



Committee Secretary

legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

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

23 APRIL 2013

Submission written by:

Robbie Fincham
Civil Marriage Celebrant

Dear Senators,

**RE: Inquiry into the Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration Fees) Bill 2013
and the Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Bill 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment on the Inquiry into the Australian Marriage Act 1961 amendments as outlined in the Bills above.

The purpose of my submission is to express my significant concern with the changes proposed to the Marriage Celebrant Laws.

My background:

- Appointed January 2010 (A13175)
- In the 40 months I've been a practicing Civil Marriage Celebrant I've averaged only **1.4** ceremonies per month at an average cost per ceremony of \$400 (gross, before expenses)
- My total business set up costs were \$7,500. My **yearly** current mandated expenses include insurance, compulsory yearly professional development, professional association membership/conference attendance, stationery, website, PA equipment maintenance and professional attire totaling approximately \$1,700 p.a.
- Committee Chairperson of Civil Celebrations Network Inc. (CCN) - Current
- Alternate delete to Coalition of Civil Celebrants Australia (CoCA) - Current
- Member of Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants (AFCC) - Current
(Note: **I am not in support of the AFCC's position on the proposed amendments**)

The figures above make it obvious that I'm not a Civil Marriage Celebrant simply for monetary reasons. I love what I do and I believe I make a valuable contribution to my community by offering a highly professional and personal service to all my marrying couples.

My situation is not unique and it is fair to say that the majority of celebrants have limited opportunity to conduct a decent number of weddings in order to earn a reasonable part-time wage and practice the skill of writing, creating and delivering ceremonies.

To add another compulsory expense (ie: celebrant fee) to an already increasing list of expenses or face de-registration is of real concern to me. Professional celebrant standards and the quality of wedding services is very likely to decrease as celebrants look for ways in which they can "cut back" on items (eg: insurance and association membership), in order to cover the cost of a potentially increasing yearly Government fee in order to remain registered.

It's also important to acknowledge and understand:

- that the Marriage Law and Celebrant section (MCLS) have stated that the fee will help increase the "professionalism" of Government appointed celebrants, **BUT, the ability to pay is not a determinant of "professionalism"**
- **there are many other ways in which raising funds can be achieved** (as outlined in the CoCA Senate Submission), which do not discriminate and will increase the professionalism of celebrants, rather than this very ill thought out "grab for cash" by the MCLS.
- the proposed "annual celebrant's fee" is **blatantly discriminatory** as only Commonwealth Celebrants are being forced to pay an annual fee, and not all categories of celebrants who also use the services of the MCLS. **Laws are laws and should apply to ALL Australians, regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliations.**
- **the removal of 5-year reviews to a "one year license to practice" as proposed in the Bills will harm marrying couples.** They will have no guarantee that the celebrant of their choice, and with whom they have booked their wedding ceremony, will still be registered at the time of their ceremony. A couple's choice of celebrant is based on many individual factors, including experience, reputation and personality; not just the fact that the celebrant has a license to do the legal paperwork. It will create a climate of fear and insecurity amongst celebrants in that they may be terminated in a year or less and create uncertainty for the majority of Australians (now more than 70%) who seek a civil wedding ceremony.

I implore you to please read very thoroughly the CoCA submission, as they are the Advisory Body to the Government, and understand the ins and outs of the celebrant industry better than anyone. These Bills must be re-visited immediately.

Why?

- They are ill-thought out
- They aren't based on fact
- They are a blatant "grab for cash"
- They WILL severely damage the Commonwealth Civil Celebrant program in Australia for both the Australian public and Commonwealth Appointed Civil Celebrants
- They are discriminatory

There are many fairer, more efficient ways of "increasing the professionalism" of celebrants and raising the necessary funds required. An immediate halt on these amendments **MUST** be made and alternatives fully researched before proceeding to make changes to the Marriage Act 1961.

Regards

Robbie Fincham
Civil Marriage Celebrant