

Senate submission on Marriage reforms –

As a Celebrant I feel I am a representative of the government each time I am officiating at a wedding.

When I was appointed I believed I had a lifetime appointment.
To have that privilege I am required to do OPD each year and pay a fee for that.

I am also required to purchase the stationary at my cost from your provider.

Your proposal is to introduce a further cost to me in order to perform a duty for the Federal Government.

To do this job, I have paid for my own initial training as well.
Yes, it s a job I want to do.

This proposed additional fee that will be imposed on me, will mean I have three unavoidable costs from your department in order to perform my job, before I have done any weddings each year.
There is no means to get a refund for unused stationary or other costs that I have incurred if for some reason you deem I cannot continue as a celebrant – is that reasonable?

I believe one fee might be appropriate (in the order of the proposed fee amount) and this should incorporate OPD.
We then choose where we will do OPD
It should be a more rigorous process and hands on from your department.

When the NOIM is completed by the couple and signed by the celebrant, I believe there should be a process where the couple pay a fee online or at Australia Post to the government.
After all it is the couple getting married.
When this fee is paid and verified by the celebrant prior to 30 days, the marriage can proceed.
The celebrant still does the paperwork, only the fee is collected elsewhere.

It seems a very unusual process that all fees are attached to the provider and none on the customer in the Marriage process.
User pays? Is it the celebrant that is the user or is it the couple?

A modest fee of \$30/\$40 per couple would surely recoup all of the fees that you are trying to impose on the celebrants.

In 2012 I was lucky enough to officiate at 6 weddings.
In 2013, I have done 1 and only have 1 booked.
My average fee for these would have been around \$500 last year.
The average time for each wedding would have been around 12/15 hours (it can vary greatly with each couple).
That equals around \$33 per hour before tax and all other costs currently imposed by your department.
Total proposed fees around \$450 without stationary
There are then my own business and marketing costs and other sundry expenses.
I won't do that calculation. It's too scary to see that reality.

From all this you can see the costs imposed by you are a great burden on my emerging small business,
that is an essential service to the government and community.

OPD – including an online element!
The first person to gain their A number from my training group was a middle aged lady (my age) who could not use or have access to the internet and did not have an email address.
The daughter had an email address and for group activities done away from class, we communicated with the daughter.
The course had some very difficult online hurdles to cross that I had to seek assistance for.
The course provider hoped you would buy their software!

Online assessment does not seem to be an effective means of regulation for the celebrant role.

There would be many celebrants that are not internet savvy.

I believe you need to look at other means as well to review all existing celebrants.

PS This job is all about people and is best done by people that enjoy people, and have some wisdom to impart
When I say 'hands on experience from your department'
I believe that needs to be from people who love people
A recent photo of the department showed very young people who have had little opportunity to have accumulated wisdom and life skills to understand the job we do or who we are.
Yes young people can have it, but there needs to be a mixture, at least.
It is not an online internet forum –
being a celebrant is a hands on face to face role
and should be supported in that way in addition to other means.