

Yvonne Wood JP CMC

12<sup>th</sup> April 2013

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

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

Dear Sirs,

I am a Civil Marriage Celebrant and have been since 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011. In that time I have done 30 weddings working in a part time capacity as I still run my own small business in conjunction with my husband. I am 61 years old and hope to continue practising as a Marriage Celebrant in a more full time capacity when we eventually retire from our business.

I am writing this submission as I am concerned about the proposed changes that the government is considering making to the administration of the Marriage Celebrants Program. I feel strongly that the consultation process was flawed (our peak body does not agree with the recommendations and nor do ANY celebrants that I have spoken with both personally and via professional internet forums) and I do not believe that the decision-making process was representative of the concerns of celebrants or in the best interests of the general (marrying) public.

The change from lifetime to annual license is the critical change - a change that would have serious and negative impact on both celebrants (reluctant to invest in infrastructure etc.) and the public (e.g. lack of security and guarantee of choice in celebrants if their celebrant is deregistered and must pass on their ceremonies to another celebrant, presumably of their own choice, not the couple's choice, or just to whoever was handy).

I understand the need for a professional fee, and applaud the introduction of a fee for new celebrants, but seriously doubt that it is needed to investigate complaints (less than an average 0.5 % Statutory Complaints in an annual number of over 72,000 weddings and an 0.00005% error rate affecting the validity of marriage in last 15 years (1998-2012) conducted by all marriage celebrants i.e. including State appointed). Or for that matter to answer celebrant's queries, as these are already being addressed by each state's BDM along with the advisory capacity of the

professional organisations to which most celebrants belong. But why only Commonwealth Registered Celebrants and not ALL celebrants?

I agree that there should be a mechanism to carefully monitor the entry into the profession by people who are poorly trained and who do not display the competence to complete the tasks required by a professional Marriage Celebrant (I am staggered by the number of people who cannot even write such a thing as an email using correct grammar, spelling and punctuation).

With respect, the Senate Committee needs to fully understand that celebrants were appointed for life; that the existing five-yearly review is already a mechanism for quality control that does have disciplinary penalties attached (those that are outlined in the Marriage Act) which may or may not involve deregistration for serious cause, but do not include any provision for automatic deregistration.

In conclusion, my position is as follows:

- I 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
- I support the introduction of an Application Fee for the processing of all new marriage celebrants.
- I oppose removal of 5 year reviews of life-time appointments
- I oppose the introduction of a "Celebrant Registration Fee" unless this applies to all marriage celebrants (not just Commonwealth Registered Celebrants).
- I propose a minimal staffing of the Marriage Law and Celebrant Section, making the maximum use of the advice and support of the peak body CoCA, celebrant associations and the State Registry Offices
- And finally, I call for implementing the recommendations of CoCA's comprehensive [Submission on Cost Recovery & Increasing Professionalism](#). Those recommendations are aimed at a cost-effective and professionally enhancing system for the appointment and ongoing management of the Commonwealth Marriage Celebrant Program.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission and hope that you will be persuaded to re-think the implementation of the legislation in its current form.

Yours faithfully,

Yvonne Wood JP CMC