

To Whom It May Concern:

23.04.2013

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Australia

My name is Claire Goodwin, Civil Marriage Celebrant, Registration number A7850

I love my profession as a Civil Marriage Celebrant, I believe it is a great honour to have been Registered in September 2006 by the Attorney General to solemnise Marriages according to the Laws of our Country, Australia.

I am a battler, I am on Aged Pension and do my best to keep the brain active, and continue to remain assertive by working part in the retail industry of only 13 hours per week, therefore taking a reduced Pension. Due to the 'flood gates' being flung open in 2008+ I find it is impossible to run my Celebrant business profitably, my business being subsidised by my very small retail wage. I am border line to be a statistic, therefore facing resignation, should the impact of the proposed FEES and CHANGES for Civil Celebrants, Bills be introduced. I legally run the business, as a business, not a hobby, via my annual Tax Return, am still running at a LOSS after 6+ years! I was told 2-3 years and you would be 'up and running'. Now, with an influx of Celebrant numbers, I personally have been crushed, presently running at loss of \$24,000+ (this figure includes set up costs and a small loss compounding after 6 years).

I desperately want to run my Celebrant business in profit, it would be more beneficial for me to give up working in retail and be practicing as a 'FULL TIME CELEBRANT'. In the first 3 years my numbers of Weddings performed increased. It was a pleasure to complete the 'Annual Return' to the AGs Department. Now, my numbers of weddings performed annually has deteriorated annually.

- Should the Annual Return process have remained in place, the Statistics in the Marriage Celebrants Section would be proof enough that Civil Celebrants struggle due to the glut in numbers allowed to be Registered.

- While I feel aspiring new Celebrants should be able to give consideration to train and put forward their Application for Registration by the AGs Department, serious consideration re stricter guidelines should be given to the Application process. **I do agree with that part of the Bill.**

However, speaking from my experience, as a Civil Marriage Celebrant, I am privileged to marry couples and I look upon my role as a very significant and important part of any couples' Wedding Day.

Therefore, I prepare myself to the best of my ability, I have educated myself appropriately, I have always attended yearly the required OPD, for which I pay for at my own expense.

I belong to the Australian Marriage Celebrant Association (AMC), for which I pay an annual membership fee, at my own expense, this to ensure I am kept knowledgeable with latest amendments to the Marriage Act, Explanations pertaining to same, official documentation, changes etc... The AMC have representation at CoCA who have put forward their submission to Parliament re the proposed BILLS.

- **I strongly recommend that strong consideration be given to the submission handed in by CoCA.**

I am available for couples to contact me by phone or email, unlimitedly to ensure their Marriage ceremony is what they require.

I have state of the art equipment to ensure I comply with the Code of Practice and that the couples' ceremony is meaningful, in that every word uttered is heard by all witnesses present. I have recently replaced/updated this equipment in view of the 'digital changes' in Australia, at my own expense \$15,000+. To recoup this amount, I need to perform 3+ weddings. My total number of weddings last year was 16, this current financial year I only have 13 on my books.

I have placed myself in the sad situation of having to personally refinance by selling house, relocating and downsizing to a new home. This was a very costly experiences, in a gallant effort to 'stay afloat' in this very competitive industry. The outcome, to be able to give whole heartedly to my couples and their dream of a wonderful wedding day!

I attend their wedding ceremony at the venue of their choice. The couples can invite unlimited number of guests to their wedding.

Now considering the aforementioned, is it fair that "I" as a Civil Marriage Celebrant, along with my fellow colleagues, am to be "slugged" with the proposed registration fee solely, excluding Religious and Registry Office Celebrants?

- **Why am "I" being singled out, why am "I" being discriminated against? Why are religious celebrants and the Registry Office celebrants not being also charged a registration fee?**

All persons who solemnise marriages in Australia must be authorised under the one Marriage Act. Marriage celebrants are in three categories in the Marriage Act 1961 under

- Division 1—Authorised celebrants - Subdivision A—Ministers of religion and
- Division 1—Authorised celebrants - Subdivision B—State and Territory officers etc.
- Division 1—Authorised celebrants - Subdivision C—Marriage celebrants

The proposed “Registration Fee” is only to be applied to Subdivision Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants

So **all staff at State Registry offices**, who conduct marriages and **ARE ON A SALARY** (unlike Commonwealth Marriage Celebrants) will be **exempted** from this fee.

Marriage Celebrants from these **Recognised Religions will be exempted** from the proposed Annual Registration Fee. These recognised Religious are financially kept by their chosen Church/Denomination, they do not have to ‘pay their own way’.

- Why do **Civil Marriage Celebrants have to support themselves** and now be slugged with the **FEE**?
- Why are Civil Marriage Celebrants, myself and my colleagues, being discriminated against?

Ok if there is to be a Fee, I will agree to that, but, please give urgent consideration to the amount and how often it should be paid:

- Even State business licences are issued for 3 or more years and a state driving licence can be paid to cover 5 years. There are other fair and more efficient options for cost recovery, if this is the prime hidden aim of the bills
- Ok, Most professionals have to pay a required licence fee, eg nurses, electricians, plumbers, etc, so if we have to pay a fee, **please keep it in line with the number of Weddings performed annually, pro rata maybe?**

As Australians, we pay our TAXES, payment of a HIGH fee for me would be detrimental to my being able to continue in this Industry.

A dedicated professional will have expenses such as advertising, insurance, memberships, stationery, office, internet, amplifier, OPD, travel and yes, registration. Like most things the more you put into your business, the more you get out of it. As in most businesses, you have to spend money to make money. However, due to the decline in numbers of Weddings performed, the OUTGOINGS far exceed the INCOMING finances. A huge fee at this stage would be so detrimental to any dedicated professional.

- The agreed upon FEE **should not increase** with inflation.

This is a COST RECOVERY process by the Government. The proposal that the FEE may even increase annually due to inflation is outlandish. My Pension does not increase at such a rapid pace.

- My passion to continue as a Celebrant is foremost in my mind. Any extra burden to me financially will cripple me.

Marriage Bills before parliament claim they are to make the Department more efficient and effective at their Regulation role.

- How many new staff will be employed? 2, 4, 6, 8 or 10 persons?

- Will they be fully trained and experienced practicing Civil Marriage Celebrants with the role of culling dedicated Civil Marriage Celebrants, similar to my colleagues and myself?
- What will be their anticipate wage? \$40,000, \$60,000, \$80,000, \$100,000 - \$130,000 PER YEAR!!!!
- Multiply the chosen FEE amount by 10,300 Celebrants in Australia!
- How do their wages compare with a dedicated and professionally trained Civil Marriage Celebrant like myself, I for one, who earned Taxable Income of \$18,761 and Income from Celebrant work \$9,612? (then reduced by numerous outgoings).
- Will these clerical staff at AGs Department have to comply with annual OPD and Licence Fees, Membership fees, Insurance etc?
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- **It is well known the Court Officers, eg BDM staff, are able to go out into the Community and perform Marriages, thus reducing the numbers of couples available to dedicated Civil Marriage Celebrants!**
- **BDM staff are paid a WAGE by the Government, yet get a remuneration again for performing the weddings outside**
- **Do Court Officers comply with annual OPD and Licence Fees, Membership fees, Insurance, huge Advertising etc?**
- **Will the activities of Court Officers be Policed?**

An annual fee will put stress on both couples and Civil Celebrants.

Couples find the extensive planning and preparing of the dream Wedding Day very stressful. Once they decide upon their chosen professionally trained and dedicated Celebrant they put all their trust in that one Celebrant.

Should unforeseen circumstances eg illness, hospitalisation (being away from internet and email facilities), annual travel arrangements etc cause a Civil Celebrant to without knowledge miss the incoming email to remind them of payment of annual fee or review -- - instant dismissal could find the Civil Celebrant in middle of months of deliberation and the fight process to be re-registered.

Thus putting additional stress on a Celebrant to inform their forward booking couples that they have been deregistered. Outcome ... transfer of NOIM to another Celebrant.

This is hard enough when serious illness or injury may strike their particular celebrant, but the possibility will be greatly increased by an annual fee system tied to the grounds for dismissal.

I put my case forward to Parliament and hope that my submission will be reviewed.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to read this submission. I await with anticipation the outcome the Bills.

Yours sincerely

Claire Goodwin CMC JP

www.coastalcelebrant.com.au

www.affordablemarriagecelebrant.com.au