The owners and residents of Regatta Wharf apartments in Pyrmont are distressed by our experience of short-term lets, and dismayed by the possibility that the State government may choose to legitimate and extend the practice.

Regatta Wharf is a residential complex of 146 apartments, built in 2000, Strata Plan 62660. We manage our affairs through an elected Strata Committee, and volunteer to work on two sub-committees. This strata has always been advertised as residential. Owners bought – and tenants rent – on this understanding. This understanding is supported by zoning, and in by-laws prohibiting leases of less than three months.

Regatta Wharf is not just a collection of apartments: it is a community, whose owners and residents consider it as home. The common areas – pool, lobbies, gardens, walkways - are extensions of these homes. The Strata Committee is committed to preserving this quality.

Our experience of short-term lets leads us to these objections.

1 Owners and residents have developed a strong sense of community. In this secure complex our personal security actually depends on knowing who our neighbours are and believing that we can rely on them in a personal crisis or a building emergency. New owners and tenants quickly adapt their behaviour and expectations to meet these norms. Our experience of short-term tenants, in the absence of the owner or long-term tenant, is that they have little concern for neighbours and would not know how to respond to a crisis. This problem is compounded when an owner or tenant disguises the short-term tenancy. In these cases the short-term tenants have every reason to avoid coming to a neighbour’s aid.

2 When owner-occupiers or long-term tenants do not know who their neighbours are – or suppose that they are very temporary – that undermines the sense of community that we have built over 17 years. Knowing, or suspecting, that one’s neighbour is not neighbourly, is deeply disconcerting.

3 Short-term tenants have no interest in the costs of maintenance, nor do they necessarily understand how to operate mechanisms safely. Knowing that they will be gone
before damage is observed or deterioration is repaired, they can be much more careless than longer-term residents.

4 The governance, as well as the sociability of this residential complex, relies on residents volunteering to serve on the Garden Committee, on the House sub-committee and on the Strata Committee. Any reduction in the pool of residents willing and able to carry out these services would strike at the foundation on which our community rests.

5 We have had experience of short-term tenants using an apartment, and the swimming pool etc., as the venue for bucks’ night parties and similar. The disruption to neighbours peace is extreme; remedies (in the form of security and police attendance etc.) is slow; and any penalties irrelevant to the residents who have endured the disruption. So far, these occasions are rare. We fear their proliferation is short-term leases are normalised.

We are certain that the normalisation of short-term tenancies would reduce the market value of our apartments: we are equally concerned that it would savage the social value of our homes.

We acknowledge that short-term tenancy is difficult to detect and even harder to control, but we reject the suggestion that this practice should be normalised and legitimated, especially in apartment complexes – like ours – which have been developed as fully residential and occupied overwhelmingly by permanent owner-occupiers.

We are especially opposed to short-term leases when the owner (or lead tenant) leaves the short-term tenants to their own devices. The risks, and the disruption, are obviously reduced when short-term tenants share the apartment with permanent residents.

Yours sincerely,

Donald Denoon,
Chair, Regatta Wharf Strata Committee, SP 62660