

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Output 1.1

Question No. 12

Senator Crossin asked the following question at the hearing on 31 October 2006:

- (a) What is the current number of registered marriage celebrants?
- (b) How have these numbers increased in recent years?
- (c) Has the Department undertaken any research on the impact of these increased numbers – for example on the numbers of ceremonies conducted by each registered marriage celebrant?
- (d) What is the projected number of celebrants in (i) 2006-7; (ii) 2007-8; and in 2008-9?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- (a) As at 13 November 2006 there are 4828 marriage celebrants registered by the Commonwealth. In addition there are approximately 25,200 ministers of religion who are nominated by recognised denominations and are registered as marriage celebrants by the State and Territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages.
- (b) The reformed Marriage Celebrants Program (MCP) commenced on 1 September 2003. One of the features of the MCP is that the names of marriage celebrants authorised by the Commonwealth are placed on a Register of Marriage Celebrants. On 1 September 2003, 3454 marriage celebrants were transferred from the old system to the new Register of Marriage Celebrants. At the end of the first year of the MCP, on 31 August 2004, there were 3629 registered marriage celebrants. On 31 August 2005, there were 3868 registered marriage celebrants, and on 31 August 2006 there were 4056 registered marriage celebrants.
- (c) Based on information sent to the Department by civil marriage celebrants, for 2004-05 the following information is available: 434 performed no weddings, 1448 performed 1-50 weddings, 237 performed 51-100 weddings, 50 performed 101-150 weddings, 14 performed 151-200 weddings and 9 performed more than 200 weddings. The Department has similar figures for the 2003-04 registration year but does not have figures for years prior to 1 September 2003.

The Department is aware that registered marriage celebrants perform different numbers of ceremonies for a number of reasons. For example, some live in remote areas and are not called on to perform many marriages each year. Some choose to perform marriages for discrete communities, for example couples who wish to have marriages performed in a particular language. Some combine marriage celebrancy with other employment and limit the number of marriages they perform accordingly. Some celebrants work in tourist destinations and may perform many marriages each year.

- (d) There is a limit or 'cap' on the number of people who may be registered as marriage celebrants each registration year. The cap is calculated on a State by State basis with a 'capital city' region and 'rest of State' region in each State, except Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory, all of which form one region each. The cap is calculated on 31 August each year based on the total number of Commonwealth registered marriage celebrants in each region on that day. The cap for

each year is currently set at 20% of the total number of registered celebrants in each region. For the first three years of the MCP the cap was set at 10%. In addition there are three island regions, Norfolk Island, Cocos Island and Christmas Island from each of which one marriage celebrant can be registered each registration year.

The cap on the number of marriage celebrants who may be registered under the MCP in the 2006-07 registration year has been met in all regions of Australia except the Northern Territory and the islands. There are four places left in the Northern Territory region so the maximum number of marriage celebrants who could be registered in 2006-7 is 4835.

The actual number of available appointments for the next registration year, commencing on 1 September 2007, will not be known until 31 August 2007 as between now and then there will be celebrants who will resign (because of age, ill health or other change of circumstances) or move interstate. As at 13 November, a maximum of 967 places would be available for appointment, based on that date's total figure of 4,828 registered marriage celebrants, giving a possible total of 5797. However that number will change by 31 August 2007 as there will have been further resignations by then.

The cap on the number of registrations is a transitional arrangement for the first five years of the MCP and will be lifted on 1 September 2008. It is not possible to estimate how many celebrants will be registered in 2008-2009 because this will depend on the number of applications received and the number of applicants found to be suitable for registration.