

COMMON EQUITY NSW

Newsletter

SUMMER EDITION // FEBRUARY 2023



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advocacy campaign



COMMON EQUITY
CO-OPERATIVE
HOUSING

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Cover Photo

Front cover photo – Lasa Street development sod-turning event, December 2022

L – R: Carmen Osborne, Chair CENSW; Nick Sabel CEO CENSW; Hon. Rose Jackson MLC; Thi Thao Phuong, Cindy Nguyen (Vietnamese Co-op members).

Photo credit: Jane Dempster

Do you have a
story to tell?

Let the sector know what your Co-op has been doing!

Contact nicole@commonequity.com.au or call 02 9356 9223.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land throughout Australia and pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders, past, present and emerging. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



A message from the CEO

Welcome to the 2023 summer edition of our newsletter.
I hope you have enjoyed a wonderful and relaxing festive season.

2023 promises to be a busy year for Common Equity and the Co-op Housing sector as we build on and complete projects carried over from 2022.

We are excited to be expanding the sector with construction of the new Vietnamese Seniors Co-op in Cabramatta finally underway and planning and designs for a new Co-op for women escaping domestic violence progressing well.

Advocating for growth of the Co-op Housing sector continues to be a priority not only to address housing need but to enable choice, control and connection for the people who are housed. The research project results, expected mid-year will provide the evidence we need to promote the benefits of Co-Op Housing to the wider community. You can read about our advocacy work in this edition.

The value of face-to-face meetings cannot be underestimated. Our annual Co-op Forum and AGM in 2022 provided much needed opportunities for meaningful engagement and dialogue with the sector on issues such as ageing in place, the CCA

review, changes to Common Equity's constitutions and ways to improve communication. We look forward to more of these throughout 2023 as we listen, learn and resolve our challenges together and keep our sector vibrant.

Finally, we want to hear your stories. It is important to share stories as ways of connecting and remembering. Thank you to Paola (Alpha House) and Gary (Emoh Ruo) for their contributions to this newsletter and we welcome others for future editions.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and I look forward to working with you in cooperation during 2023.

Nick Sabel, CEO



CENSW ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – SATURDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2022 – MERCURE HOTEL, SYDNEY.

AGM rundown

The meeting was very well attended with approximately 50 attendees, representing 21 Co-operatives.

The report from the Chair and the CEO reflected on the financial year 2021/22, as another challenging time for many. With communities impacted by disasters, both local and international, the need for safe, secure and affordable housing is critical. Common Equity has been lobbying for growth, advocating at both federal and state levels to increase the presence of Co-operative Housing within the Community Housing supply.

This lobbying will continue for 2023. A focus for 2022 was also to strengthen existing Co-ops structures and management.

Other areas of work included: the Lasa St, Cabramatta development; Co-operative Company Agreement (CCA) review; development of the Positive Ageing Action Plan; the University of Western Sydney research project and the BCCM affiliation and inclusion in the Parliamentary Friends of Co-operatives.

Co-operative Housing International

Julie LaPalme, Secretary General for Cooperative Housing International (CHI), provided a video presentation on CHI. They are one of the advocates in the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and have 30 members all over the world. Their mission is to unite, represent and lead the housing co-operative movement, with the main focus on: sharing good practices; networking; advocacy; and peer to peer exchanges

A key asset of CHI is the ability to share ideas, projects, designs and best practices across the world. Environmental sustainability is also very important to CHI.

Constitution changes

CENSW presented some proposed changes to its Constitution which resulted in an engaging discussion amongst members. More information was required about the changes, and sector consultations will occur in 2023.

University of Western Sydney (UWS) research project

A Co-op Housing research project update was provided by Sidsel Grimstad, part of the research team on the Articulating Value of Housing Co-operatives in Australia research project.

This is the first nationwide study to develop an evidence base regarding the benefits of Australian housing co-operatives. There has been great involvement from Co-ops in NSW, exceeding the target. So far, a high level of satisfaction has been reflected in the survey results. A final report is due in early 2023.

For further information: housingcoopresearch.org.au

Board membership

We were pleased to announce the re-election of Christopher Ryan, Lisa Danker and Denis Vaccher.

Awards and Presentations

Numerous Co-ops and their members were recognised for their valuable years of contribution, with awards being presented to those who have provided 10 and 20 years of service.

These included members from Nelson Bay, Kapit Bahayan, Van Lang, Albury, Lac Viet and Hindu Co-ops.

The Co-op Leadership Award was won by Les Ritchie from Nelson Bay Co-op for all his efforts in guiding the Co-op through the covid lock downs, with tenants' wellbeing always on his agenda.





Drawing with Light

By Paola Talbert 2022

I am an artist who has been living and working at Alpha House Artist Co-operative in Erskineville since 1996 when the Co-op opened.

My art practice is mainly Fine Art, photography and drawing. Back in 1998, I built a black and white darkroom for the practice of black and white photography and alternative photographic processes with other artists at the co-op and helped design the 10 art studios that are available for our members.

The beautiful vivid blue of the Cyanotype photographic process is a printing technique I have been reviving in my art practice since 2020.

The series: Garden of Alpha is about making art in the community and found objects

in nature, it includes collecting leaves, flower petals and organic debris from the courtyard and terrace which are then selected to create compositions for my Cyanotype prints. This process really evolved particularly during a period where I had no paid art teaching as the global pandemic developed and Sydney went into a series of lockdowns, for the sake of my physical and mental health I felt as an individual I needed to act and make art.

The Cyanotype process uses the elements of sun and water to make the prints. My Garden of Alpha Cyanotype prints are made on cotton fabric which are then

sewn into bags by my flat mate at Alpha, Zio Ledoux who is also a shoemaker and tailor.

My art has flourished living at Alpha, the hundreds of artists who have lived here over the years have had an immense impact on my career and life. I have been inspired by this experience enormously.

Of course, I have often worked on committees where I have felt overwhelmed by the administrative workload that comes with each committee but still, I have participated in all committees and been a director many times over.

This article is written in loving memory of the artists Coco Miles, John Martensen & Jasmine Pring.

Part Two, An Alternate Proposal

Title and Equity

Gary Luke, Emoh Ruo Co-op

The Newsletter in July last year included a piece about Title and Equity by Wayne Stamp of Planet-X, framed as title transfer in exchange for our sweat equity – the numerous hours we volunteer in management of our housing co-ops. Although members of co-ops have discussed this for years no state housing authority has ever accepted sweat equity as a factor for consideration.

Assets owned by state government are not permitted to be used as collateral for loans. Transfer of title for our co-op housing stock to a non-government entity such as CENSW would permit leverage of substantial loans to increase the housing stock. That was the purpose of the proposed title transfer, which was assumed would occur three years after the establishment of Common Equity in 2009. As much as we would like to be repaid for our efforts, concepts of sweat equity were never part of that proposal. The intention was financial to expand affordable housing beyond the dependence on government or other grants. To ensure a low risk of loss of housing stock from failure to repay loans the initial CENSW board discussed limiting collateral value to a maximum of 20% of housing stock.

The actual value of housing

stock managed by CENSW is not known so we'll use the insured value - \$167 million. If title transfer had occurred with CENSW holding title for all these properties the 20% limit would allow \$35 million for loans. CENSW manages 520 households so the average value of each household is approximately \$167m divide by 520 equals \$320,000. It looks like the \$35million could purchase about 100 more households, increasing the housing co-op population by 20%. The problem is repayments; there is no surplus in the sector to repay any substantial loan. Total annual rent paid into the sector is \$6 million, with 60% needed by CENSW for operational purposes. The other 40% retained by co-ops covers responsive and cyclic maintenance, rates and utility charges and various expenses. So title transfer can't increase the co-op housing sector.

We need housing stock that costs nothing to CENSW for construction. Mass housing developments being constructed and proposed across Sydney all include a percent of units reserved for affordable housing. Regional cities such as Goulburn, Maitland and Gosford have developments under way specifically for affordable housing.

A few social housing providers have already hooked themselves into these developments and successfully negotiated management of the housing units. Commercial units in Sydney will revert to market value rent or sales after ten years. Many in housing need would jump at the opportunity for rebated rent for a decade while being priority candidates for transfer to new development units on expiry. For self managed co-ops it would be best to take on all units on a single floor, not units scattered across levels or blocks of units.

CENSW is currently negotiating a longer term headlease from Land and Housing Corporation (LaHC). Another couple of points should be included that would grant us increased security. The Headlease makes no mention of the housing stock being for Co-op managed community housing – that's a major neglect. It puts CENSW in the same category as other community housing providers and according to LaHC classes ourselves as individual tenants. If it's not requested we can't know if there is a purpose for it being neglected. A second request could be to place a legal covenant or schedule on the titles held by LaHC specifying the property is reserved for affordable co-operative managed housing.

Co-op Corner
This section is
dedicated to opinion
pieces from our
members.

Bringing staff and members together to find solutions

We held our first CENSW specific Co-operative Housing Forum for a while in August 2022. Recently we have been combining our Forum with the Co-op Federation Assembly. It was great to have a day set aside specifically for us to meet. The objective of the day was to bring our members and CENSW staff together to learn from each other and workshop solutions to the challenges and issues we share.



Issues that were discussed and explored included:

What the Co-op model means to CENSW & the sector:

- Empowerment
- Security of tenure / stability
- Small needs can be addressed quickly
- Migrant experience is valued
- Building the brand of Co-op living
- Building communities inside and outside the Co-op
- Active members and not just members.

How can CENSW and Co-ops work better together.

- Communication needs to be both ways
- Learning from other Co-ops
- Still misunderstanding of CENSW responsibilities and function
- COVID has created a huge issue in many Co-ops
- Linking with their members is critical for Co-ops
- Co-ops are emotional and important.



How can we work better together

There was great input from everyone, many ideas were shared amongst the group. The following actions resulted, responsibilities being split between Co-op Board, Co-op members and CENSW.

- Co-ops to start to connect with each other and look at setting up: member led forums; sharing stories; sharing resources; inter Co-op Board meetings
- Co-ops to use the CENSW website or CDT to connect with other Co-ops
- CDT to work on more information and training options for Co-ops
- Co-op members to complete the research project survey
- CENSW to improve communications; review standardised email accounts for Co-ops; promote the Bulletin and Newsletter

Positive Ageing Action Plan (PAAP)

A presentation on the work that has been undertaken on the draft Plan to date was presented by CENSW staff. This considers the fact that the ageing population is growing and also takes into account the long term future of Co-op sustainability.

Actions include:

- PAAP will be presented to Co-ops for feedback, consultation processes will be implemented
- Property to address and outline clear responsibilities for cyclical maintenance and repairs
- CDT to work with Co-ops on waitlist management.

Discussions

Other areas of discussion included: the Company Co-op Agreement, changes and needing, a better understanding of the Agreement; partnering with other peak bodies, funding agencies and advocacy services; helping members run a Co-op; improved accessibility for people with a disability.

All actions formulated on the day have been included in a Forum Action Plan which has been promoted via The Bulletin and at Regional meetings.





CENSW MP Advocacy Campaign

In the lead up to the March State election, CENSW undertook an advocacy campaign contacting relevant MPs with a number of policy requests.

During the campaign period CENSW directly contacted 36 MPs with a policy recommendations document which outlined a number of key asks and included our rationale for these requests.

MPs were contacted on the basis of related portfolio, electorate (electorates home to existing Co-operatives), and/or their involvement in the Parliamentary Friends of Co-operatives.

CENSW has received responses from a number of Ministers and MPs including the current Minister for Homes and Planning. We have also held follow up meetings with: The Office of the Minister for Multiculturalism and Seniors; and directly with the Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services and Disability Inclusion, and the Shadow Minister for Water, Housing and Homelessness.

More local MP meetings are planned for 2023 including with the Member for Newtown and the Member for Albury.

CENSW will continue to contact MP's following the election to raise awareness of the sector and build relationships. We will continue to revisit our key policy objectives to strengthen and grow the sector across NSW.

What we asked for

Targets

5% of all new community housing supply to be Co-operative Housing owned and managed by CENSW

Funding

Commit funding/financial support to ensure that supply targets are met

Policy

Set enabling policy to ensure that Co-op Housing targets can be met.

Land

Access to land for development of Co-operative sites

Title transfer

Facilitate CENSW securing title transfers on current headlease properties

Streamlined regulation

Setting up a single national regulator for co-operatives.



Sector growth Lasa St, Cabramatta

What a great way to end 2022, building the sector, together!

A sod-turning event for the Cabramatta development was held in December 2022. The event marks the commencement of building works on this property which will be managed by two local Vietnamese Housing Co-operatives, Van Lang and Lac Viet and house older members of the Vietnamese community.

Local Vietnamese Co-op members at the sod-turning event

"The Lasa Street co-operative housing project is important as it has been designed for the specific needs of the future Vietnamese Seniors tenants. The project has been designed with both personal privacy and community interaction in mind.

CENSW is proud to have partnered with Lac Viet and Van Lang housing co-operatives on this project.

The future tenants will be mentored and supported as they begin to live in the Co-operative."

Carmen Osborne, CENSW Chair

"Co-operative housing puts tenants in control of their homes. The long-term involvement of tenants with their housing and their community is highly beneficial providing a sense of place and commitment. Co-operative housing builds the confidence of residents and can contribute positively to other life and employment opportunities. The efficiency dividend of Co-op Housing includes better managed and maintained housing and longer tenure and stability for residents.

With the ongoing crisis in affordable housing being a reality for many Australians, models of housing that empower and give agency to tenants is vital to maintaining the social fabric of our cities and communities."

Melina Morrison, CEO BCCM



Carmen Osborne CENSW Chair,
The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC,
Shadow Minister for Water,
Housing and Homelessness,
Nick Sabel CENSW CEO.
Photo credits: Jane Dempster



IN MEMORY OF

Mr Suntheralingham

Chairman, Hindu Community Co-operative Ltd
by Samy Pasupati

Suntha, as he was known to friends, was originally from Sri Lanka where he worked for the Sri Lankan Railways as one of the most senior engineers.

A colleague of Suntha described him as studious, always helpful and caring, he took part in all extra-curricular activities and even at that young age would meditate when he found time.

These are qualities that he brought to the Co-op and how he interacted with other members and with the world at large.

Mr & Mrs Suntheralingham took time away from Sydney when the Pathrakali temple in his home town of Sankarathai needed rebuilding. They supervised the reconstruction, helping to make it once again a flourishing temple.

Mr Suntheralingham never forgot those who needed a hand in life. He would, very quietly help them, be it in their education or other needs.

He had the interest of our Co-op very much at heart and worked hard, not wanting any recognition.

Mr Suntheralingham was meticulous in keeping of records and compliance with various legal and other requirements.

Only recently, after 20 years he agreed to be our Chairman, saying to me at the AGM, 'if you think I must.'

He received the 20 years of service award at the last CENSW AGM.

Some word from others who knew him:

"Suntha was an amazing man...so kind and gentle."

"I have always admired Suntha for his dedication to the Co-op, coupled with a beautiful sense of love for others. It really saddens me deeply."

We will certainly miss him very much.

Mr Suntheralingham sadly passed away in late December 2022.



IN MEMORY OF

Adrian Wolfin

Member of BRANCH Co-operative Ltd
by Yvonne Jenkins

Adrian honoured the International Principles of Co-operation as a great good in the world.

His central interests were in world affairs, and advancing human rights, he wrote excellent letters and articles on the plight of refugees, he had an acute interest in climate change and the work to be done to change the trajectory of devastating change.

Adrian was a foundation member of BRANCH Housing Co-operative.

In 1993/4 Adrian was working for the local Bellingen Neighbourhood Centre when he came across information that led him and a small group to form a co-operative and apply for funding under the old 'Commonwealth State Housing Agreement' to purchase and build 9 dwellings.

In 1997 BRANCH was incorporated as a co-operative and by 2000 our 9 dwellings were occupied by the first BRANCH members, very appreciative and happy people.

For 20 plus years Adrian was involved as BRANCH secretary and advisor, always diligent. A good thing had been created, a housing co-operative.

There is much more I could say about Adrian and his contributions to the world, but that is more for his close family, friends and friendship circles.

His BRANCH colleagues honour and thank him for his role in bringing BRANCH co-op into being and his knowledge of policy development and application.

And his sharp wit.

Adrian Wolfin passed away on the 15th April 2022, his family by his side.

Adrian wrote an article/history about BRANCH published in the CENSW Newsletter magazine. It can be found in an earlier issue. <https://www.commonequity.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/April-Newsletter-for-FINAL.pdf>

+ Health Services

Unfortunately, COVID-19 is still around in the community - help take care of yourself and each other.

Stay informed nsw.gov.au/covid-19

Information on this web site includes:

♦ Vaccinations ♦ Testing clinics ♦ Antivirals ♦ Registering RAT tests

A range of translated COVID-19 resources are also available here:

nsw.gov.au/covid-19/support/translated-resources

Transcultural Mental Health Line

1800 648 911 Monday to Friday – 9.00am – 4.30pm

This service provides assistance with:

- ♦ Advice on how to improve your mental health and well being
- ♦ Helping you to access mental health services in your community
- ♦ Supporting you to care for someone with a mental health concern.

Call 1800 186 815 for health information in your language

Multicultural Health Connect

- ✓ Get free health advice from a nurse
- ✓ Find doctors, hospitals and community health centres near you
- ✓ Learn more about Medicare and how it can support you
- ✓ Learn about COVID-19, including vaccinations

healthdirect





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