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Ms Nicola Roxon
Attorney-General of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Monday, 10 December 2012

Dear Attorney

Support for Coalition of Celebrant Associations

The Committee of the Humanist Celebrant Network (HCN) is pleased that **our Delegate, Charles Foley**, reports that you have begun considering recommendations from your Civil Celebrant 'peak body' the Coalition of Celebrant Association – CoCA - regarding:

- **enhancing the status**, real skills and professional expertise of Civil Marriage Celebrants
- **restoring parity** with State nominated mainstream religious celebrants
- examining ways the Department can implement Cost Recovery (if it is so necessary) with **Equity and Fairness** in an effective and efficient manner.

You are aware that all celebrant associations, indeed nearly all civil celebrants, have expressed grave concerns about the 2003 “business model”. We refer in particular to the **mass appointing** of Civil Marriage Celebrants.

Our Humanist Association wants to ensure that you as Attorney-General know that **we support CoCA's recent recommendations** for the Marriage Act to be urgently changed to:

- **cap the number** of new appointees, and work in sensitive ways to decrease the current excess numbers, so that celebrants deliver a sufficient number of ceremonies to maintain and improve their knowledge and skills. (CoCA's -to MLCS -February 2012)
- Strengthen, clarify and refine **Conflict of Interest** provisions.
- Ensure a “professional” model of celebrancy applies, without discrimination, to all civil and religious marriage celebrants, as as per Professor Michael Pryles legal opinion given to your MLCS staff in 1994. (<http://www.collegeofcelebrancy.com.au/Pages3/Pryles2.html>)

The HCN also strongly supports CoCA's recommendation and our Delegate Charles Foley's repeated representations to yourself , Ms Christine Duke and your MLCS staff for:

- **a Senate Inquiry** into Australia's marriage law, rules and regulations including the entire marriage celebrant Program and (MLCS) services- and essential equity before the law in every way between all celebrants.

- **Productive Ongoing Professional Development (OPD)** with interesting and enriching content by competent and experienced teachers who have a vision of what celebrancy can and should mean to Australian culture.
- **Opening OPD to additional providers** who have a vision of how they can genuinely improve the skills and celebrants and inspire them.

We feel strongly that the **current ‘closed shop’** of benefiting just 3 providers (two of whom are owned by non-celebrants !) is not and never has been in celebrants’ best interests, and warned against it years ago when this plan was being considered.

Finally, Attorney, this is a **Whitlam Government initiative**, of which all parties approved, and to which many of us have voluntarily given much of our lives, because experience quickly showed how good it was for our society.

This program has always gone backwards when the Attorney General has not shown a personal interest - the last ten years being the most tragic example. The Humanist Celebrant Network considers your personal support as Attorney is vital. Your predecessor Lionel Murphy himself attended many wedding ceremonies by civil celebrants to encourage them to do the best job possible.

Civil celebrants should have the same respect from you and your department as that granted to religious celebrants. **The disrespect and discrimination inherent in the current Act** and Regulations has resulted from the 2003 changes and recent controversial Cost Recovery proposals.

Ceremonies are one of the really important ways **humans have evolved to communicate with one another at a very deep level**. We ask your personal involvement.

Your sincerely.

Dally Messenger
Convenor