

**Humanist Celebrant Network (HCN)**  
**Convenor**  
Dally Messenger III

**Humanist Celebrant Network (HCN)**  
**CoCA Delegate**  
Mr Charles R Foley



Friday, 26 April 2013

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Parliament House, PO Box 6100  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Chairperson and Senators,

***Re: Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration and Fees) Bill  
and the  
Marriage (Celebrant Registration Charge) Bill 2013***

Dear Senators:

The government passes legislation to enable the citizens to live happily and securely in society, and so that they can have an enriching and fulfilling life.

**The ideal of the civil marriage celebrant programme** from the beginning was to enable meaningful rites of passage for secular people. I do not have to point out to you that most Australians live in a secular mode. Church attendances have been declining for many years and the aim of this programme has been to fill the cultural, social, and psychological needs which once the churches used to provide.

**Non-believers, non-churchgoing people, are not second class citizens.** They need meaningful rites of passage and ceremonies of substance and beauty in the same way as churchgoers do or once did. Milestone celebrations, such as weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies – simply to mention the main ones – mean a great deal to most people no matter what their belief or lack belief.

**We ask you as senators that you recognise the broad purpose of this program** and give it all the moral support you can. Please also recognise that this program **has enormous possibilities for strengthening society**. Ceremonies are the way humankind has involved to assist citizens adapt to changes in their lives, to communicate, transmit and reinforce values, to give expression to a wide range of the visual and performing arts (especially music poetry and prose - but many others as well), to be a means of powerfully communicating love, commitment, appreciation, recognition and history (for example the Anzac Day ceremonies in which we have just participated).

To appoint someone a marriage celebrant - and marriages are the flagship ceremony of all cultures - you validate and recommend that such a person is suitable for a much broader role in society.

**Celebrants are not merely legal functionaries**. The law is not the marriage. The law simply records the marriage for a range of other good purposes. But celebrants should be chosen because they are well trained, not only in delivering ceremonies, but in understanding who they are and why they are there.

**In general, we support the Coalition Celebrant Associations (CoCa)** at the same time pointing out that the Attorney General should be in charge of this program giving leadership, encouragement, and personal interest into a programme, which has unquestionably changed the paradigms of our society since its inception.

Leadership is also required to ensure that not only **celebrants are carefully trained, but are also carefully selected**, and are made to feel that they are honoured by their commission to enrich the culture, and the society, and the lives of their clients.

For example, **there are far too many celebrant organisations** but there is no leadership asking them those who have much in common to cooperate and combine. The writer cannot remember the last time an Attorney General asked celebrants to observe a high professional standard of ceremony preparation and rehearsal.

By far and away the worst feature of the last ten years has been **the overstated and excessive pre-occupation with legal matters** quite a slab of which has simply been plain wrong. The excessive numbers have meant that celebrants in general do so few weddings, that have not had the practice to stay current with legal knowledge and ceremonial skills.

### Summary

 The Programme needs leadership.

☞ The programme should primarily be seen as cultural, social and communal and of psychological assistance to individuals -adding to the sum total of human happiness.

☞ The programme needs to be taken out of the legal responsibility of a public servant and reside in the elected minister.

☞ the emphasis should be on the role of the celebrant in society and the ideals that this program carries.

☞ the proposals to discriminate against civil celebrants and diminish their long held prerogatives should be dismissed.

☞ senior celebrants who have served this program for many years should be honoured and respected and should be free of professional development obligations except in special circumstances.

☞ the proposals to discriminate against civil celebrants and to violate Section 116 on the Constitution should be treated with the contempt it deserves.

☞ Trainers and teachers of celebrants should be independently vetted very carefully for knowledge, skills and the ability to effectively communicate.

☞ The public servants who assist the Attorney General to administer this program should be instructed to respect the celebrants whom presumably he/she has carefully chosen and trained.

☞ The words “Civil Marriage Celebrant” should be clearly stated in the Marriage Act.

☞ As a member of CoCa we support the detailed report recommendations made by our peak body.

On behalf of our members

Please be assured of our gratitude for examining the current propositions and wish you all the best in your serious deliberations.

Your sincerely

*Dally Messenger III*  
Convenor  
*Charles R Foley*  
Delegate