



CONSULTATION ON REFORMS TO THE MARRIAGE CELEBRANTS PROGRAM

The Attorney-General's Department is seeking feedback on proposed reforms to the Marriage Celebrants Program. We are interested in input from marriage celebrants, as well as from Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDMs), registered marriage celebrant training organisations and the broader community.

This information sheet outlines the consultation process, and provides some brief information about the proposed reforms.

We encourage all celebrants and those interested who are unable to attend a consultations meeting in person to continue to provide written feedback to the Department so that your views can be considered.

Additional information about the proposed reforms is available on the Attorney-General's Department's website at <www.ag.gov.au/MarriageCelebrantsProgramReforms>.

ABOUT THE PROPOSED REFORMS

Professional celebrants' fee

An annual registration fee—the professional celebrants' fee— will come into effect from 1 July 2013. The fee will not generate revenue for the Government; it will enable the Marriage Celebrants Program to operate on a cost recovery basis and to support measures to ensure the continued professionalism of marriage celebrants.

The fee's structure and details will be determined during the consultation process. Although the fee amount has not been set, it is anticipated that the fee per celebrant will be less than \$600 per year.

Improvements to the Program

The improvements to the Marriage Celebrants Program funded by the fee will include:

- a strengthened application process for new celebrants
- proactive and regular monitoring of celebrant compliance with professional development obligations
- improved performance reviews and investigation of complaints
- improved service and accessibility to the Department through an online portal and dedicated phone service, and
- updated written information, guidance and advice to assist marriage celebrants in performing their role.

WHY ARE REFORMS NEEDED?

The Marriage Celebrants Program was established in 1973 to provide a meaningful alternative to registry office and religious weddings. Its purpose is to make available to the community suitably qualified and competent celebrants to perform marriage ceremonies.

The Attorney-General's Department is committed to maintaining a high professional standard among marriage celebrants. The role of a marriage celebrant carries significant legal responsibilities and, unlike most occupations,

involves working alone and unsupervised from the day the marriage celebrant is authorised to solemnise marriages. Registered celebrants rely on the Department for guidance and advice on carrying out their responsibilities under the Marriage Celebrants Program.

Celebrants currently pay no charge for receiving these services from the Department, or for being registered as a celebrant.

A statistical snapshot

- The Department handles 10,000 to 18,000 enquiries each year. Many of these enquiries are complex, raise significant legal issues and require a written response.
- 10,300 celebrants are currently registered under the Program— a trebling since 2003.
- Over 60% of marriages per year are conducted by celebrants registered under the Marriage Celebrants Program (compared to the 30-40% of marriages performed by ministers of religion who are registered by State and Territory BDMs to solemnise marriages on the nomination of their religious organisation).
- 120,118 marriages were registered in Australia in 2009— this rate has remained largely static.
- 10 per cent of celebrants registered under the Marriage Celebrants Program perform ceremonies for independent religious organisations.
- Approximately 60 percent of celebrants live in capital city areas.

ABOUT THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Purpose

The consultation process aims to:

- provide a forum for celebrants to make comments and exchange views with the Department on the proposed reforms
- enable the Department to provide information about:
 - the current operation of the Program
 - the aims and objectives of the reforms
 - the scope of the proposed improvements being considered, and
- enable the Department to seek specific feedback from celebrants on a range of issues as outlined in this information sheet.

Participating in the consultation process

You can provide feedback about the proposed reforms to the Marriage Celebrants Program by:

- attending the formal consultation meetings
- sending an e-mail with your views to celebrantprogramreform@ag.gov.au
- writing to the Attorney-General's Department's Marriage Law and Celebrants Section, and
- providing feedback through your celebrant association.

Please visit our website regularly for information about other opportunities to provide feedback, and updates on progress of the consultation process.

FEEDBACK ON SPECIFIC ISSUES

We are interested in your feedback on any aspect of the proposed reforms that you wish to raise. However, we are particularly keen to hear your views on the following questions:

- Should there be a separate application fee, as distinct from an annual registration fee, for new celebrants?
- What is the best way to structure the professional celebrants' fee to take into account the need to ensure the continuing provision of marriage celebrancy services to rural and remote communities within regional Australia?
- Are there specific items or services that marriage celebrants would like to see included in the professional celebrants' fee?
- How can we strengthen the application process for new people seeking to become celebrants?
- What matters should the Department take into account in designing the on-line access portal for marriage celebrants?
- What is the best way for the Department to improve information provision to marriage celebrants?
- What kind of strategies would best educate the public about the significance of the work of marriage celebrants?
- What specific activities should be considered to raise the professional standards of marriage celebrants?
- How can marriage celebrants, individually or collectively, raise the professional standing of marriage celebrancy?

Department's contact details

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