

Submission to Senate Legal and Constitution Affairs Committee

Re: Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration and Fees) Bill Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Bill 2013

I'm writing as a very concerned husband (and also member of the public) of a Commonwealth Civil Marriage Celebrant, in relation to proposed changes to the Marriage Act. I am totally against the implementation of a Celebrant Fee and am of the opinion that it's the Government's way of raising revenue (ie: tax) and a "quick fix" to the oversupply of celebrants in Australia.

As a self-employed businessman myself, I would never have considered outlaying \$1,000's on starting my business with the threat that if I could not pay a fee I would automatically be de-registered from operating my business. This is in effect what the fee and consequent removal of "life-time appointment" will do. I'm sure there are many other partners of independent civil celebrants who feel the same way I do and are in a similar situation.

I have always been, and remain a very supportive husband of my wife's decision to re-enter the workforce after raising our young family, by establishing her own business as a Civil Celebrant. She clearly loves what she does, putting an enormous amount of time and emotional energy into giving her marrying couples the best wedding ceremony ever, who, after all do not get a second chance at their "big day". Very few jobs that I can think of have such high stakes for the clients.

To my surprise, her start up costs three years ago after she completed her celebrant training were very high (in the vicinity of \$8,000) and she has yet to fully re-coup these costs, given only the few weddings she does per year (approx. 8 per annum). The on-going compulsory expenses are also substantial - professional development, website renewals, insurance, stationery, telephone and advertising. She has already begun to think in what areas she could "cut back" on to afford this compulsory celebrant fee. Membership of a professional celebrant association is one expense that is likely to be axed. If the Government wants its Commonwealth Celebrants (those who represent the AGD) to be a professional group, then wouldn't membership of a professional association be important and encouraged? Insurance is another non-compulsory expense, and therefore many celebrants may not renew their insurance, in order to cover the cost of the fee.

The over-supply of celebrants is another major concern. Only last week a client bargained with my wife for a fee of \$200 to match that of another celebrant. This is much less than even the cheapest registry office wedding!!!! Had my wife

accepted the booking, she would effectively have been working for nothing. This is a good example of a completely unacceptable situation for all parties concerned. Not only for the celebrants who can't match such low fees, but also for the celebrant who feels they must offer only \$200 in order to secure a wedding booking, not to mention the couple, who will end up with a real "cheapo" style wedding. What professional celebrant in their right mind will spend 10 – 15 hours writing a personalized ceremony for between \$15 and \$20/hour. Is it no wonder that this over-supply has cheapened the image of celebrants, with couples wanting to cut costs on that part of their wedding day, (ie: their ceremony) which is usually already one of the lowest costs involved. **When the Government does not value its own celebrants, is it little wonder that the community will not as well?**

When celebrants are treated as a commodity to be dispensed with simply on the basis of paying a fee or not, then there is little hope for upgrading the status of marriage. Many suggestions have been made by various celebrant associations in their Senate Submissions on how funds can be raised for the Government Marriage Celebrant Section, without penalizing and discriminating against one group of celebrants, who provide a fabulous service to the community.

I strongly urge you to read those celebrant associations' submissions which provide many sensible, common-sense and non-discriminatory suggestions on how to raise funds and IMPROVE the Celebrant industry in this country.

Trevor Warburton

24th April 2013