

Submission to the Senate Committee re Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration and Fees) Bill 2013 and the Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Bill 2013.

## **I support the submission put forward by CoCA to the Senate Committee.**

However, as a recently registered celebrant (June 2012) I would like to record some of my personal concerns regarding the proposed Bills.

### **I believe the introduction of an annual registration fee for celebrants authorised under section 39 of the Marriage Act, is discriminatory as there is no levy placed on registered celebrants appointed under section 26 of the Marriage Act:**

Celebrants authorised under section 39 have the impost of costly annual professional development, membership of professional association fees, public liability, professional indemnity and copyright insurance, stationery costs, office set-up, communication and travel expenses, amongst others.

Conversely, Religious and State and Territory celebrants are generally supported by the organisation they represent, do not personally bear the infrastructure costs and are not required to do the same mandatory annual professional development to ensure consistent high standards.

### **I believe the introduction, especially at the proposed levels, of an annual registration fee for celebrants authorised under section 39 of the Marriage Act, will cause hardship:**

The Attorney General's Department statistics reveal that if the number of marriages annually were to be divided equally between the number of authorised celebrants, each celebrant would perform approximately 3-4 marriages. For many celebrants (section 39) this will be the number they will actually perform. Clearly annual registration at the proposed level will cause hardship. This hardship will not be shared by celebrants appointed under section 26, especially when they have 'captive' clients (eg their church congregation).

Established celebrants obviously conduct a greater number of marriages than more recently qualified celebrants. It is my experience that building a reputation will take some considerable time. Being selected as a celebrant depends on marketing – and then being able to demonstrate skills through performance. In my first year of registration I will have conducted only two ceremonies. The costs of *qualifying (Certificate IV) 1* and *establishing* oneself as a celebrant far outweigh the returns in the early years, (something I was aware of at the outset) – the additional expense of a new *annual* registration is a huge impost at this stage - and will be into the future.

My decision to continue to seek registration as a celebrant was based in part on the belief that it was life-long registration, reviewed within a maximum of every five years (except in special circumstances ie complaints, professional misconduct). I undertook the expensive

training course, committed to office set-up costs, PA system purchase, mandatory professional development fees etc and am in no position to walk away from the financial and personal investment. The annual registration and any concomitant changes to the review process will cause great uncertainty and will jeopardise booking weddings in advance of the review/registration.

Marriage ceremonies offered by State BDM Registry celebrants (eg Queensland) cost between \$280 - \$360 which includes the cost of the venue. In my view, it is already extremely hard to compete with this sector given the below-line and extra above-line expenses I necessarily have to bear. It is anti-competitive. The annual registration fee will add additional financial burden. This in turn will affect marrying couples choosing to use the services of celebrants appointed under section 39.

**I strongly support greater reliance on the advice and assistance provided by industry and professional associations (CoCA) and State Registrars, to reduce the work load and thus administration costs, of the Marriage Law and Celebrants section of the Department.**

**I strongly support the Amendment to Australia Marriage Act 1961 Part IV Division 2 Sub-paragraph 42 to *add an Australian passport as evident of the date and place of birth of the party seeking to marry* as this removes discrimination against all Australian citizens, and especially as those persons born overseas are able to use overseas passports.**

Thank you for your consideration.