

# Submission to the Attorney-General's Department

## *Ongoing Professional Development for Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants and Guidelines on Conflict of Interest and Benefit to Business for Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants DISCUSSION PAPER – NOVEMBER 2016*

**SUBMISSIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 5pm FRIDAY, 13 JANUARY 2017**

### Your details

<b>Name/organisation</b> <i>(if you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation, please provide the name of a contact person)</i>	Riverina Marriage Celebrants Association
<b>Contact details</b> <i>(one or all of the following: postal address, email address or phone number)</i>	

### Publication of submissions

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- Microsoft Word
- Rich Text Format (RTF)
- txt format.

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Would you prefer this submission to remain confidential? No

## Your submission

### ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Riverina Marriage Celebrants' Association (RMCA) are supportive of a professional development requirement for all Marriage Celebrants.

However, we believe some improvements could be made as follows:

- 1 RMCA supports changes to non-compulsory activities to allow Associations and State Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages to develop and offer OPD non-compulsory topics to Celebrants.
  - Each Association or Registry could determine the non-compulsory topics to be delivered. Attendance for members would not be compulsory, they could choose to attend or to source topics elsewhere. All Celebrants would be welcome, whether members of that Association or not. Fees could be charged.
  - This would result in a broader and more relevant range of topics being available. RMCA agree that these topics should relate to Marriage Celebrants, and not other forms of celebration (eg funerals).
  - Non-compulsory topics would not be written by the Attorney General's Department but would be developed by the Associations or Registries.
  - Associations/Registries would be encouraged to use only suitably qualified members in the development and delivery of non-compulsory topics.
- 2 RMCA supports the alignment of OPD and the annual charge – both to be aligned to the financial year with the six months transition as proposed.
- 3 RMCA supports the Attorney General proposal for a compulsory topic only when a change to legislation or legal requirements occur. This topic would be developed by the AG's Department and could be delivered online as an open book assessment. This approach would encourage all Celebrants to research the information for themselves and to consolidate their learning by having to determine the correct answers. As it stands now, some providers take Celebrants through the text in the provided booklet and answers are discussed in a group setting. It is quite feasible that many Celebrants do not actually learn the answers but simply listen to the given responses.

- 4 RMCA supports individual Celebrants keeping their own records of OPD completion – three hours per year, subject to audit.
  
- 5 RMCA supports the proposal that all RTO's with Certificate IV in Celebrancy on scope, Celebrant Associations and State Registries be recognised as approved providers of non-compulsory programs with the AG's Department issuing fairly strong guidelines, for example workshops, online training courses, accredited courses relating to small business activities, the delivery of high quality ceremonies, speech development, copyright law etc be listed as examples of appropriate training programs.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

- 1 RMCA strongly support clear guidelines on conflict of interest and believe that there is a trend towards some celebrants developing business opportunities and restricted trade practices. For example, celebrants who operate a reception business or catering business who offer celebrancy services/catering as a one stop shop; and reception venues who promote a small number of celebrants as being "on their books".
  
- 2 RMCA believe that these practices put couples at a disadvantage and detract from their ability to "shop around".
  
- 3 RMCA believe that the current approach to allow any number of people to become Celebrants has led to a lowering of standards in line with a lowering of fees charged. We support open market principles but feel that there should be a ceiling with regards to numbers of celebrants in proportion to population numbers. This approach will support existing Celebrants who are finding their market drastically reducing while the financial costs of operating are steadily increasing.

There is a sound argument for the AG's Department to set a minimum fee for all ceremonies. This would support the professional standing of a Celebrant in the community and build respect for the Marriage ceremony itself.

RMCA support Option 2 of the Discussion Paper (retain current policy on conflict of interest but allow a narrow range of business opportunities). RMCA believe that there should be a more stringently approach to ensuring Celebrants operate within the guidelines of Option 2