

Submission regarding Proposed Changes to Civil Celebrancy

My name is Jill Caroline Fry.

I live in Alton Downs, a rural area, which is outside of Rockhampton, Queensland in an area described as Capricornia.

I was appointed as a Marriage Celebrant on 2/9/2008 after doing the required courses. When I applied and was appointed it was as a lifetime appointment, subject to continuing to be a fit and proper person and complying with the Code of Practice and the terms of 39g of the Marriage Act. I respected that I would be subject to 5 year reviews and annual OPD obligations.

There are a number of Celebrants in Capricornia which includes Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Emu Park areas with considerable distances to be travelled unlike in the large cities with larger populations. As there is no longer a 'capping' of the number of celebrants there are a number people always in training so the average number of weddings per celebrant is dropping.

Since 2008 I have performed 32 weddings.

In 2012 I performed 12 weddings and I considered this to be a very successful year for me. I performed weddings from Yeppoon to Ridgeland and an average wedding is 45 minutes to a 1.5 hour drive away. I charge \$450 for a wedding regardless of distance, which usually required me to have at least 3 or 4 meetings with the couple usually in their home or in Rockhampton which makes my mileage very high as I live 25 kilometres from Rockhampton. I keep asking myself why I bother to go ahead trying to be a professional, competent, caring, celebrant when all the brides are interested in is how cheap I am! I respect that other celebrants may charge less than myself but I consider that I supply a personalised service in a rural area to enable couples to have the wedding when and where they wish.

2011/12 was the first year I made a profit - \$172. Knowing that there are a limited number of weddings in Capricornia region I have been prepared to make a loss in the early years to establish myself and reputation allowing that as time went by my practice would build.

You may suggest that I increase my fees to cover the costs like any other business but the market in my area would not accept this. I would just have less weddings and higher expenses! Very few celebrants could be construed as full time celebrants actually making a wage. Most celebrants are part time at best and they are *not* providing a free community service. (Unlike Justices of the Peace)

The proposed changes to Celebrancy mean that Celebrants would go from a lifetime appointment to an annual registration. I would in fact become a government contractor and therefore may find myself unable to continue to provide a service in my rural community. So in the years when there is not a lot of weddings available to me I will have to do 1 wedding to cover my OPD costs (approximately \$200) and the proposed registration fee alone without expenses.

Celebrancy is not a fixed income and I cannot guarantee that I will have enough weddings in a year to pay the costs of office, equipment and vehicle etc. I seldom have clients booking me more than 6 months in advance.

If I am unable to pay the registration fee or need time off e.g. for illness what happens to my registration? Would it be suspended while I was not able to work? Would I automatically become re-registered upon payment of the fee for the next year or would I have to pay *all* arrears which would then put further hardship upon me? Or possibly worse would I have to redo the course and registration again? (Remember I was appointed for life subject to the Code of Practice, Marriage Act, OPDs and reviews).

I believe I am providing my regional community with a professional service that not only unites the couple but helps to unite the community itself. Nowadays it is not a social or legal necessity for a couple to get married but a choice. To be able to celebrate with and in the community you live is vital to that community's sense of self.

I believe the proposed changes are discriminatory against Civil Wedding Celebrants as these changes will not be applied to the religious officiant. I also believe that this legislation is biased against regional celebrants who have a smaller population base to start with and a larger geographical area to service.

A possible solution to the issue would be to charge a **licence fee to the couple** which would apply to every marriage whether religious or civil. This could be obtained by adding a form to the Notice of Intention to Marry (NOIM) with payments particulars such as Qld BDM now use for issue of certificates. The processing would be simpler and the government would raise considerably more funds through this method and be seen to be impartial and non-discriminatory.

Yours sincerely

Jill Caroline Fry CMC