

SUBMISSION FROM REBECCA SKINNER, Registered Marriage Celebrant No. A15478

I was registered in July 2012 and believe I have a huge amount to offer as a marriage celebrant. As a journalist and writer of more than 38 years experience in all fields of the media plus television and radio, as well as training and experience as a public speaker and trainer/facilitator, I believe I have unique skills to ascertain exactly what couples want from their ceremony, the ability to write a tailor-made service for them as well as deliver in an engaging and professional manner. My vast experience in dealing with people and in difficult situations I believe will enable me to handle any situation that could arise. This is quite unlike State appointed celebrants in registry offices and churches who use a standard ceremony script within the same venue.

However despite extensive marketing, at April 2013 I have still not conducted a wedding ceremony. I have got bookings though for weddings late this year and early in 2014, as people book their preferred celebrant sometimes more than a year in advance.

Running a small business means it is vital I ensure that my monetary investment involved in completing the Cert 1V in Celebrancy, a new computer, printer, scanner, clothing, insurance, membership of a Celebrant association, purchase of stationary, certificates etc is covered by my earnings. I have already enrolled in my annual professional development in June at large expense. With the proposed changes, I fear I will not be able to recoup my costs.

In fact, the annual "Celebrant Registration" fee will put me out of business.

I am also concerned at the increased cost burden it will place on civil marriages in Australia. I fear that couples will have no guarantee of having the celebrant of their choice with whom they feel at ease and have bonded with and with whom they have booked their ceremony – as celebrants like me will not be able to afford to continue as wedding celebrants due to the "Celebrant Registration" fee.

Seven days to transfer a NOIM gives couples no time to find another celebrant with whom they feel comfortable and who they feel confident can offer a similarly perfect service for them. This puts additional stress on what is already a very stressful time and could affect their enjoyment of such an important occasion in their life.

I am also worried that structuring the Commonwealth Marriage Celebrant Program on an annual cycle of 'casual contractors' exacerbates an increasingly unstable and inexperienced workforce, therefore potentially making civil wedding ceremonies less professional.

As it takes several years to build up a business as a civil wedding celebrant the proposed changes – which I do not believe are necessary – will see even more celebrants coming into the business and therefore less work available for those many wedding celebrants already in the industry.

I strongly support the CoCA submission and the CCN Inc's submission. I also endorse CoCA's Capping Recommendation not to remove Section 39E (1) but to amend SECTION 39E (2) to put in the CoCA 5 yearly regional appointment process based upon the best candidate for the vacancies, number to be determined on an average of weddings per celebrant per year, either by an Independent Knowledge and Skills assessment or by regional reviews. I strongly support the plea for minimal staffing of the Marriage Law and Celebrant Section, instead making the maximum use of the advice and support of the peak body CoCA, celebrant associations and the State Registry Offices.

I believe the proposed changes will make the civil celebrancy industry in Australia go backwards rather than forwards and I urge you to take all the comments that are being submitted to you, into very serious consideration.

- Rebecca Skinner