

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERALS DEPARTMENT

**Question No. 18**

**Senator Ludwig asked the following question at the hearing on 24 May 2007:**

- a) How many staff (in FTE) are assigned to the Marriage Celebrant section of the Attorney-General's Department?
  - (i) Provide a breakdown of their duties, and the number of staff (in FTE) assigned to each duty.
- b) For the Marriage Celebrant section of the Attorney-General's Department, please indicate:
  - (i) For 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07, what was the annual budget assigned to this section?
  - (ii) For those years, what was the actual expenditure on that section?
- c) Are you able to indicate whether or not the Department intends to set up a working party or liaison group between the section and Celebrants across Australia?
  - (i) If not, why not?
  - (ii) If so, when is this likely to occur?

**The answer to the honourable senator's questions from the Family Law Branch is as follows:**

- a) There are currently 12 full-time equivalent staff assigned to the Marriage Celebrants Section of the Attorney-General's Department.
  - (i) All staff in the Marriage Celebrants Section undertake policy work and other duties relating to the Marriage Celebrants Program, the *Marriage Act 1961* and the *Marriage Regulations 1963*. The Registrar of Marriage Celebrants has overall responsibility for management of the Program. There are no staff whose position relates solely to one duty. Several staff members have administrative, supervisory and staff management responsibilities.

The duties to which each staff member is assigned vary according to Marriage Celebrants Program cycles that change throughout the year, and other administrative and policy priorities which may arise without notice. The following is a guide to the types of duty undertaken within the Section and approximate allocation of full-time equivalent staff time to each duty:

The Section includes approximately 3 full-time equivalent staff whose primary role includes duties relating to general marriage policy and regulation of the Program.

There are approximately 2 full-time equivalent staff whose duties relate to applications for registration as a marriage celebrant.

Approximately 1 full-time equivalent staff perform the duty of providing guidance to marriage celebrants.

Performance reviews of marriage celebrants are conducted by approximately 1 full-time equivalent staff members.

Ongoing professional development of marriage celebrants occupies the time of approximately 1.5 full-time equivalent staff members.

Enquiries take up approximately 1.5 full-time equivalent staff members' time.

Approximately 2 full-time equivalent staff are engaged in clerical support for the program including, data entry, records administration and file management.

b)

- (i) Annual budget figures are not kept at Section level. Estimated expenditure on direct employee costs for the years 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 is noted below.
- (ii) As the Marriage Celebrants Section is part of a larger cost centre (the Family Law Branch) these costs were calculated based on the records of the staffing of the Marriage Celebrants Section. These costs include salaries, superannuation, and accruals for annual and long-service leave.

For 2004-05 the estimated direct employee costs for the Marriage Celebrants Section were \$812,400;

for 2005-06 the estimated direct employee costs for the Marriage Celebrants Section were \$726,400;

for 2006-07 the estimated direct employee costs for the Marriage Celebrants Section were \$980,500.

c) The Department has no immediate plans to set up a working party or liaison group between the section and celebrants across Australia.

- (i) The Department uses E-bulletins for publicising new initiatives of the Marriage Celebrants Program.

The Department also conducts annual face-to-face meetings with major associations, eg the National Council of Authorised Celebrants Australia and the Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants.

In addition, the Registrar of Marriage Celebrants and the Senior Legal Officer of the Marriage Celebrants Section visit each capital city once a year to deliver ongoing professional development activities to associations. They take the opportunity to liaise with members of associations at these functions, and propose to continue this practice.

Some States have several marriage celebrant associations, and rather than considering any amalgamation or pooling of resources in order to better support or advocate for their marriage celebrant members, in recent years the number of organisations has actually increased. This situation is likely to be confusing for new marriage celebrants and for others considering association membership. It also makes liaison with government more difficult.

In August 2007, the Attorney-General wrote to all marriage celebrant associations encouraging them to discuss future roles and responsibilities, with a view to forming one national representative body.

(ii) N/A