

I strongly oppose the changes to the Marriage Celebrants Program proposed by the Senate and ask why are some many Civil Marriage Celebrants being churned out each year often with very sub standard training producing a very unstable and inexperienced workforce. Why are these training schools allowed to certify so many each year and why are so many being certified by the Attorney Generals Office. If the training was more thorough then the support staff would not be inundated with calls from inexperienced Civil Celebrants.

I am a fairly new practicing Celebrant and I absolutely love what I do but it is very hard to build your business when you are competing against so many others. My training was ok but I have taken it upon myself to ask a very experienced Civil Celebrant to be my mentor which she accepted with grace. My mentor is my first port of call when seeking advice of any sort.

Trying to run a sustainable Marriage Celebrant business is difficult and expensive. Your business cannot survive without advertising widely and this is costly. We don't earn a lot of money and so much of that money must be pumped back into the business if you want your reputation to grow. Adding another cost and an annual licence is unjust and will make it even more difficult to survive in the industry.

If we are to pass this cost onto the marrying couples then this annual 'Celebrant Registration' fee will increase costs on 95% of all civil marriages and over 70% of all marriages in Australia.

I also ask why it is only Civil Celebrants that this new fee applies to. Why are ministers and state Celebrants exempt? This sounds very much like discrimination. We as Civil Celebrants pride ourselves on writing a ceremony that will reflect the love story of the couple we are marrying. We put hours of work into each and every ceremony and give the couples the real sense that this is their story and that we as their celebrants take a real and positive interest in their hopes for their ceremony.

With this new system marrying couples will have absolutely no guarantee that the celebrant of their choice, and with whom they have booked their wedding ceremony, will be still registered at the time of their ceremony.

- Couples choice of a celebrant is based on many individual factors, including the experience, reputation, personality and style of the celebrant, not just the fact that the celebrant has a licence to do the legal paperwork.
- 7 days to transfer a Notice of Intended Marriage gives couples no time to choose another celebrant, nor any guarantee that another celebrant with the same qualities will be able to be found in time.
- Many couples book their wedding in the first half of the year for a wedding in the Spring to early summer season. This could affect one half of all civil weddings ie 35% of all marriages given 70% of marriages are done by Commonwealth Celebrants.

- A wedding ceremony and celebration is a complex and difficult task in event planning and coordination, in balancing family and friendship relationships, in meeting expectations and desires, balancing financial and other pressures so is rated as one of life's most stressful events.
- Having to find another celebrant at last minute notice is adds not only extra stress, but can affect the couple's confidence and thus enjoyment of what they hope will be one of the happiest days of their lives.
- This is hard enough when serious illness or injury may strike their particular celebrant, but the possibility will be greatly increased by an annual fee system tied to the grounds for dismissal

The quality of the wedding services will decrease as structuring the Commonwealth Marriage Celebrant Program on an annual cycle of 'casual contractors' exacerbate an increasingly unstable and inexperienced workforce.

- Independent civil celebrants primary point of difference with State appointed marriage celebrants is the provision of a personalised ceremony tailored to the needs and desires of the couple. Unlike State appointed celebrants in registry offices and churches, independent celebrants do not have a standard set script for the ceremony.
- In 90% of civil weddings independent marriage celebrants do not work at the same venue, because the marrying couple book or provide the venue, in many cases in outdoor spaces. Thus the need for equipment and experience in delivering ceremony under a variety of more challenging situations.
- Professional standards depend upon continuity of work experience over a variety of work situations and improve over time as newer professionals are mentored by more experienced ones.
- Celebrants' motivation to invest in extra training, professional association support, clothing, computer, PA and other equipment depends upon the expectation that there will be time to recoup set-up expenses and achieve the ability to make a decent hourly rate for one's work
- Even small businesses take 4 to 5 years to become established so annual appointments will create a high turn-over of newer celebrants lowering the overall experience and stability of the profession

I do not believe these changes are needed

This Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants program

- has less than an average 0.5 % Statutory Complaints in an annual number of over 72,000 weddings
- has 0.00005% error rate affecting the validity of marriage in last 15 years (1998-2012) conducted by all marriage celebrants ie including State appointed,

Marrying couples are protected by

- the Australian Marriage Act which covers all marrying couples, who are free to marry, from any mistakes their celebrant may make, whether in a civil or religious marriage ceremony
- by Fair Trading laws and have access to a Complaints Process, both to the Attorney-General's Department and to State Departments implementing Fair Trading laws.

Do you consider these Bills create efficient government? NO!

The Government argues it needs to increase its staffing from 7 to 12 full-time staff to manage the Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants program

- to meet their regulatory requirements of 5 yearly celebrant reviews, yet plan to scrap that requirement anyway
- to duplicate phone advice services already provided by State Registry Offices to all marriage celebrants.

This Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants program

- operated for 30 years with 1 or 2 staff in Canberra in smooth and efficient manner
- is part of the Australian Marriage Act with protects all couples, who are free to marry, from any mistakes their celebrant may make, whether in a civil or religious marriage ceremony.

Even State business licences are issued for 3 or more years and a state driving licence can be paid to cover 5 years. There are other fair and more efficient options for cost recovery, if this is the prime hidden aim of the bills.

Please not that I do not support these new changes to the Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants Program. I believe it has not been well thought out and considered and is a quick fix knee jerk solution that will damage the already suffering industry.