

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

Program 1.3

Question No. 82

Senator Wright asked the following question at the hearing on 18 October 2011:

1. Attorney General's Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) states "The raw average for the number of marriages conducted by each celebrant registered under the Program is approximately 6.6 per annum." and that "it is anticipated that this factor may result in approximately 10% of celebrants registered under the Program deciding to leave the Program on a one-off basis".
 - (a) By reducing the number Commonwealth Appointed Marriage Celebrants by 10%, what is anticipated to be the average number of weddings per marriage celebrant per year?
 - (b) By reducing the number Commonwealth Appointed Marriage Celebrants by 30%, what is anticipated to be the average number of weddings per marriage celebrant per year?
2. Is the Annual Registration fee designed to discourage Commonwealth Appointed Marriage Celebrants who are doing very few weddings?
3. What information or data does the Department have as to the average number of weddings being performed by ministers of religion of a recognized denomination?
4. The Department formerly required annual returns from Commonwealth Marriage celebrants to enable some analysis of the distribution of the number of weddings per celebrant, as well as those performed in other languages. When was the requirement for Annual Returns discontinued?
5. The 1999 annual returns provided to the Department by the then 1671 commonwealth marriage celebrants showed that the average number of weddings per celebrant was 35 per year (5 times higher than today's rate of 6.6) and that less than 4% of those celebrants were able to gain full-time sustainable income from wedding work alone. Is it accurate that, even then, the vast majority of commonwealth appointed marriage celebrants were providing marriage services for part-time income or as a volunteer community service?

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

- 1.(a) At 28 October 2011 there were 10,323 marriage celebrants registered by the Commonwealth. A reduction of 10% would result in a total of 9,291.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 120,118 marriages were solemnized in Australia in 2009. Of these 39,740 were conducted by ministers of religion and 80,340 by civil marriage celebrants (this latter number includes a small proportion conducted by state or territory officials such as staff of the Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages but this number is not able to be calculated).

Taking into account these statistics, a raw average for the 9,291 Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants would result in 8 marriages per celebrant.

Information on the actual number of marriages conducted by each marriage celebrant is not available.

- 1.(b) Applying the factors outlined above, a reduction of 30% in the number of Commonwealth registered marriage celebrants would result in there being 7,227 marriage celebrants registered under the Program. A raw average would be 11 marriages per Commonwealth registered marriage celebrant per year.
2. No. The annual registration fee is intended to place the Program on a secure financial footing into the future and provide the capacity to properly regulate it. The Government's objective is to effectively regulate the Program, thereby improving the compliance and professionalism of marriage celebrants to the benefit of marrying couples and society more generally.
3. Ministers of religion from recognized denominations are registered and regulated by the Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages in the States and Territories. Based on the figures provided to the Department by the Registries there are currently 23,596 ministers of religion from recognized denominations registered to solemnize marriages. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has stated that, in 2009, 33.1% of marriages were conducted by ministers of religion. As 120,118 marriages were solemnized in Australia in 2009, this would equate to a raw average of 1 marriage per minister of religion per year.
4. This was discontinued with effect from 1 January 2010.
5. The Department cannot provide a response to this question. The Department has never maintained records on whether celebrants perform marriage ceremonies on a volunteer or part-time income basis, or the level of income generated from providing celebrancy services.