Message from our team

Welcome to our Summer 2014–15 issue of Marriage Celebrant Matters.

It’s been a busy year following key changes to Australian marriage legislation in 2014 including the implementation of cost recovery for the program and the roll-out of a new self-service portal for celebrants.

In early December the team met with marriage celebrant associations to discuss a broad range of issues including the introduction of cost recovery, feedback about marriage forms and ongoing professional development requirements. We value opportunities to meet face to face with celebrant associations, so we can continue to improve the Marriage Celebrants Program.

As at December 2014, there are more than 8780 Commonwealth registered celebrants from all Australian states and territories.

We wish you a happy holiday season and look forward to working with you all in the new year.

Marriage Celebrants Program Team

In this issue...

Message from our team ......................... p1
Introduction of cost recovery .................. p2
Passports as evidence of date and place of birth .................. p2
Forms for use under the Marriage Act 1961 and the Marriage Regulations 1963 .................. p2
Update your details ......................... p2
OPD and Performance monitoring in 2015 .................. p3
Regulator performance framework .......... p3
Vale Robyn Caine ......................... p3
Stronger Relationships Trial ................. p4
Keeping your ‘A number’ secure .......... p4
Telephone Service for Celebrants .......... p4
Contact us ................................ p4

Key dates

25 December 2014–1 January 2015
Department closes for Christmas. The Guidelines on the Marriage Act 1961 for Marriage Celebrants are an excellent resource if you need guidance during this time. Your celebrant association may also be able assist.

31 December 2014
Deadline to complete your 2014 ongoing professional development obligations.
Introduction of cost recovery

Cost recovery for the Marriage Celebrants Program commenced on 1 July 2014 with the most noticeable immediate change being the introduction of an annual registration charge. We appreciate all celebrants’ cooperation and understanding as we implemented the annual registration charge and the exemption process.

A key issue was the department’s ability to track payments which was difficult if the correct information was not included when paying the invoice. In particular, when making payments by electronic funds transfer it is important that celebrants carefully follow the instructions on the invoice and include the correct reference number.

Cost recovery for the program operates in accordance with the Government’s Cost Recovery Guidelines and the fees charged to celebrants represent the cost to regulate the program. Further detail on cost recovery can be in the Cost Recovery Impact Statement (CRIS) available from the Changes to the Marriage Celebrants Program page.

The department continues to look at ways to improve its service and achieve a more efficient process next year. These options include:

- providing a greater number of invoices electronically
- placing individual invoices on celebrant’s portals,
- and
- continuing to provide regular and clear guidance to celebrants on key dates and payment methods.

Passports as evidence of date and place of birth

The 2014 amendments to the Marriage Act 1961 allow marrying couples to use a passport as evidence of their date and place of birth.

An Australian passport showing the date and place of birth of the party can be used, as can a passport issued by a Government of an overseas country, showing the date and place of birth of the party.

An expired passport is acceptable. However, a cancelled passport is not acceptable. This is because a cancelled passport is a passport that has been reported as lost or stolen and is permanently cancelled by border control authorities in Australia or abroad.

For more information, please see Part 4.4.2 of the Guidelines on the Marriage Act 1961 for Marriage Celebrants published on the department’s website.

Forms for use under the Marriage Act 1961 and the Marriage Regulations 1963

On 1 July 2014 all forms, with the exception of the Form 15 Certificate of Marriage, were removed from the Marriage Regulations 1963. You may continue to use previous versions of the forms until 31 December 2014. The previous version of the NOIM can continue to be lodged with you throughout December 2014 for a marriage intended to take place as late as 30 June 2016. From 1 January 2015, the use of previous versions of all forms is not permitted.

Please see the Forms for use under the Marriage Act 1961 and the Marriage Regulations 1963 page on the department’s website for more information and to access forms for download. We are currently working to provide the Official certificate of marriage (formerly Form 16) and the Declaration of no legal impediment to marriage (formerly Form 14) as pdf writeable documents. We hope to have these available to you early in the New Year.

The 2015 compulsory ongoing professional development activity will cover the changes to the forms.

Update your details to the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department

As a celebrant, you are legally required to inform the Registrar of Marriage Celebrants at the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department of any changes to your contact details. This includes phone numbers, postal and residential addresses as well as email addresses. We encourage all celebrants to check the Register of Marriage Celebrants and ensure all details are up to date.

The Marriage Celebrants Self Service Portal is the easiest way to check and update your details. Simply login to the portal and select the ‘change your details’ button on the left side menu. You can choose what details you wish to display on the Register using the tick boxes on the right of your details. If you need assistance logging into the portal, please don’t hesitate to contact us on 1800 550 343.

Please take care when entering your details that they are entered correctly. If your details are incorrectly recorded you could miss out on important information, including your invoice for payment of the annual celebrants charge.
Ongoing professional development and performance monitoring in 2015

Ongoing professional development (OPD) is very important to help you keep informed and up to date about developments in your profession and in the Marriage Celebrants Program, including recent legislative changes. You must complete five hours of ongoing professional development each calendar year, unless you have an exemption. You have until 31 December 2014 to complete requirements for this year.

Compliance with your OPD requirement is one way of monitoring your performance as a celebrant. In addition, in 2015 there will be a short questionnaire that all celebrants will be required to complete. This will review other areas of performance, such as compliance with the Code of Practice, and any other matter that may have arisen. These could be any conflict of interest to declare, any offences committed or any physical or mental incapacity. More information about the questionnaire will be provided next year.

OPD Exemptions

All OPD exemption applications, including payment of the $30 application fee, must be received by the department by 31 December 2014. From 18 December 2014, payment of the exemption processing fee is only accepted via the marriage celebrant selfservice portal. Celebrants should choose the option that allows for the $30 processing fee to be paid at the time of lodging the application.

2015 compulsory OPD activity

In 2015 there will again be two hours of compulsory OPD activity (as there was in 2014). In accordance with feedback from state and territory Births Deaths and Marriages Registries, training providers and celebrant associations, the 2015 compulsory OPD activity will cover:

- changes to the marriage forms
- completing the NOIM – evidence of date and place of birth and establishing the identity of the parties to the marriage
- shortening of the required notice time, and
- questionnaire on common marriage celebrant errors.

The topics covered in the activity are designed to assist marriage celebrants understand the changes made by the Marriage Amendment (Celebrant Administration and Fees) Act 2014 and the Marriage Amendment (Fees and Charges) Regulation 2014.

More information about completing your ongoing professional development is available from our website.

Regulator performance framework

The Government has committed to reducing the cost of unnecessary or inefficient regulation imposed on individuals, business and community organisations by at least $1 billion a year. The Government has stated that regulation will only be imposed where absolutely necessary.

The Australian Government announced the release of the Regulator Performance Framework in October 2014. The framework establishes a common set of performance measures that will allow for the comprehensive assessment of regulator performance and their engagement with stakeholders. It is designed to encourage regulators to minimise their impact on those they regulate while still delivering the vital role they have been asked to perform.

The first reporting period will be July 2015–June 2016. Further detail of how the program will comply with the framework will be provided in due course.

For more information, visit the Cutting Red Tape website.

Vale Robyn Caine

Staff of the Marriage Law and Celebrants Section would like to pay our respects to Robyn Caine, who passed away on 23 May 2014. Robyn was appointed as a marriage celebrant in 1992, and was the former Coalition of Celebrants Association (CoCA) Chairperson and life member of Celebrants & Celebrations Network (CCN). She was influential in establishing CoCA and worked closely with many current and former staff of the department on marriage celebrant issues. This included an active role in advising on marriage celebrant training and cost recovery. Robyn’s energy, compassion and kindness will be missed.

More information about completing your ongoing professional development is available from our website.
**Stronger Relationships Trial**

Stronger Relationships is an Australian Government initiative which recognises that happy, healthy and strong relationships are vital for individual and family wellbeing, and help to strengthen communities, too.

Investing in marriage and relationship education and counselling can strengthen relationships and help improve personal and family wellbeing.

Stronger Relationships runs for 12 months from 1 July 2014 and is open to all couples over the age of 18 years in a committed relationship.

The trial provides couples with $200 towards relationship education and counselling with an approved provider of their choice.

Couples are able to enter the trial at any phase of their relationship. They don’t have to be newlyweds, they don’t have to intend to marry, they don’t have to have children, and they don’t have to be living together. To be eligible to participate, couples simply need to confirm they are in a committed relationship.

You may wish to pass information about Stronger Relationships to your clients.


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**Keeping your ‘A number’ secure**

Your ‘A number’ is unique to you and very important. Your ‘A number’ starts with the letter A and contains a number of numerical digits. Your ‘A number’ is used for the completion of marriage documents, is your username for the self-service portal and helps us identify you when you contact us. You should take care to store this number in a safe and secure place and avoid using it in any advertising.

A report released by the Minister for Justice, the Honourable Michael Keenan, in October 2014 indicates that identity crime is one of the most common of all crime types in Australia. Each year around 4 – 5% of Australians (750,000 to 900,000 people) suffer a financial loss through identity crime. While most victims lose less than $1,000, losses can range into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The report also supports the assessment of law enforcement agencies that identity crime is a key enabler of serious and organised crime.

Nationally, the total economic cost of identity based crime is estimated at more than $1.6 billion annually, with $900 million of this borne by the individual. In addition to the financial costs associated with identity crime, a significant proportion of victims also experience non-financial repercussions, including 1 in 10 experiencing mental or physical health impacts; and 1 in 17 being falsely accused of a crime.

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**Telephone Service for Celebrants**

You may have already taken advantage of our dedicated telephone service (1800 550 343) where an operator is available Monday through Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm AEST. Staff can answer questions about completing marriage forms, updating your personal details, general marriage questions and assist you with the self-service portal.

There has been a large spike in the number of enquiries made with the addition of a dedicated phone line this year. Year to date enquiries are already up by 25% on 2013 full year figures. Since the commencement of the phone line, we have received an average of 837 phone calls per month. Don’t forget that the Guidelines on the *Marriage Act 1961* for Marriage Celebrants are available and provide clarification on many frequently asked questions. We suggest you peruse the Guidelines in the first instance to find an answer to your query.

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**Contact us**

Phone: 1800 550 343 Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm AEST

Our staff can answer questions about completing marriage forms, updating your personal details, general marriage questions and assist you with the self-service portal.

For feedback or suggestions for this newsletter or our program, email us at: marriagecelebrantssection@ag.gov.au.

The department closes for Christmas from 25 December 2014 to 1 January 2015 inclusive.