

Committee Secretary Senate
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

Dear Secretary and Committee Members

I write briefly to advise that I support the position of the Coalition of Celebrant Associations Inc (CoCA) and Civil Celebrants Graduate Association (Monash) in relation to the current bills before parliament.

In Particular I would like to emphasise the following concerns are:

1) Removal of lifelong appointment

The Bills remove 40 years of lifetime appointments, replacing them with annually renewable appointments. Under the existing system, celebrants can be de-registered for poor performance as identified by complaints from the public, issues identified in the 5-yearly review and failure to complete ongoing professional development (OPD). Under the proposed changes, a celebrant in effect is an annual contractor and can be de-registered for non-payment of the annual registration fee; nothing to do with the professionalism of the celebrant.

Any change from a lifelong appointment to an annual contract based on a registration fee denies the ongoing appointment of a celebrant without any compensation for the removal of their security of their appointment. It could be argued that registration as a celebrant confers the status of Commonwealth Office holder. Celebrants are appointed by the government to perform a service on behalf of the government for the wider Australian community and now we are being asked to cover the costs of that service via legislative change.

2) Reduction of Oversight of Professional Standards of Marriage Celebrants

When I was first appointed in 2004, I was required to submit annual returns and was subject to a 5-yearly review. The annual returns have been discontinued and the Bill under review removes the need for the 5-yearly reviews. It appears that the Marriage Law and Celebrants Section (MLCS) of the Attorney-General's department has reduced their workload and removed the effective check on professional standards of an individual celebrant while, at the same time, imposing fees to cover their costs.

The introduction of a proposed registration fee will disregard the professionalism of an individual celebrant. Incompetent celebrants can pay the fee and stay registered while a highly competent and professional celebrant may decide the imposition of the registration fee makes it not cost-effective to remain in business and their experience and expertise will be lost to the Australian public.

- 3) No consideration for the costs incurred by celebrants or the income they can reasonably derive.

We are now in the position of having over 10,500 authorised civil marriage celebrants Australia-wide handling 70%, or approximately 72,000 marriages a year. This is close to an average of 7 weddings a year per celebrant. At the average fee of \$500 charged by Celebrants for each wedding they conduct the average celebrant's work generates an income of \$3,500 a year most of which is necessarily spent on advertising, insurances, copyright licensing, statutory and government charges, membership of celebrant associations, equipment required (e.g. sound system and ongoing maintenance, computer), regulatory marriage stationery, appropriate clothing and car and petrol expenses. The imposition of an annual fee will be unsustainable for many regardless of how good they are as celebrants.

I ask you to heed the calls of the celebrant community who fully understand their obligations and the impact the proposed changes to their appointment will have on their profession and the Australian community they serve.