



CelebrateLife!  
Merrilyn Williams  
Commonwealth Registered Civil Marriage Celebrant  
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The Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

**Inquiry into the Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration and Fees) Bill 2013  
And the Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Bill 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment to the above inquiry.

I make this submission in my capacity as a Commonwealth Registered Civil Marriage Celebrant appointed in 2003, and working as a full time celebrant having conducted over 800 marriage ceremonies.

**Application Fee for Aspiring Celebrants**

I support this initiative

**Imposition of Annual Registration Fee**

I support an annual registration fee with the following important considerations:

Preamble: Since the introduction of the marriage celebrant program by Lionel Murphy and Garfield Barwick in 1973, all appointments have been made on a lifetime basis subject to adherence to the regulations outlined in Section 39G of the Act and a satisfactory five yearly performance review.

- I am concerned that the imposition of an annual registration fee threatens my lifetime appointment and interferes with forward planning for marrying couples who often make celebrant bookings more than one year prior to their wedding date. Therefore, the imposition of an annual fee should not be linked to punitive measures for celebrants who received a lifetime appointment prior to the introduction of the annual fee.
- Since 2003 the Marriage Celebrant's Program has had legislative authority to discipline /de-register those celebrants who have not completed mandatory Ongoing Professional Development, yet has seemingly chosen not to fully implement that authority. Celebrants who have not complied with OPD should be de-registered.
- Initially it was proposed that the registration fee would assist in cost recovery related to the five yearly performance reviews for each celebrant. According to the latest information, the five year review will be eliminated thus removing the need for cost recovery.
- The Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) initiating the rationale for this bill stated that the government fully expected any costs to Civil Celebrants to be passed on to those couples wanting a secular marriage. This is discrimination against those marrying couples on the basis of belief (or non-belief) which contravenes international and national anti-discrimination laws, rules, covenants and regulations. Therefore, this fee if applied must include ALL marriage celebrants, not just Commonwealth Registered Civil Marriage Celebrants.
- Set-up and ongoing costs for professional celebrant services are considerable. I completed the Graduate Diploma in Arts (Civil Ceremonies) at Monash University in

2002 and established a private library of celebrant related resources which incurred a total debt of around \$15,000. Following my appointment, I spent further considerable monies to establish a fully equipped office with the usual overheads and am required to meet recurring costs such as:

- Ongoing Professional Development
- Membership of a Celebrant Organisation
- Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance
- Marriage Stationery from Canprint
- Maintaining and updating computer and software, printer
- Vehicle maintenance
- Advertising
- Website maintenance and upgrades
- Additions to resource library

The costs of maintaining a professional celebrant practice are rising but the remuneration for celebrant services is not. This is due to fierce competition between too many celebrants many of whom charge very little for their services just to secure the booking. It is likely that the imposition of an impossibly high annual fee may encourage more experienced celebrants to leave the profession thus reducing the opportunity for less experienced celebrants to receive valuable advice and mentoring. In addition, those celebrants who do not engage in outside employment but who subsidise their services with their private savings, would be disadvantaged and likely to choose retirement.

**Acceptance of the Australian passport as evidence of date and place of birth of the party.**

I support this amendment.

Yours sincerely

Merrilyn Williams

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