is and why SCA sees this campaign as a necessary step into the spotlight for its strata manager members. I'll take you over now to my chat with Alisha Fisher.

Alisha Fisher, welcome to the show.

Alisha Fisher: Thanks, Amanda. How are you?

Amanda Farmer: I'm doing very well, thank you. We were just chatting off-air about the bit of travel that we've both been doing, and happy to be in our respective homes for the time being. That's strata for you. You know, I mean, we're dealing with properties, you might think it's kind of boring and we do the same thing week in, week out, but not the case for us, is it?

Alisha Fisher: No, absolutely not. Love the travel. Nice to get out and about and see everyone.

Amanda Farmer: Absolutely, yes. It's the time of year for it. Now, Alisha, I'm always interested to know about people's backgrounds and, you know, how they came into the world of strata. You've been the CEO of SCA Australasia for quite a few years now. Well-known in the position. We've all come to recognise you and your name, and I'm not sure how many of us know how you came to be in the position. What's your background?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, I mean, I've just reached seven years in the role, so my background, I actually joined professional membership associations when I was 18, and I haven't left. I've continued through a range of different industry sectors, and I love supporting communities, and when I say communities, I, more mean membership communities rather than the strata communities. And all of the roles have been around bringing that professionalism and education piece to the role and the industries.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. So your background is memberships and membership associations. That may give us a little hint about why things. Maybe we've seen things changing with SCA in recent years under your leadership, bringing some of that knowledge from outside strata and using it to move us forward. Is that kind of how you see it as well?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, absolutely. When I was brought in seven years ago, it was really to look at how do we strengthen the SCA as a body. Looking at, we had multiple accreditation programs, different code of ethics. Everyone was doing different education. And so the goal, and we're still working on the goal, is obviously to have everything streamlined. So we now have one national accreditation pathway, which we have had for the last six years.

We have only just achieved our one national code of ethics, and we're hoping in 2026 to have our registered training organisation up so we have quality education being delivered.

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Amanda Farmer: Excellent. So right now, Alisha, SCA National has launched a new campaign, which you're calling Your Property. Our Priority. And it's all about encouraging owners, as I understand it, to ask one simple question. Can you share a bit about that? How was this campaign born? And, of course, what is the question that we're wanting owners to ask?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, obviously, last year was a challenging year for lots of managers, and that was a perception that was put through the industry, that managers are all tarred with the same brush. And we know that's not the case. There are a lot of well-educated, very passionate managers that support their communities day in, day out. And so this was around ensuring that owners are choosing the right manager. They need to know what good looks like, and we don't want them just choosing someone for the price. So that's really where this came from of choosing someone who can bring value to their community.

Amanda Farmer: And the question that you're encouraging owners to ask with this campaign?

Alisha Fisher: Ask if they're an SCA member.

Amanda Farmer: Are you an SCA member? All right, so what is it about SCA members that you say separates them, makes them great strata managers, is what good looks like.

Alisha Fisher: I think the main thing is that they all abide by a national code of ethics, and we do have a complaint management process that's streamlined across all the regions. They all have continual education that they're doing in their regions. It's varied across all the regions, but the majority of them are kept up to date with legislation, changes and requirements, and they've got that initiative to continue their professional development on a regular basis.

And I think also they have access to lots of best practice guides on how they run Australian management practice in the right manner.

Amanda Farmer: And how do you answer questions from owners, which, you know, I'm sure have been coming up. You mentioned the last 12 months being tough. Media reports, SCA members at the forefront of some of those media reports. Do you have questions from owners, or expecting questions from owners saying, "Well, yes, you know, we've had an SCA member who's been our strata manager, or we've seen SCA members in the news. What's changed, what's new? How is SCA dealing with or recovering from that and showing us that things are going to be different for their members moving forward?"

Alisha Fisher: Yes, what it's actually done is probably make all members look into their businesses. So, you know, unpacking their policies and procedures, the way their staff are communicating with their owners, they're increasing transparency with communication. A lot of businesses are looking at digital opportunities to give more access to owners. So I think it's really just changed the mindset of a lot of the businesses to look into the future of where we want the industry to be.

Amanda Farmer: And where do you think that is? You know, I'm really interested to hear from strata managers at the moment. With the rise of AI tech - always, you know, has been there, changing things. What does the future of strata management look like for SCA?

Alisha Fisher: Definitely, AI is a new thing for a lot of the businesses. We've got a lot of small businesses that probably haven't even looked at that yet, but, you know, spending so much time as strata managers working on the tiny little pieces of information that needs to be done, whether it's invoicing, finance, et cetera.

But we really want the managers to be able to spend more time working with their clients, and adding the value where they can, even if it's looking at future sustainability options, you know, remedial work within their properties. There's a large ageing stock that's happening and obviously building defects, but there's so much managers could be doing, and we're spending so much time, I suppose, on the little compliance red tape things.

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So it's really looking at how do we use technology smarter to enable managers to have more time. I think the other thing is that there's not going to be enough strata managers to support the communities that are coming through, because, as you know, there's a rapid growth in the sector of buildings, and so we want to make sure we have enough managers that can support all of the strata communities.

Amanda Farmer: And how is SCA planning to support managers with this? I mean, I agree it's a big shift that the tech is forcing managers to make from, you know, the words that I use in a lot of my education is from being a post box, from, you know, doing that paper shuffling, funneling One piece of communication from one party over to another, that's not going to be enough anymore because the tech can do that, the AI can do that.

Stepping up into that role of trusted professional advisor, someone who the buildings can turn to when they're in the midst of that building defects remediation project or wanting that advice on sustainability. I think we all recognise that that's the shift. What is it that SCA is doing now or planning to do in the future to help its members, in particular, to make that shift?

Alisha Fisher: A lot of our regions have been running smaller sessions with their members to try and unpack. What does it even mean for the sector, and how can we look in different ways of being efficient? We have upcoming workshops that will be held for our members, especially the smaller members. As I mentioned, 80% of the members have under five staff. So they are small businesses, and we want them to have more time with their clients.

Amanda Farmer: Nice. I mean, that's what I'm hearing from ownership as well, that they want from their strata managers. Returning to the campaign, what's the measure of success for this campaign? Or maybe what's the aim? Is this about increasing membership, or is it about just more owners using SCA members? All of the above. How do you measure the success?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, I mean, I think for us it's around, firstly, our managers being asked if they are an SCA member by owners. That would be the biggest thing because that means that we've had the outreach, and what we want, we want owners to make better choices in the strata manager they're choosing.

You know, whether that's a manager, that's new in the industry and can bring something, a new idea to their community, or whether it's someone who's been in the industry forever. We want them to actually unpack the education and the experience those managers have to make sure they're choosing the right person. There are obviously lots of managers out there that have low costs and you're just paying for, I suppose, that administrative compliance piece.

But is that what you're after? And so I think each community needs to understand what they're after by their strata manager and then choose that manager based on that skill that they're acquiring for their property.

Amanda Farmer: So it's horses for courses, right? As you've said, some buildings feel like maybe they can partially self-manage, and they just want that license holder there to tick off the compliance piece. Others really do want the hand-holding or the committee, just, you know, professional people don't have time, don't want to be involved. They want that really hands-on manager.

Is it the case then that you see that the SCA members stepping into that, they're going to be the ones who are those more skilled, professional, maybe higher-priced managers? Is that kind of the message that you want to be sending? You might be paying more for an SCA member, but it's worth it. Have I got that right?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, absolutely. I think you've got to pay for what you want. One of the analogies we use all the time is, you know, you spend a fortune at the mechanic on a regular basis for your car that might be \$30,000, but you have a property and in most cases around Australia it's over a million dollars and you know you're choosing the lowest priced strata manager and really that's not the best thing for your asset.

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Amanda Farmer: Yes, and you know, I've just very recently come out of a full day that I spent with managers talking about pricing and part of the conversation was about having the confidence and the belief in yourself that the work you are doing is valuable, is incredibly valuable and therefore that the prices that you're charging are fair, are reasonable, are good value for good work. It's encouraging, I think, to hear the same messaging coming from SCA.

Can you say any more about what you're doing with your members around that pricing conversation? I mean, we're in a real period of reform now, especially in New South Wales, where we're.. Well, for SCA members 1st of January, no more commissions. If you want to remain an SCA New South Wales member. And we're expecting, well, I want to be hopeful about this, expecting maybe some legislative reform around that area next year as well, from the pricing perspective.

And I know you're with your SCA national hat on, but can you speak to how SCA is helping its members with those kinds of conversations?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think the first thing to remember is that by removing commissions, you're actually not going to save money as an owner. This is a replacement of the commission revenue. Strata managers are doing a lot of work for the commission that they're currently receiving through the insurance.

You know, it's a massive piece of work that has to be done to make sure that your asset is insured to the value that it needs to be and that, you know, if something happens that you have that coverage that's required. So it's a replacement of the revenue. So that will have to come in the form of an invoice, or across the management fees directly paid by the consumer. So it's just a shift in that mindset, and we want to make sure managers are remunerated for the work they're doing.

Over the last five years or more, there's been evidence through Macquarie Bank that managers are absorbing all these costs. And especially this year in New South Wales, there's a lot of new compliance requirements, and we're not anti-compliance. It's absolutely a great thing. However, that increases the time managers have to spend, but it also increases the cost for owners corporations to make sure they're compliant because a lot of the compliance is on the owners corporation, not the manager.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, look, I think having those very frank, upfront, clear conversations about pricing is important for everybody, and to have that coming from SCA peak body is helpful for its members to feel supported in that way. It was only very recently, I spoke to John Trowbridge on the podcast, and you know, he was saying something similar about what you're saving on the commissions. You know, it's going to be made up for in your agreed services fees, they're going to have to go up.

But, hopefully, what we don't see. I had a bit of a debate with him about whether we then see strata management services become more expensive overall. And he said he couldn't really see that happening because where your insurance premium is reducing, you're saving that money there and then, yes, you might be spending more on strata management, but your costs, your overall costs are remaining the same. Is that what the CA is hoping to see as well?

Alisha Fisher: I think in an insurance setting that's probably correct. The only thing to point out is that strata management fees have remained quite steady over the last 5 to 10 years. And so that's a concern that managers aren't charging their real value. And as you mentioned earlier, with the race to the bottom to get the client, that is impacting the community worse than it should. So we really want managers to be charging what they're worth and owners being willing to pay that.

And I suppose that's around that education piece of owners know, what do I need? What am I willing to pay for? What do I need my manager to support me with? And then paying the right price for that manager.

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Amanda Farmer: Yes, just returning there then to the campaign, and you've got a website, which I will link to in the show notes for the episode, so listeners can go over and check it out - askthequestion.strata.community. And I can see on that page, you know, you're trying to do some of that heavy lifting of explaining to owners committees. Those who come and visit this page, what it is that strata managers do. And it's great to see some faces there, some familiar faces on the page where you've done some video interviews.

I mean, it seems to me that that's a huge piece. It's fair enough to ask owners to look for and to select an SCA member, but the step before that is really understanding what it is that a strata manager does. Have you got other plans around this campaign in terms of getting that message out there? I know it just kicked off, I think within the last week or so, that we're speaking that general message, not just about SCA members, but about strata managers and what they do.

Alisha Fisher: Yes, we have a lot of key information that we're providing to owners, and we're looking at finalising some guides that will support them in then obviously identifying what they're after. And so then when they're talking to managers, they can ask if that's included in their service. I think a lot of owners don't know what's included in their management agreements. And we quite often have managers call us and say, "Oh, my manager's not doing A, B and C."

And then we look at the contract and we say, "Your manager's not contracted to do A, B and C." So I think it's that misunderstanding and making sure that they're getting what they've required and what they've asked for.

Amanda Farmer: Lots of owners listening to this podcast, Alisha, this is an opportunity to hear from you what you see the top challenges are for your strata managers. What do you want owners to know that they might not already know about these challenges that strata managers are facing?

Alisha Fisher: I mean, I think the biggest challenges for managers is that there's a lot of owners out there that don't understand their legal obligations, managing their communities, owners corporations and or body corporates, depending on which region you're in. They have a responsibility, and the manager is there to guide and to assist and support, and it's actually their obligation. So that's probably the first challenge. And then that ties into, obviously, maintenance and properties aren't being maintained.

There's a lot of owners that are pushing back on spending on maintenance, and the flow-on of that is insurance, because if you. If you're not maintaining your property and, you know, making sure your asset is growing, you're going to have increased insurances because your property is deteriorating. So I think they're probably the key challenges at the moment. And the final one is expectations of owners.

Since COVID, there's obviously been a massive increase that people want everything now, and managers are managing and supporting a lot of communities and doing their best to give the greatest service they can. But, yes, expecting a response, you know, within an hour, if it's not urgent, is not likely.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. I mean, when you stop and think about how many clients a strata manager has, you know, it's not just the building that signed the contract, it's a building that potentially has hundreds of owners in it. That's why we hear about inboxes with, you know, a thousand emails on a Monday morning. That's how that happens. A difficult job, that's for sure.

Just returning to the education point, you know, over years of having these conversations and doing this podcast, I've heard different points of view. Education always comes up. It's always central to this conversation about how we do strata better. But I'll hear from owners that strata managers need to be better educated. I'll hear from Strata managers that owners need to be better educated, educated.

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Do you think that there is a role for the strata manager to play in doing that education, in educating owners, committees, their clients? Some strata managers will say, "Not my job. These people have purchased these properties. They should know what they're getting into. It's the job of the sales agent or the conveyancer, or they need to go and do their own education. I'm not a teacher." Other managers will say, "Yes, that is part of my role as the professional advisor." What do you think, Alisha?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, I mean, it's a tricky one. We know that when people are buying into strata, they're not educated, they're not being informed of what they've purchased into. Many owners come in and say, "I want to opt out to the strata."

Amanda Farmer: Oh, yes.

Alisha Fisher: You know, that's what you've purchased into. You can't opt out of it. And I think the manager, you know, has a dual role, probably with the committee of that community, to work together to educate new entrants into their community, making sure they're aware of all the requirements, the rules, so that they have a happy place to live and that they're all supporting and I suppose, growing their asset together and working together.

It's definitely an opportunity for committees to probably look at, you know, an agreement with other owners and say, what do we want our community to be like in five years time and how do we achieve that? And, you know, that's where the managers can bring their knowledge and expertise to provide that guidance and support and education. Because sometimes you've got to start looking at stuff, especially if you're looking at that sustainability area. So, yes, there's a lot of opportunity. I'm not sure it lies specifically with the manager, as I said, but it definitely helps if the communities are more educated.

Definitely, in New South Wales, as you will have seen, there's the new committee training, so that will be interesting to see how many committee members choose to do that education. I think they should all do the education. We have lots of committee members and owners around Australia and New Zealand that love being educated on strata, and they'll go to any topic because it's, you know, it is interesting and it's fascinating to know how you personally can bring value to your own property.

Amanda Farmer: And I'm sure we're preaching to the converted here. For the listeners of this podcast who love learning about strata, that's why they're tuning in. But look, I do agree, I think managers who take the position that it's not my job to educate these owners or this committee, I think you're missing a trick because I think you gotta admit now there are few others out there who are gonna provide this education and it is not until, you know, you might go and go to an open for inspection and maybe go and look at some books and records and talk to an agent.

Maybe if you're clever, talk to a lawyer before you buy, but you're really not as a purchaser going to be all that interested or all that invested until you are there as the owner, paying the levies, as you say, asking these questions, going to the meetings. So the strata manager really is that first point of contact and place for owners to be asking questions. And in my view, that is the role of the modern-day strata manager. Part of the role of the modern-day strata manager.

And I just think it's so much easier, isn't it, to be working with well-educated owners and committees. Why managers wouldn't want that, I don't know. But, you know, maybe some, maybe some non-SCA members want to keep their clients in the dark about things.

Alisha Fisher: Definitely. With all the new legislation, changes that occur on a regular basis across all regions, there is no way owners have the time to be across that. And we know that the government departments try to educate owners, but you know, they're really not getting out to everyone. And so definitely it's the manager's role to make sure that they understand their obligations, to give them that knowledge so that they are making the right choices and decisions.

And as I mentioned, it's the manager's not the one that's got the obligation to maintain that property. It's the owners, so they need to be aware of that requirement.

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Amanda Farmer: Yes. Does SCA or anyone have data on how many buildings or the proportion of buildings across the country are managed by SCA members? Is that a thing that you can track?

Alisha Fisher: Yes, absolutely. Probably more we track how many lots managers are looking after. So we do know how many lots from the University of New South Wales. Strata Insights Report how many lots are within each of the regions, and then annually, our members advise us of how many lots they are managing. So yes, we do have quite large numbers. There's obviously a lot of self-managed schemes in the smaller regions, but when you're talking about the larger regions like New South Wales, our managers are managing over 75% of the lots in New South Wales. So it's quite a large proportion.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, interesting. Yes. So, in terms of measuring the success of your campaign, that should be data that you can revisit fairly confidently. And see how many more you have managed by SCA members.

Alisha Fisher: Definitely, yes.

Amanda Farmer: All right, Alisha, as we wrap up, tell me what is the single most compelling reason for building a community to work with an SCA member manager?

Alisha Fisher: So, basically, for us, strata is home to millions of Australians, and we want to make sure that they are choosing someone that can bring great value to their property and work together with them for the future.

Amanda Farmer: Fantastic. Well, where is the best place for our listeners to go to find out more about the Your Property. Our Priority campaign? And if they're looking for a manager and they want to check out what SCA has to offer in their state, where should they go?

Alisha Fisher: They can go to our website. So, at the moment, we do have for this campaign, the askthequestion.strata.community is where they can go at the moment. There are lots of owner resources, there's a directory of our members. As you mentioned, we have education that is running around all the regions as well. So we welcome everyone to come to the website.

Amanda Farmer: Excellent. Well, thank you so much, Alisha Fisher, for spending time with me here today and sharing the news about SCA's new campaign. I know you're moving into a bit of conferencing this week, catching up with members and others in the industry. Have fun.

Alisha Fisher: Thanks, Amanda.

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.