

## OPINION 31

# Best man for better buildings

**Paul Nicolaou**



**D**avid Chandler might just be the most important bureaucrat in the NSW Government as Sydney prepares to build its way up and out of the current housing crisis.

Mr Chandler heads the Office of the NSW Building Commissioner and his no-nonsense attitude and gritty determination are inspiring. He has a "take no prisoners" approach to weeding out shonky builders and developers who cut corners leaving structural faults and poor quality work.

Sydney needs Mr Chandler more than ever as we prepare to build up to create more housing opportunities for the citizens of our great city.

It's vital for buyers, particularly young people entering the real estate market for the first time, to feel confident about buying a property. It's the biggest investment most will ever make.

Most builders are salt of the earth, honest and skilled people who take great pride in the quality of their work. And most developers are honourable. As so often is the case, it's the minority who do the wrong thing tarnishing the reputation of an entire industry in the process.

It's timely to think about Mr Chandler's role in holding the construction industry to account. December marks the fifth anniversary of the Opal Tower fiasco at Olympic Park. Residents were evacuated when structural faults and cracks appeared in the most dramatic fashion. It took years to unravel that situation.

The trauma for apartment owners caught up in these situations can only be imagined. Think of the Mascot Tower apartment owners evacuated from their building in June 2019.

The building remains uninhabitable. The unit owners refer to four years of psychological hell and who could blame them? These two shocking examples led to David Chandler's appointment.

His confidence, vigilance and activism will be great for Sydney as the construction sector gets on the tools to build an unprecedented number of housing projects.

Everyone from Premier Chris Minns down accepts that we can't keep extending Sydney's metropolitan boundaries. Instead, we must have higher density housing along major rail and road corridors.

However, it is essential that prospective buyers can feel certain that they are buying a quality constructed home or a buy-to-rent property, not a lifetime of problems.

For Mr Chandler to succeed in his task, he will need the support across all relevant government departments and all local councils. We know that the current work-from-home trend runs the risk of slowing things down. Government leadership will be needed on that score.

It must also be recognised that the construction industry is in challenging times to achieve Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's ambitious goal of a million new homes within a five-year period.

It is beset with a labour and skills drought, rising costs, supply chain issues and company collapses. In this troubled environment, it is good to know that we have someone of David Chandler's calibre in the key position of Building Commissioner. He gets the big picture.

**Paul Nicolaou is Executive Director of Business Sydney**