

Sunday 7th April 2013

Re: Concerns regarding amendments to Marriage Bill 2013 – Celebrant Registration charge.

Members of the Senate Committee,

I am a qualified Registered Marriage Celebrant of some three years standing. I have during the course of the past year and a half attended a number of meetings at which the forthcoming changes to this Bill have been discussed.

As recently as a fortnight ago – when attending a Celebrants Association meeting, a report was given on the latest and most recent information that had been obtained from the Cocas' meetings. This report indicated that an agreement had been reached regarding – amongst other items - a Registration Fee amount that was to be incorporated into the amendment of the Bill. We were lead to believe that the amount would be in the order of \$240.00.

This sum whilst, not a considerable one, was still considered to be significant given that the average Celebrant conducts approximately 6 weddings a year. It was however, felt that it might help 'clean up' some residual registrations and thus provide a better opportunity for those of us wishing to earn a reasonable living conducting marriages.

It would now seem – from the published proposed draft amendments – that this 'agreement' has been disregarded, and a Fee of some \$600 is the possible outcome. Since a large percentage of currant Registered Celebrants are either retired or approaching retirement, and given the governments consistent reassurance that their focus is on maintaining a viable and active workforce, particularly amongst its more senior community, I find this charge to be excessive in the extreme.

Many senior Celebrants bring a wealth of experience from all walks of life to this role. They then apply this knowledge and expertise to providing a wonderful, meaningful, individual, and personal quality to their couples ceremonies. Sadly this will mean many of these Celebrants will abandon Celebrancy altogether – and the likelihood is that ceremonies will become homogenized and repetitious as Celebrants scramble to make as much money as possible in order to remain viable. Our industry relies heavily on "word of mouth" referrals for its ongoing business, and having to add a considerable fee increase to our charges is not going to win us any favors with our prospective clients.

We are yet to be assured that we will actually gain any benefit from this new charge, and what those benefits might ultimately be, other than to ensure an increase in the Public Servant ranks.

I would like, therefore, to strongly protest at this apparent betrayal, and respectfully request that the wording of the Bill amendment be adjusted to reflect what was discussed and agreed with the various Celebrant Representatives, namely a registration fee of no more than \$240.00 per annum.

Yours sincerely,