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All content is created for information only and is not legal advice, and not necessarily the views of the editor or any Celebrancy association. It is edited by Lou Szymkow and whilst all care is taken, the editor cannot guarantee the accuracy of information. The editor, guest contributors & guest speakers all volunteer their time for Celebrants. All care is taken to honour copyright but if an error is made, let us know for correction

An update from your AMC South Coast Coordinator, Lou Szymkow

To achieve success, we will continue to grow and do what we can to help each other grow. We are Celebrants Cheering for Each Other & Celebrating each other's success



COVER PIC
A wonderful home wedding overlooking Berringer Lake with Bride's Mum on video

Inside this issue:

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Celebrant
Professional
Development

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This huge issue includes articles on Consent including education for CPD on Consent Meetings

Celebrant Professional Development



Marriage Celebrants Portal

There is a help inside this newsletter for the **Compulsory Professional Development (CPD) activities for 2026** that became available on 20th March for completion by **Thursday 31st December 2026**.



This year's two activities are set out in the Marriage (*Celebrant Professional Development*) Statement 2026, available on the Federal Register of Legislation:

- <https://www.legislation.gov.au>

The compulsory activities are:

- Separate Meetings-45-minutes duration
- Knowledge of the Law (No 1)- 75-minutes duration.



Your obligations

You must complete **both** compulsory activities by **31 December 2026**.

Under section 39G(1)(b) of the *Marriage Act 1961* it is a legal obligation for registered marriage celebrants to undertake all professional development activities required by the Registrar of Marriage Celebrants. Failure to do so (*subject to any exemption granted*) may result in disciplinary measures being taken, which may include a caution, additional professional development activities, suspension or deregistration.

If you have been issued any additional activities as a disciplinary measure, these will also need to be completed.

Featured in this month's newsletter is everything *and 'more'* that a Celebrant will need to complete the OPD/CPD unit on 'Consent Meetings'. When you undertake your CPD, you will discover there are only 15 questions within the Consent Meeting unit but that the Knowledge of Law unit also has questions on consent and so you will find guidance on those within this issue as well. In addition there are articles for your interest such as the Shoalhaven Community Meeting, AG Resources links, the Family Court's 50th anniversary, and importantly, the upcoming BDM Seminar. You can learn about April Fool's Day, and discover more Poetry or consider the tips on Marketing.

Read how others view this newsletter with their Feedback, and finally, there are the Coordinator Comments.

Hope you enjoy"

Exemption applications

If you have an exceptional circumstance that will prevent you from



undertaking this important obligation for a significant period of the calendar year, you may apply for an exemption. Guidance about exemptions from CPD activities is available on our website:

- <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/professional-development>

Marriage Celebrants Portal

Using the marriage celebrant's self-service portal is the department's preferred method for completing your professional development activities. Information on accessing the portal is available at:

- <https://marriage.ag.gov.au/mcportal/>.

If you have not accessed the portal in the past 12 months, you will need to reset your password.

Please contact the MLCS if you have any questions about completing your compulsory professional development for 2026, or if you require assistance in accessing the portal.

MLCS Contact details for more help:
Marriage Law and Celebrants Section
Attorney-General's Department
3-5 National Circuit Barton ACT 2600
E: marriagecelebrantssection@ag.gov.au
T: 1800 550 343 (Tues-Thurs – 10am to 12.30pm – 1pm to 4pm Canberra local time)

HOW TO



Celebrant
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Development

STEP 1: Log into the Marriage Celebrant’s Portal (MarCel) where you will see there are a number of choices. Make your selection of follow the prompts.

If you haven't logged in for a while, or a certain period has expired, you may get the screen below to create anew password. If so, all you need do is enter a new password but remember to write it down so that you have record of it for future use.

STEP 3: Choose your preferred CPD option and follow the screen prompts

STEP 4: COMPLETING CPD

- *To start your CPD, choose the first option above, i.e. *“Complete Current Year CPD”*
- *Read the screen and make your selection
- *Download the information booklet before you commence the Consent assessment.
- *For best results, download the questions.
- *For the Knowledge of Law assessment, have the Act, Guidelines and Regulations on hand for ready reference.
- *To prevent the questions randomly changing, answer one question and then save. This will ensure your questions don’t change. They should remain in the same order with the answer options unchanged.
- *If you do not save, and log out, when you next log in, the questions may be randomly changed.
- *Read the question thoroughly before answering.
- *You have four answer options and four chances to submit.
- *Submit when complete and if all correct, you will be advised but if you have an error the system will highlight which answers are in need of correction before resubmission.

STEP 2: To satisfy two factor authentication (2FA), you will then be asked to enter a security code which will be sent to you via your previously chosen method i.e. text or

email. One you enter the code, you are logged in. Go to the next step.

CPD CONSENT KEY MESSAGE ON SEPARATE MEETINGS



The CPD [information booklet](#) downloadable from the link, reminds all authorised marriage celebrants that they are required under section 42B of the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) (the Marriage Act) to meet with each party to a marriage separately and in person **before they solemnise the marriage.**

This applies to all legal marriages and all authorised celebrants, including Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants, ministers of religion of a recognised denomination and state and territory officials authorised to solemnise marriages.

- The term '*separate meeting*' means that the celebrant and each party must meet in person **without the other party to the proposed marriage being present.**
- The party is able to bring a trusted person with them to the meeting if they wish to do so.

The purpose of the meeting is to assist the celebrant in satisfying themselves that each party is freely and voluntarily consenting to the marriage.

It is important to remember:

- ◇ real consent may change over time, even after you have met separately with a party – and your legal obligations in relation to real consent continue after the separate meeting
- ◇ a party could potentially indicate their consent to marry for the weeks or months leading up to the marriage, but on the day of the ceremony circumstances change which mean they cannot, or do not, give real consent
- ◇ marriage celebrants must be satisfied that both parties genuinely consent to the marriage
- ◇ if at any point a celebrant is unsure of the genuine consent of either party, it is their responsibility to not proceed with solemnising the marriage
- ◇ it is important that you always act in the best interests of a party who may be at risk by being mindful of their safety as well as your own
- ◇ there are important legal consequences where consent has not been given freely and voluntarily: a marriage may be void and a celebrant may have committed an offence

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONSENT?



◆ Real Consent:

A free, genuine, informed, current consent that is freely and voluntarily given without coercion or inhibition.

◆ Current Consent:

Given voluntarily and freely at a current point in time. Consent may be questioned at every planning meeting, immediately prior to the ceremony and even during the ceremony prior to the exchange of vows.

◆ Active Consent:

Clear and current, voluntary affirmative agreement to participate.

◆ Explicit Consent:

An explicit verbal or written agreement e.g., says "yes, I consent to be married".

◆ Informed Consent:

A clear understanding of what is being asked & consented to. Informed consent is given voluntarily

◆ Ongoing Consent:

Consent is exhibited through ongoing communication e.g. repeated expressions of consent, contributions to the ceremony script and making choices about content & activity.

◆ Passive Consent:

No clear or obvious objection but passive compliance. Just because a person doesn't say no or doesn't resist, doesn't mean they consent. So Passive Consent though is NOT real consent.

◆ Prior Consent

Previously given consent but which can be revoked at any time. Prior consent is not a substitute for real & active consent at the time of the marriage. e.g. a free & willing signing of the NOIM indicates consent at that time but consent can be revoked at any time, even during the ceremony before the vows are exchanged, so signing the NOIM is not an indication of current voluntary consent.

◆ Presumed Consent

This is an assumption that there is consent because a party is in attendance. It doesn't matter where you are or how someone is dressed or behaving, you can never assume or presume that there is consent.

◆ Withdrawn Consent

Withdrawn Consent, means there is NO consent because Consent has simply been revoked as it can be at any time before the vows are exchanged.



The *'Separate Meetings'* component of your CPD is the first compulsory unit. There are only 15 questions for which 45-minutes duration has been allowed but a number of celebrants have reported that they completed the unit in far less, especially if they read the information booklet which can be found at

- <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/compulsory-professional-development>.

N.B. There are also some questions on *Consent and Consent Meetings in the Knowledge of Law* unit.

Since June 2024, the Marriage Act, section 42B, has stipulated that Authorised Celebrants must physically meet each party to an intended marriage separately, prior to the ceremony, to establish real and current consent. The specific wording in the Marriage Act, is:

An authorised celebrant must not solemnise a marriage unless the authorised celebrant has met separately with each party before the intended marriage. The authorised celebrant and the party must be physically present at the meeting.

Though not specified in the Act, a support person can be present, without interference, but that support person cannot be the other party to the marriage, or someone representing the interests of the other party, or who may coerce the party. In some circumstances, it may be culturally appropriate for a support person or an independent interpreter, to be present.

It has always been recommended that you keep a record of the meetings, noting:

- who was present,
- the factors considered and
- the conclusion you reached on the question of real consent.

This means if any questions arise at a later date, you have a record of your decision-making process. This is important because celebrants may be called upon to give evidence in court as to the consent of the parties. Celebrant Phil Timbrell says he holds his separate meetings at the time of signing the DONLIM and so he ensures that the each party signs at their DONLIM at the time of their meetings and so he affectively has a signed record of the date and place that the meetings took place, confirmed by his witnessing the separate



It has to be real to be legal.

It is the Celebrant's legal obligation and responsibility to ensure consent is:

1. real,
2. informed &
3. current.

Consent can be revoked at any time and so prior consent is NOT a substitute for real & current consent. That means simply that people can change their minds, and if they do, the marriage cannot proceed. Types of 'consent' are explained later in this newsletter.

signatures. He though of course also evaluates context, mood, body language and any visual or emotive sign or irregularity.

The editor does something similar in that the meetings also usually take place in conjunction with the signing of the DONLIM, but a list of specific questions are asked to establish eligibility, and current & real consent with the view that always asking the same questions creates a consistency in evidence while, like Phil, the signing & witnessing is a record of the date and place of the meetings. The editor asks the following:

- 1) Are you over 18?
- 2) Are you sober?
- 3) Are you married to anyone else?
- 4) Is anyone telling you that you have to marry?
- 5) Do you want to get married?
- 6) When do you want to marry?
- 7) Who do you want to marry?

Simple enough, but let's break that down:

1. **An authorised celebrant must not solemnise a marriage unless the meetings have taken place**
2. **The authorised celebrant must meet separately with each party before the intended marriage.**
3. **The authorised celebrant and the party must be physically present at the meeting.**
4. **a support person can be present, but cannot interfere or coerce.**
5. **Make a record of who was present and your decision process.**

There is more information throughout this newsletter, more than you need to complete your CPD but still very important for you to excel as a Celebrant in preventing nonconsensual marriage.

You will find more tips & sample questions.



Consent



Non-consensual marriage is a Forced Marriage and can affect anybody regardless of gender, religion, age, or culture. The following may be an indicator that real and active consent might need to be rigorously established but each sample alone cannot necessarily be conclusive. Hence they must be considered in context such as environment, tone, body language, eye contact, behaviour, flinching, etc. If unsure, get advice.

- Erratic behaviour
- One or both parties have a guardian or has an appointed Power of Attorney
- Refusal to meet in person prior to the ceremony.
- Intoxication, disorientation or an inability to focus.
- A party to marriage seems scared, anxious, paranoid, nervous or lacking in focus and presence.
- One party to marriage dominates communication and meetings while the other is passive, silent, reserved, anxious, or fearful.
- A party to marriage flinches when the other more dominant person makes any sudden moves.
- A party to marriage continually, fearfully glances at the more dominant party for approval or permission when hesitantly answering questions about their relationship.
- Meetings are attended by dominant family members or other persons who insist on answering questions and speak over the party to marry.
- Others retain documents.
- A party does not appear to be fully lucid or cognitive during meetings.
- A party to marriage appears confused and has difficulty recalling previous meetings or their purpose.
- A Dominant or more lucid party stands to gain financially.



- A terminally ill party has a dying wish to be married but the other is hesitant.
- One party is terminally ill and the other is insistent on marriage.
- One party is terminally ill & often sedated or is to marry a more lucid patient or carer who has only recently gained presence, excluding family contact.
- Unexplained or suspicious injuries or bruising. (*can be concealed by a party wearing heavy clothing & coverings inconsistent with the heat of the day*)
- A party to marriage is reluctant to take part in necessary meetings or to provide necessary information or documentation.
- A party to marriage displays signs of depression, self-harming, social isolation and/or substance abuse.
- A party to the marriage is silent during meetings (may be an indication of trauma)
- Uncertainty when answering questions that they should be confident in answering.
- Hesitancy or confusion.
- Written communication from a party to marriage uses language and context that is not evident in meetings (i.e. another party is messaging instead)
- Payment delays.
- Delaying tactics including multiple changes of date, Celebrant, venue or ceremony content.
- The couple have been Celebrant hopping after being refused by another celebrant.
- An arranged marriage in which one or both parties are reserved, hesitant, very young, or reluctant. (*N.B. arranged marriages are legal but only if both parties fully and actively consent*)
- A party to marriage expresses a disbelief in marriage.
- An insistence by a dominant party to a very quick 'legals only' ceremony in private with no guests.
- A party to marriage is under medical or palliative care, or appears to be medicated.
- Concerns are expressed by another party such as a close friend of the party, a nurse, medical practitioner, carer, or another family member.
- One party insists that the other not see or hear their answers to questions about age, previous marriages or other aspects of their life.
- Both know little about the other.
- There is a family history of very young marriage
- There is an immigration issue.
- Inexplicitly late for meetings or even the ceremony.



Consent



SAMPLE CONSENT QUESTIONS

When you ask a question, always, pause in silence & wait for an answer, while observing body language, mood, context, & voice tone.

Have an independent interpreter present if you needed.

Before commencing, the consent questions, asked if the party would like a support person but make certain that the support person does not coerce the party in any way.

Silence is never an indication of consent. It's important to look out for other people's signs of hesitation or uncertainty in their body language as well as the words they use. You need to pay attention to all the signals.

You may have other questions but these are some samples to stimulate consideration:

- Are you over 18?
- Are you sober?
- Have you taken any medications that could affect your abilities?
- Are you married to anyone else?
- Is anyone telling you that you have to marry?
- Do you really want to get married?
- When do you want to marry?
- Whom do you wish to marry?
- Do you understand why we are meeting separately & in private without interference?
- Do you understand that you will be married for life under Australian law?
- Do you know & understand that getting married is entirely your choice?
- Do you have a guardian?
- What are you looking forward to about marriage?
- Do you really want to marry him/her?
- Are you ready to get married to (name)
- Do you feel pressured by anyone to get married?
- Is anyone telling you that you have to get married?
- If you could delay or cancel the wedding, would you?
- Are you certain you want to go ahead and marry?
- Is your consent to marry freely and honestly your own choice?
- Is there anything you don't understand about the ceremony?
- Do you have any questions?



How to help? -What to do?

- Celebrants should communicate consent requirements very early in the process and by various means, (e.g. via email, verbally, pamphlets etc.) to avoid surprises and to minimise the risk of conflict or distress, by informing the couple that consent must be '*real & current*', and that separate, in private meetings, are a legal requirement under Section 42b of the Marriage Act in order to establish if there is '*real & current*',
- meet in a safe and private/culturally appropriate place
- if using an interpreter, be aware that the interpreter may know the person, their family or their community.
- **If consent is not real & current, the solemnisation cannot proceed.**
- **Consent should never be presumed.**
- **The presence of a support person is permissible at meetings but interference or coercion is not.**
- To avoid undue pressure, Consent Meetings should not be left to the last possible opportunity but can be held at any time, and repeatedly, and consent should be reaffirmed at every opportunity, up until vows are exchanged..
- Minimise escalation of conflict by keeping calm, seeking assistance of others, and by ensuring your own safety and the safety of others.
- Always have an escape plan.
- Provide the party/s with information about forced marriage and services that can help them.
- Always act in the best interests of a person at risk of a forced marriage, by being mindful of their safety as well as your own.
- If you form a view that one or both parties may be under duress or otherwise not freely and fully consenting, you can help protect both the party/s and yourself by getting help (see next page)
- Do not engage in conflict or argument but leave the area.
- Remember that other people may read your emails, text messages or other written communications with the party
- Provide the party/s with information about forced marriage and services that can help them.
- If you do not have the express permission of the party/s to discuss the situation with others, do not attempt to set up a meeting with:
 - ◊ the party and their family, or
 - ◊ community members, or
 - ◊ contact family or community members.

Consent



Where to get help

The following additional resources are available to support authorised celebrants and vulnerable parties:

If you have immediate concerns for your safety, the safety of another person, or there is an emergency call Triple Zero (000).

If there is no immediate risk of harm and indicators of forced marriage are present:

- Call 131 AFP (131 237), or
- Complete the form on the 'Human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices (including forced marriage) information report' page of the AFP website:
 - ◊ https://forms.afp.gov.au/online_forms/human_trafficking_form, or
- Complete the general 'report a crime' form (which covers all crime types and can also include forced marriage):
 - ◊ <https://www.afp.gov.au/report-crime>.
- You can also provide anonymous information about criminal activity to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or www.crimestoppers.com.au

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) can provide initial advice to people who are in, or at risk of a forced marriage, including in situations where a person needs help to make sure they won't be taken overseas. The AFP can also refer victims for support, including safe accommodation, financial support, legal advice and counselling.

Initial support is available for victims even where they don't want to assist with an investigation or prosecution. In cases where the victim is a child, the AFP will always act in their best interests.

The *Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program* (FMSSP) is delivered nationally by the not-for-profit organisation, **Life Without Barriers**. The FMSSP provides individually tailored case managed support to people who are at risk of, or who have experienced, forced marriage. Case managers help victims and survivors to access supports to help them recover and heal from their forced marriage experiences. People at-risk, and

victims and survivors, of forced marriage may self-refer to the FMSSP, or may be referred by a community organisation or government services. Anyone can contact Life Without Barriers:

- ◊ on 1800 403 213, or
 - ◊ through its website at www.lwb.org.au/services/forced-marriages-support/.
 - You can also seek additional guidance from **My Blue Sky**, and provide My Blue Sky's contact details to relevant parties. My Blue Sky is an easy to use website dedicated to preventing and addressing forced marriage in Australia. The website provides people in, or at risk of, forced marriage with important information and links to support services, as well as useful resources for frontline responders, service providers and the general community – see <https://mybluesky.org.au/>. You can contact My Blue Sky's national forced marriage **helpline on (02) 9514 8115** for free, confidential legal advice about forced marriage, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm, with an out of hours recorded message. You can also get help by:
 - ◊ emailing help@mybluesky.org.au or
 - ◊ sending an SMS to 0481 070 844.
 - The **National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service** is a free 24/7 confidential telephone and online counselling service, staffed by professional counsellors to assist any person who has experienced, or is at risk of family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault. You can:
 - ◊ call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) or
 - ◊ visit the National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Service website: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>.
- The following specialist community organisations may also be able to provide help and advice:
- **Anti-Slavery Australia:**
 - ◊ <https://antislavery.org.au/>
 - ◊ Tel: 02 9514 966 or 02 9514 8115
 - ◊ Email: antislavery@uts.edu.au
 - **Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights:**
 - ◊ <https://amwchr.org.au/>
 - ◊ Tel: 03 9481 3000
 - You may also wish to seek advice from the **National Enquiry Centre** for the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia
 - ◊ <https://www.fcfcfa.gov.au/> or
 - ◊ a family solicitor at your closest Legal Aid office.
 - **The Translating and Interpreting Service** (TIS National) can be contacted on:
 - ◊ 131 450 or
 - ◊ <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>

Consent

When?

WHEN TO ASK ABOUT CONSENT?

Earlier in this newsletter, you read:

- a selection of questions that could be asked
- A list of observations that could cause concern
- When the separate & private meetings should be held (anytime before the wedding)

However, the topic of how often should consent be reaffirmed or re-established has not been discussed in details however as consent can be withdrawn at any time, it is important to inform and to *'establish consent'* as often as needed or is possible.

The first consent is of course the acceptance of the proposal of marriage and is reaffirmed at the time of the Lodgement of the Notice of Intended Marriage (NOIM) which is when the Celebrant usually gets the first opportunity to establish consent, remembering though that previously given consent can be revoked at any time and so prior consent is not a substitute for real & active consent. There is then a series of opportunities in communication and in planning meetings but yet, consent cannot be assumed, even at wedding rehearsals.

The next formal phase of establishing consent is in the separate and private meetings but it does not start or stop there. During the ceremony, consent can be re-established with in the welcoming with a question such as, *"have you come here to be married to each other?"*, and/or prior to the exchange of Vows with an *'I Do'* question.

As there is no legal requirement for an *'I Do'* question, you can have some fun with it but throw in the promise of marriage and always await the response.

Once the marriage is solemnised with the exchange of vows which is the ultimate declaration of consent, the couple are of course married. So let's recap:

1. First contact: explanation of the process
2. First meeting: explanation of what to expect & given both a 'Consent' & 'Happily Ever After', pamphlets'
3. 'Consent' & 'Happily Ever After', pamphlets' shared via an online file with other ceremony documents.
4. NOIM Lodgement: Consent & cognitive questions to ensure understanding of marriage
5. Any subsequent meetings and communication: re-establish
6. Rehearsals (if they occur): re-establish consent
7. Separate & private meetings (obligatory) at DONLIM signing
8. Welcoming to the ceremony (the couple are asked, *"Have you come here to be married?"*)
9. I Do's: re-establishes consent mid ceremony
10. Introduction to vows: re-establishes consent

HOW TO RECORD CONSENT?

There is requirement in the Marriage Act for Celebrants to keep a record of when the consent meetings took place, who was present, or how consent was determined, but the AG points out in the CPD material that it is good practice to make a record you were summonsed to court and asked to give evidence of when and how you concluded consent was real and current.

How do you respond to that recommendation?

What, if any records, do you currently keep?

When the law changed in 2024, I wrote to the AG suggesting that the DONLIM should be updated to include a declaration of consent. I have no current information as to whether that will occur .

I also created an informative 'consent brochure' and a 'Steps to Marry' pamphlet which I give to every couple so that they are fully informed in regard to consent requirements including information about the consent meetings and process. They are attached to my standard instructional email and in an online file shared to each couple. The brochure & pamphlet also appear on my webpage and social media.

For the author, repetition creates consistency and so I ask the same question every time, and at the same time (separate signing of DONLIM), at which point a 'selfie' is often taken and verify consent at least another 7 times in the process, while closely watching the party to marriage as I search for any discrepancy and so if called to give evidence, I have the same answer for every single couple, actually I was asking consent questions well before it became law and so there has been little change to my process other than to providing considerably more information to couples.

Let's look at some options:

1. Have a consistent process that is repeated for every couple, and publish it on your webpage, on your socials, & in emails to the couple.
2. Hold separate consent meetings in conjunction with the signing of the DONLIM, asking the same questions every time and reestablishing consent at every step of the process up until the exchange of vows. The DONLIM date is then the recorded date of the required meetings.
3. Create a checklist from the previous article, marking (date & time) when consent has been established.
4. Create a separate consent form with tick box questions, for the couple to sign.
5. Make a diary or journal note of meetings and each time consent is established.

Consent

IS IT JUST ONE PARTY?

We cannot limit ourselves to the possibility that just one person might not consent. It could be both.

This year's Consent Meetings OPD does not delve deeply into Guardianships or cognitive abilities, and significantly, no material encountered has gone into the possibility of not just one party, but both parties either lacking informed consent or being coerced/forced into marriage.

The focus has been on ensuring current/active and real consent of individuals but there may be circumstances, though rare, where both parties to a marriage are not consensual, where instead, both parties have been coerced into marriage by cultural, family, religious, or financial considerations. Your process including the separate consent meetings, should expose any irregularities.

In next month's edition, you will read of the Tongan royal tradition of arranged marriage. In the story,



you will find there was some objection to the marriage arranged by the Queen despite the objections of the King and the Queen Mother but the couple went ahead, presumably consensually.

Arranged marriages are of course not illegal; as long as there is mutual consent and it is the task of the Celebrant to establish that there is individual and mutual consent, so don't just ask "do you wish to marry?" but ask also "Who do you wish to marry?"

Financial coercion has been covered in past editions of this newsletter including:

- Family held hostage overseas by human traffickers to ensure compliance of that family and the party in Australia
- Upholding Family honour after payment of a dowry.
- Sham marriages to secure residency.

We also need to be aware of the possibility that a party, or even both parties, lack cognitive ability, not only because of intoxication, but perhaps by an inability to comprehend the nature and consequences of marriage.

A Shortening of Time (SOT) is often applied for when a party to marriage is terminally ill and the focus tends to be on the cognitive ability of the patient where we consider is the party:

- Drugged
- Being coerced or deceived for financial gain

However we must also consider the reverse possibility when we ask the healthy party if they truly wish to marry or are they being coerced, or 'guilted'

by family & friends to satisfy a person's dying wish. In the list of alerts, there is 'depression'. Most of us have no qualification to diagnose depression but consider a couple who have been together for some time and both have become depressed as their lives have become intertwined but dissatisfying. It might be a financial disaster to separate but an emotional disaster to marry. They could feel trapped, especially if there is coercion from their children and so you could have two parties 'consenting' to marry but not actually having an inability to comprehend the nature and consequences of that marriage and/or are have the ability to reject coercion from their own children. Your own an 'Consent Action Plan' and/or 'Process to Establish Consent', should be designed to overcome dilemmas.

- ◇ **The parties must consent at the time of the marriage. Prior consent is not a substitute for real consent at the time of the marriage.**
- ◇ Authorised celebrants must ensure that **both parties freely and genuinely consent to the marriage at all times during the ceremony.**
- ◇ **An authorised celebrant who believes the consent of one or both parties is not real consent should refuse to solemnise the marriage, even if the marriage ceremony has commenced.**
- ◇ **'Real consent' cannot be given by a third party, even if that third party has power of attorney or is a guardian to the relevant party to the marriage.**
- ◇ If you are concerned about whether a person's consent is real consent, you should speak to the person in the absence of any other party. You may also speak to third parties but should first seek permission from the person involved.
- ◇ While a third party such as a guardian cannot consent to marry on someone's behalf, they may raise issues of capacity in relation to that person
- ◇ Authorised celebrants should consider whether there is any sign that a party cannot manage their own affairs, for example, being subject to a guardianship order
- ◇ **A party to an intended marriage should be advised to seek independent legal advice if they have questions about the operation of guardianship orders or powers of attorney, having regard to their particular circumstances.**
- ◇ You should thoroughly document any conversations you have about consent. This will provide a record of your decision-making process, should you be called upon to give evidence in court as to the consent of the parties.



Registry of Births
Deaths & Marriages

NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages Marriage Celebrants Webinar



Register for 15 April 2026

Join the upcoming NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages Marriage Celebrant webinar

When?

15 April 2026 at 12:00pm - 12:40pm.

In this session, we'll walk you through:

- What is the role of the NSW Registry?
- Register a marriage performed in NSW
- Common errors to avoid to ensure smooth and timely registration
- Where to find guidance, support and further information

This session is ideal for:

- Newly appointed celebrants who are registering NSW marriages
- Experienced celebrants seeking a refresher on current processes and best practice

Register below.

[Register now](#)



When a Groom posted on Facebook, that he was seeking a Celebrant for 1st April 2026, you could be left to ponder if it was an April Fool's joke because the post was placed at 11:59pm on 1st March, which meant that the groom had only 60 seconds to lodge the NOIM and so it did raise the question as to what constitutes an April Fool's Joke, what exactly is the origin and how on earth could that be included in a ceremony without breaching the Marriage Act.?

Although many theories have been proposed throughout the years, a common belief the origin of April Fools' Day, is it originates in the Old Testament story of Noah and the Ark, when Noah sent a dove out on 1st April to check if the waters had receded and when the dove returned without a sign of dry land, it was considered a fool's errand, however that doesn't explain how the practical jokes came about and according to Wikipedia, the precise origin is not actually known but let's explore the history and maybe we can find something that a Celebrant can use in a Ceremony.

In Iran, *dorugh-e Sizdah* (lie of Thirteen) is celebrated as part of Sizdah Be-dar.^[22] It is similar to April Fools' Day, and celebrated on the 13th of Farvardin in the Persian calendar, which usually falls around April 1 or 2. Pranks have reportedly been played on this holiday since 536 BC, making it perhaps the oldest known joke day.^[23]

According to an article titled, *Fooling Around: The Surprising History of April Fool's Day*, by [Leanne Williams](#), published 27th March 2025, April Fool's Day, may have its origins in the Romans spring festival of Hilaria, held at the end of March, where people engaged in jesting and playful pranks. Similarly, the Celts marked the arrival of spring with festivities involving trickery and merrymaking. These playful customs, she wrote, potentially contributed to the development of April Fool's Day as we know it today.

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1392),^[3] a vain cock, Chauntecleer, in the "Nun's Priest's Tale", is tricked by a fox mentioning "*Since March began, full thirty days and two,*"^{[4][5]} (the 32nd day from 1 March, which

is 1 April.^[6]) however, it is not clear that Chaucer was truly referencing 1st April because in the "Nun's Priest's Tale" the story takes place on the day when the sun is "*in the sign of Taurus had y-rune Twenty degrees and one,*" which would not be 1st April. Modern scholars believe there is a copying error and that Chaucer actually wrote, "*Syn March was gon*",^[7] which would

have originally meant 32 days after March ended, i.e. 2 May.^[8]

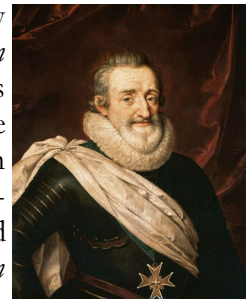
In 1508, French poet Eloy d'Amerval referred to a *poisson d'avril* (April fool, literally "April's fish"), possibly the first reference to the celebration in France.^[9] In Italy, France, Belgium and French-speaking areas of Switzerland and Canada, the 1 April, *poisson d'avril* in French, *aprilvis* in Dutch or *pesce d'aprile* in Italian, includes pranks such as attempting to attach a paper fish to the victim's back without being noticed. This fish feature is prominently present on many late 19th- to early 20th-century French April Fools' Day postcards. Many newspapers also spread a false story on April Fish Day, and a subtle reference to a fish is sometimes given as a clue to the fact that it is an April Fools' prank. Bakeries, pâtisseries and chocolatiers in France sell chocolate fishes in their shop windows on the day.^[30]

New Year's Day was celebrated on 25 March in most European towns,^[10] and when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar moving the start of the new year to 1st January, in the middle ages, not everyone was aware of the change and those who continued to celebrate the new year on 1st April became the target of ridicule, earning the nickname "April fools."

In Spain and Hispanic countries, likened to April Fool's Day, there is "Día de los Santos Inocentes" which is celebrated on 28th December with playful tricks and hoaxes.

In Italy, people celebrate "Pesce d'Aprile" by playing pranks, often involving fish-related jokes. In some parts of India, "Holi" is celebrated around the same time as April Fool's Day, allowing for a colourful explosion of joyous revelry complete with water fights and playful mischief.

In 1686, [John Aubrey](#) referred



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(Continued from page 12)

to the celebration as "Fool's holy day", the first British reference. On 1 April 1698, several people were tricked into going to the Tower of London to "see the Lions washed"^[8]

Popular April fools pranks in Armenia include common, harmless tricks like tying a friend or co-worker's shoes together, hiding plastic spiders in drawers of people in their workplace, and switching sugar for salt in hopes of startling an acquaintance as they take a sip of their morning coffee.

In Germany, an April Fool prank consists of tricking someone else to believe a fake story, usually to be later revealed by shouting "*April, April!*" at the recipient, who becomes the "April fool".^[21]

It appears that this term was imported from April Fools from western cultures into the Iranian modern society; and mistakenly attributed to their ancient national traditions, due to a date proximity between April Fools and **Farvardin 13th** (also known as **Sizdah Be-dar**, which plays a major role in Iranian new year holidays).

In Ireland, it was traditional to entrust the victim with an "*important letter*" to be given to a named person. That person would read the letter, then ask the victim to take it to someone else, and so on. The letter when opened contained the words "*send the fool further*".^[29]

In Lebanon, an April Fool prank is revealed by saying (كذبة أول نيسان) which translates to "First of April Lie") to the recipient.

In Nordic countries, the Danes, Finns, Icelanders, Norwegians and Swedes celebrate April Fools' Day (*aprilsnar* in Danish; *aprilipäivä* in Finnish; *aprilsnarr* in Norwegian; *aprilskämt* in Swedish). Most news media outlets will publish exactly one false story on 1 April; for newspapers this will typically be a first-page article but not the top headline. In Sweden, April Fools' jokes are revealed with the phrase, "*April, April, din dumma sill, jag kan lura dig vart jag vill!*" This can be translated to, "*April, April, you silly herring, I can trick you wherever I want!*" They can also be revealed with the phrase '*Maj maj måne, jag kan lura dig till Skåne!*' (May, may moon, I can trick you into Scania!). The tradition of April Fools' Day dates back to the 17th century. There were also April Fools' letters, with one of the earliest known examples dating back to 1742. ^{[31][32][33]}

In Poland, *prima Aprilis* ("the 1st of April" in Latin) as a day of pranks is a centuries-long tradition when many pranks are played: sometimes very sophisticated hoaxes are prepared by people, media. The conviction for this is so strong that the Polish anti-Turkish alliance with Leopold I, signed on 1 April 1683, was backdated to 31 March.^[34] However, for some in Poland, *prima Aprilis* ends at noon of 1 April and *prima Aprilis* jokes after that hour are considered inappropriate.

In Turkey ^[36] pranks and jokes are usually verbal and are revealed by shouting "*Bir Nisan! / Nisan Bir!*" (1 April).

In Ukraine, April Fools' Day is widely celebrated in Odesa and has the special local name Humorina (in Ukrainian Гуморина, *Humorina*).

This holiday arose in 1973.^[37] An April Fool prank is revealed by saying "*Перше квітня — брехня всесвітня*" ("*Pershe kvitnya — brekhnya vsesvitnya*", translating as "*First of April — worldwide lies*") to the recipient. The festival includes a large parade in the city centre, free concerts, street fairs and performances. Festival participants dress up in a variety of costumes and walk around the city fooling around and pranking passersby. One of the traditions on April Fools' Day is to dress up the main city monument in funny clothes. Humorina even has its own logo which is a cheerful sailor in a lifebelt, whose author was the artist Arkady Tsykun.^[38] During the festival, special souvenirs bearing the logo are printed and sold. Since 2010, April Fools' Day celebrations include an International Clown Festival, and both celebrated as one. In 2019, the festival was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Odesa Film Studio and all events were held with an emphasis on cinema.^[39]

In the United States of America, since 1986, New York City has hosted the *Annual April Fools' Day Parade*, founded by artist and activist Joey Skaggs.^[45] The parade features satirical floats and performances that lampoon political figures, celebrities, and current events. Participants often dress in costumes and carry props to embody the year's most notable "fools." The event begins at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street and proceeds to Washington Square Park, where a "King (or Queen) of Fools" is crowned. The parade has become a platform for public commentary and satire, drawing attention to societal issues through humour and performance art.^[46]

In one famous prank in 1957, the BBC broadcast a film in their *Panorama* current affairs series purporting to show Swiss farmers picking freshly-grown spaghetti, in what they called the **Swiss spaghetti harvest** after the "*virtual disappearance of the spaghetti weevil*". The BBC was soon flooded with requests to purchase a spaghetti plant, forcing them



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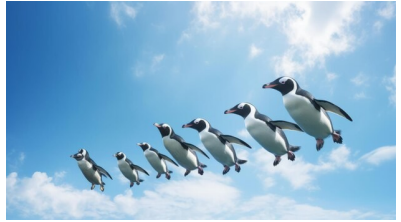
to declare the 3 minute article to be a hoax on the news the next day.^[47]

In the United Kingdom, on April Fools' Day 1980, the BBC announced Big Ben's clock face was going digital and whoever got in touch first could win the clock hands.^[6] A study in the 1950s, by folklorists Iona and Peter Opie, found that in the UK, and in countries whose traditions derived from the UK, this continues to be the practice, with the custom ceasing at noon, after which time it is no longer acceptable to play pranks.^[40] Thus a person playing a prank after midday is considered the "April fool" themselves.^[41]

In Scotland, April Fools' Day was originally called "Huntigowk Day".^[42] The name is a corruption of "hunt the *gowk*", *gowk* being Scots for a cuckoo or a foolish person; alternative terms in Gaelic would be *Là na Gocaireachd*, "gowking day", or *Là Ruith na Cuthaige*, "the day of running the cuckoo". The traditional prank is to ask someone to deliver a sealed message that supposedly requests help of some sort. In fact, the message reads "Dinna laugh, dinna smile. Hunt the *gowk* another mile." The recipient, upon reading it, will explain they can only help if they first contact another person, and they send the victim to this next person with an identical message, with the same result.^[42] The following day was known as "preen-tail day", or "tailie day"; the tradition involved attaching paper tails to people's backs, often with an unflattering message.^{[43][44]} In England a "fool" is known by a few different names around the country, including "noodle", "gob", "gobby", or "noddy".

One of the most famous and successful April Fool's Day pranks is undoubtedly when the BBC aired segment showcasing Swiss farmers harvesting spaghetti from trees in a picturesque Swiss village. The TV station was so inundated with callers who has watched *The Swiss Spaghetti Harvest (1957)*. asking where they could acquire a spaghetti plant that a public announcement had to be made that it was an April Fool's Day hoax.

In 2008, the BBC were at it again with the "Flying Penguins" (2008) when they aired footage (with the help of digital effects) of penguins flying over the Antarctic.



In Australia, ABC's *This Day Tonight* revealed that the country would soon be converting to "metric time."



Under the new system there would be 100 seconds to the minute, 100 minutes to the hour, and 20-hour days. Furthermore,

seconds would become millidays, minutes become centidays, and hours become decidays. The report even included an interview with Deputy Premier Des Corcoran who (participating in the prank) praised the new time system. The Adelaide town hall was shown sporting a new 10-hour metric clock face. The show received numerous calls from viewers who fell for the hoax including a caller who wanted to know how he could convert his newly purchased digital clock to metric time.

In 1978 well-known personality, adventurer and millionaire businessman, Dick Smith, announced he would tow an iceberg from Antarctica to be moored near the Sydney Opera House and then carve the berg into small ice cubes, branded 'Dicksicles' which he would sell to the public for ten cents each. These well-travelled cubes, fresh from the pure waters of Antarctica, were promised to improve the flavour of any drink they cooled. As soon as the 'Dickenberg 1'



sailed into the harbour, phone calls started pouring into radio stations and newspapers, and boats followed but then it began to rain, washing away the firefighting foam and shaving cream, revealing white plastic sheets beneath. On another occasion, Dick Smith who was also known for his flying feats, said

(Continued on page 15)

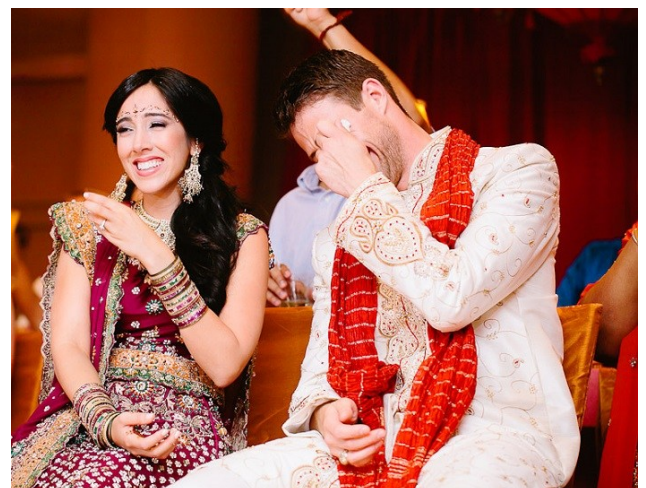
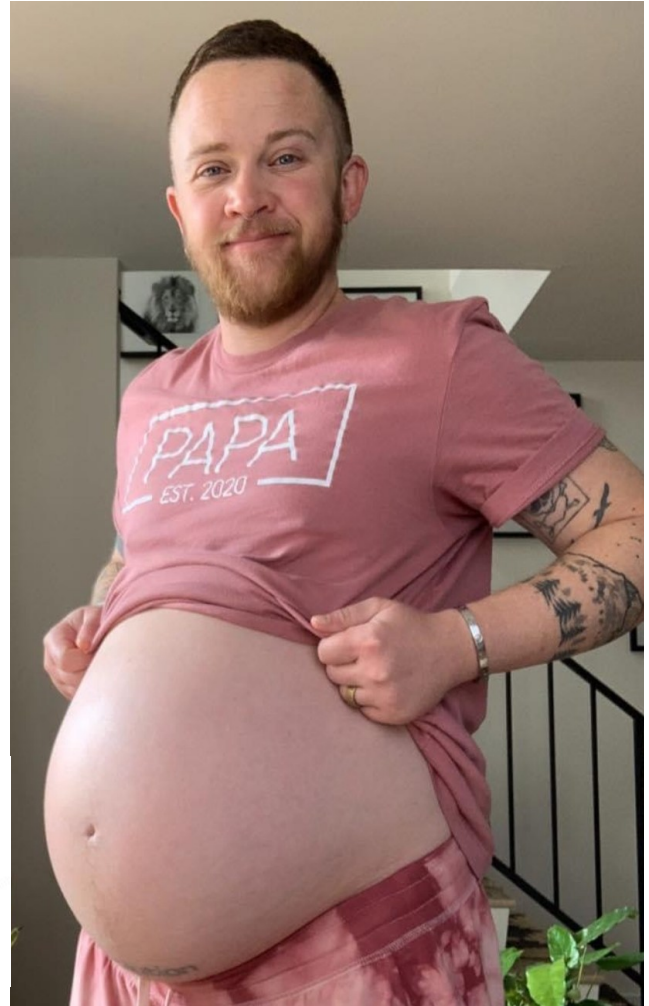
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he would take a 'Jumbo' under the Sydney Harbour Bridge and, after much hype, with news cameras at the ready on the Harbour Bridge and at the Opera House, Dick sailed a barge with an elephant named Jumbo on board, across the harbour.

So, how do we incorporate any of that into a Wedding? The best suggestion is perhaps to include a prank or two, with ideas only limited by imagination, and a willingness to have some fun.

Here are a few suggestions but what are yours:

- Have a 'surprise' wedding at an engagement party (*well, surprise the unsuspecting guests*).
- Start the Ceremony using entirely wrong names or wrong language
- hide fool's errand letters/errands under seats,
- wear outrageous costumes,
- substitute the wedding rings with huge ring lollies or outrageous toys
- Give away spaghetti plants
- Have all of your wedding party drop to one knee and propose to another wedding party member or a guest
- Ask for any objections to the marriage and have a 'pregnant man' frantically run up the aisle objecting but then stopping to say *"whoops, wrong wedding"*
- Ask for any objections and have multiple people of both sexes stand up declaring their love.
- At the Reception, have a large but fake cake carried out and 'accidentally' dropped.
- When the Bride throws her bouquet, have a piece of string attached so that she can pull it back away from the eager singles
- Have the ring bearer 'lose' or drop the rings which can suddenly reappear from another's pocket.
- Have a fake bride walk down the aisle and then run away
- Surprise all the guests with a well-choreographed 'Flash Mob' that can include Family and friends and even the couple and perhaps the Celebrant either at the ceremony or the reception.



- <https://canadabayheritage.asn.au/some-of-australias-greatest-april-fools-day-pranks-2/>
- https://www.insightvacations.com/blog/history-of-april-fools-day/?gclid=aw.ds&gad_source=5&gad_campaignid=21818294855&gclid=EAIaIQobChMxLeIip6FkwMV-6lmAh0GKQKIEAAYASAAEgKUG_D_BwE
- [April Fools' Day - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/April_Fools'_Day)



FEDERAL CIRCUIT
AND FAMILY COURT
OF AUSTRALIA
DIVISION 1

50 YEARS OF THE FAMILY COURT



The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 1) marked a significant national milestone in 2026, celebrating **50 years since the establishment of the Family Court of Australia**.

The Family Court commenced operations on **5 January 1976**, following the introduction of the transformative *Family Law Act 1975* by the Whitlam Government in the previous year. It was Australia's first federal court dedicated solely to helping families resolve their family law disputes. This was both innovative and highly controversial at the time.

To mark the anniversary, a **ceremonial sitting** was held in Melbourne on **Friday, 20 February 2026 at 10:00am (AEST)**. The event was livestreamed on the Court's [YouTube channel](#), and a [short film about the Court's history](#) has been made available.

The establishment of the Court marked a major shift in societal attitudes towards marriage breakdown, introducing the principle of **no-fault divorce** into Australian law. The *Family Law Act* also introduced other significant reforms, such as recognising the **best interests of the child** as the paramount consideration in parenting matters.

Despite its progressive foundations, the Court has faced profound challenges over its history, including significant public and government scrutiny. This, however, has led to an ongoing culture of innovation to address the issues raised. The Court is considered a **world-leader in its response to family violence**, and the use of social science expertise, delivering therapeutic justice that responds to the needs of families and children.

The darkest time in the Court's history, however, involved being the subject of a series of violent crimes committed by **Leonard Warwick** in the 1980s. His attacks targeted individual judges, their families, and the institution as a whole. It was not until, 29th July 2015 that the then, 68-year-old Leonard John Warwick was arrested by detectives at Campbelltown, New South Wales over the shooting murder of Opas, bomb death of Pearl Watson, wife of Judge [Ray](#)

[Watson](#), two other murders, one by gunshot, and bomb attacks from 1980 to 1985, all related to the Family Court of Australia.^[2]

On 23 July 2020, almost four decades after his crimes, Warwick was finally found guilty of multiple crimes, including the 1980 murder of Justice David Opas, the 1984 murder of Pearl Watson (wife of Justice Ray Watson), and the bombings of Justice Richard Gee's home and the Court's Parramatta registry. He was also found guilty of numerous other offences, but not guilty of one shooting.^[3] Warwick was sentenced to life in gaol without parole in September 2020 and died in prison on 14 February 2025.^[4]

In 2026, celebrating 50 years since the establishment of the Family Court of Australia:

The Hon Will Alstergren AO, Chief Justice, 2018 to present

“Through determination, innovation and integrity, the Court has supported over 5 million Australian families in their most challenging times. Over 180 Judges (past and present), together with CEOs, Registrars, Court Child Experts, and all other staff, should be incredibly proud of their contribution in helping families resolve their family law disputes, when they were unable to do so themselves.

I think the ideals that Prime Minister Whitlam had when he originated this Court, has pretty much been borne out with the Court model we have now. I believe the originators of this Court would be very proud of the legacy created.

To see the Court thrive as a superior court of record over 50 years is quite remarkable. Although often shrouded in controversy because of the emotive nature of the work, it has always been a world-leading and innovative Court with Judges who are incredibly committed to dispensing justice in the best interests of the child, with fair and equitable hearings.

In recent years, the Court has continued to evolve and respond to community needs through initiatives aimed at improving access to justice and enhancing the experience of all court users. These include strengthened First Nations engagement, improved family violence and risk assessment processes, the Court Dog Program, and a range of other innovations.

As it marks its 50-year legacy, the Court continues to uphold its foundational commitment to supporting Australian families through some of life's most challenging circumstances.

As the current Chief Justice, I am honoured to lead such an

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

innovative, collegiate and hardworking Court and I am extraordinarily proud of what has been achieved.

***The Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC,
Chief Judge, 1976 to 1988***

The Family Court opened in January 1976 and hundreds of people, if not thousands of people, came to the Court because they had been waiting patiently for the Act to come in so they could get their divorce without fault, so we were swamped with work.

Despite the challenges, there was very good morale, everyone that worked in the Family Court, all of the judges appointed to the Court, they were all highly committed to the principles of the Family Law Act, and the services to help people resolve their disputes. We all loved that and we all wanted it to work.

***Speech delivered by Tania Wolff,
President of the Law Council of Australia***

"May it please the Court.

I echo the acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and I thank Ms Cathy Dowsett SC for her Welcome to Country.

I acknowledge Your Honour Chief Justice Alstergren AO; the Attorney General, the Honourable Michelle Rowland MP; many distinguished judicial officers and guests; colleagues; and friends.

It is a privilege to appear on behalf of the Law Council of Australia and the Australian legal profession on this significant milestone, and to congratulate the Court on 50 years of service to the Australian community.

Today we mark more than the anniversary of an institution. We recognise fifty years of a national commitment: that when families fracture, when children's lives are disrupted, and when questions of safety and care must be resolved, Australia will respond through a court system that strives to be both authoritative and humane.

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 1), formerly the Family Court of Australia — is a specialist court — established at a time of profound social change. Today it is entrusted with the most complex family law trials and the appellate work that gives coherence and guidance to the entire system.

Its appellate role is not abstract. It is how consistency is built across a continent. It is how principle is clarified. And it is how fairness becomes more predictable for the families who rely upon it.

Fifty years on, it is easy to forget how visionary the Court's establishment was.

It reflected a recognition that family law required not only legal authority, but a system capable of responding to human



complexity with compassion and dignity.

From its earliest conception as a "helping court", the ambition was clear: that law could be delivered with humanity without sacrificing rigour or independence.

What has sustained that ambition over five decades is the Court's willingness to evolve.

Family law, as everyone in this room understands, is unlike any other jurisdiction. It deals with people at their most vulnerable and with children who have no choice about the conflict surrounding them. It confronts family violence, coercive control, trauma and urgent risk. It asks judges to make decisions that shape a child's daily life — where they live, how they are protected, and how they remain connected to the people they love."

- [Media release: Family Court marks 50 years since its historic commencement | Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia](#)
- [Family Court of Australia - Wikipedia](#)
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Opas
- <https://lawcouncil.au/media/speeches/ceremonial-sitting-to-mark-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-federal-circuit-and-family-court-of-australia-division-1>



Family law

The Court's family law jurisdiction includes applications for divorce, [proof of divorce](#), applications for spousal maintenance, financial or property disputes, parenting orders, enforcement of orders, location and recovery orders, warrants for the apprehension or detention of a child, and determination of parentage.

This is the full reading referred to by Dally Messenger III in his letter to the Editor, though he used had only an extract:

“Us Two”

by A.A. Milne



Wherever I am, there's always
Pooh,
There's always Pooh and Me.
Whatever I do, he wants to do,
"Where are you going today?" says
Pooh:
*"Well, that's very odd 'cos I was too.
Let's go together,"* says Pooh, says he.
"Let's go together," says Pooh.
"What's twice eleven?" I said to Pooh.
("Twice what?" said Pooh to Me.)
"I think it ought to be twenty-two."
"Just what I think myself," said Pooh.
*"It wasn't an easy sum to do,
But that's what it is,"* said Pooh, said he.
"That's what it is," said Pooh.
"Let's look for dragons," I said to Pooh.
"Yes, let's," said Pooh to Me.
We crossed the river and found a few-
"Yes, those are dragons all right," said Pooh.
*"As soon as I saw their beaks I knew.
That's what they are,"* said Pooh, said he.
"That's what they are," said Pooh.
"Let's frighten the dragons," I said to Pooh.
"That's right," said Pooh to Me.
"I'm not afraid," I said to Pooh,
And I held his paw and I shouted *"Shoo!
Silly old dragons!"*- and off they flew.
"I wasn't afraid," said Pooh, said he,
"I'm never afraid with you."
So wherever I am, there's always Pooh,
There's always Pooh and Me.
"What would I do?" I said to Pooh,
"If it wasn't for you," and Pooh said: *"True,
It isn't much fun for One, but Two,
Can stick together",* says Pooh, says he.
"That's how it is," says Pooh.

<https://allpoetry.com/us-two>



Grief

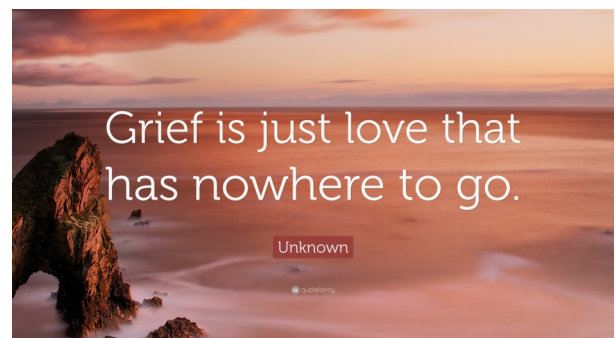
©Lou Szymkow 7/2/2017

The air is still
The birds are silent
The one I loved has gone,
but my heart, is defiant
My soul is in wreaking pain
as I blindly seek for you in vain
You were taken from my now empty arms
I yearn for you, and all of your charms
My life must go on; Please, why are you gone!
Come back to me
Come back to me
You were my life, my only destiny.

I fall to my knees
My heart about to burst
What is this pain, this despicable curse
How do I survive,
when I myself no longer feel worthy to be alive
Why has the sun so dimmed, how have I so sinned

That I should deserve to be so empty and bleak
I'll rest here in your casket's shadow, I'm so lonely
and so weak

Words have been spoken but none fell to my ears
The curtains have closed and a friends' arm
appears
I rise to my feet, still so empty and so very weak
I struggle to walk, I don't want to hear them speak,
I must go through the motions of living you know
But this pain will remain until I myself go,
Go to that place where we shall always be together
That mystical place of forever and ever.



Grief is just love that
has nowhere to go.

Unknown

Quoting

Brides wedding day

an original poem by Stella Joseph

The day has arrived so fresh and so new
The sunrise is promising a sky oh so blue
She's woken up early for today is the day
Her biggest life moment - just hours away.

Thoughts are surrounding her, in her poor head
She knows deep inside she must get out of bed.
But she is aware when her feet hit the ground,
She'll lose that cocoon of sweet quiet sound.

She draws a breath quickly and tries not to yawn,
It's only just daylight, just minutes from dawn.
She struggles to stretch and to rise once again,
Those thoughts keep on dancing around in her brain

It's time for a coffee and time for a shower,
Heaven forbid she loses an hour
Her time is pre-planned and the day's not her own.
She reaches beside her and unplugs her phone.

She's texting her friends now to make sure their up
It's time for some coffee – she'll need a huge cup.
She makes sure her dress is still hanging right there,
and her shoes and accessories are still on the chair.

She pats little Mindy, her fluffy cat child
She showers and dresses and pastes on a smile.
The keys to her car are just there by the door
She leaves the house grinning and laughing some more.

She gets to the salon that's when the fun starts
Her bridesmaids support her all dressed up with hearts
The salon is buzzing with dryers and such
She's a little bit nervous but excited so much

It's back to her house now to change and to dress
Lots of excitement and Lord, what a mess!
Her loungeroom is covered with bags all around
Make-up all over, her phone can't be found.

Two hours later the photographer's there
Thank goodness they spent all that time on her hair.
She feels like a princess all primed up and set
Not long to go now, just a few hours yet.
Her friends are all with her, they pour her a wine
Just for the nerves – but she knows she'll be fine.
She smiles with such fondness and does a quick check
Do I have everything, has my dad arrived yet?

The limo is here now – it's all systems go.
Her friends help her into the car, oh so slow.
Her dress is quite special they need to take care



That the laces trims don't get all caught up and tear.

It's all just so real now, the big moment has come
The limo slows down and pulls out of the sun.
Her family and friends are all waiting with glee.
She smiles to herself feeling happy and free.

The celebrant's waiting and comes to say hi
The music starts playing - she tries not to cry
Her dad stands there smiling so tall and so proud.
Finally, it's time to walk down through the crowd

She smiles at her friends as she walks down the aisle
She's nervous, excited and wearing a smile.
She turns to her dad, and grins wide with a wink
He smiles back right at her with his face turning pink.

They reach the aisle's end, and her dad leaves her side,
Now she has come to her man as his bride
They beam at each other with smiles all around
As the guests start to quieten, – not even a sound.

Her man stands there happily and says with a grin.
"It's our time now babe, let our new life begin"
She can't wait any longer to become his wife.
And to join with him in this new chapter of life.





4 Things To Help You

Sell More Weddings In Challenging Times.

KC | KELLY CHANDLER



Kelly Chandler promotes herself as a UK Venue Consultant, Business Coach and Confidante to land, property and service-based business leaders, creating impact, and her webpage has some

useful advice that we Australian Celebrants might consider.

Her webpage tells us that Kelly is an events industry professional of 25 years having previously planned weddings (often 6-figure) for over 150 discerning global couples. A Wedding Venue Business Consultant to many of the UK's finest Stately Homes, private houses and diversified farms, Kelly says she supports land and property owners to thrive by generating sustainable profit from hosting weddings. A live-long learner and personal development devotee, she's also a Master Coach & Success Coach to high-achievers.

Being endlessly curious about the power of the mind and neuroscience, she's says she is passionate about unlocking, unblocking and championing the potential of her fellow bold business-leader clients.

Kelly webpage specifically addresses venues, but I have adapted her words to our situation and will paraphrase parts, but you can of course follow the link to see the original words and it includes her contact details if you would like more information.

- <https://www.kellychandlerconsulting.co.uk/wedding-consulting-blog/4-ways-to-help-you-sell-more-weddings-in-challenging-times/>

1. Focus on wedding value and experience over price

Kelly writes that you must acknowledge that in challenging economic times, your focus needs to shift to demonstrating your value over your price. Whilst couples are savvier with their budget and are price-conscious, they will still spend. It's about whether and how they perceive the value of what you're offering. This is where tip-top

service comes in and how you make couples feel. If they really can't see how you're better than the Celebrant who is cheaper, then they will book them and not you and so your role is to showcase the value and experience they get with you.

2. Ask great questions

"Get good at asking really great questions. Why? Because this means you can understand that particular couples' dreams and desires for their wedding. Also their painpoints, challenges and worries"

I'll chip in here and say that I've never liked the term 'pain points'. I truly don't envisage people being in pain over a decision but may face pressures or obstacles due to uncertainty. I totally agree with Kelly that the way around that is to ask questions, adding that you should turn every statement into a question e.g. instead of saying "I provide...." Ask, would you like me to provide....?"; offering the couple control and confidence.

"We buy either when somebody essentially solves a big painful problem for us or when our desires are met. The more that you can uncover here, the more you can meet and match those areas showing that you have them covered!"

Kelly writes that help on creating your killer questions is covered in my online [Sales Success Accelerator training programme](#) for venues.

3. Know your wedding strengths and focus on them

Kelly tells us that you should double down on what you know that you do brilliantly and better than your close competitors. She also says to NEVER criticise your competitors but to instead, keep it professional and focused on all the *benefits and unique things you have* by highlighting some of those areas that you know you're strong in, and perhaps others are not.

So, know and promote your point of difference.

4. Tackle the wedding budget question

Kelly suggests that you hone your intuition and empathy skills. If you get the impression and your instinct tells you that budget is a concern for a couple, don't be afraid to ask the question and have the conversation, showing empathy and understanding while being open to working things through and to finding solutions.

This page is specifically for the information of those residing in Shoalhaven which covers much of the NSW south coast.



LIZA BUTLER MP

MEMBER FOR SOUTH COAST

Invitation: Community Information Session – Sussex Inlet RSL

I'm inviting you to a practical, community focused information session at Sussex Inlet RSL Club, from 10:00am to 2:00pm. This is a structured event with guest speakers and hands-on support.

What you'll hear and do

- Local NSW Police: Staying safe at home and how to avoid scams.
- Service NSW: Understanding and responding to identity theft.
- Local solicitor: Clear legal information on wills, powers of attorney, and advance care/medical directions.
- Community Bank representatives: Tips for secure banking and protecting your money.
- Bill check-up: Bring your household bills - Service NSW staff will review whether you're on the best available rate and identify any rebates or concessions you may be eligible for.

Event details

- When: Wednesday, 22 April 2026, 10:00am–2:00pm
- Where: Sussex Inlet RSL Club
- Format: Guest speakers, Q&A, and guided assistance stations
- Catering: Morning tea and a light lunch will be provided

Please RSVP to my office by 15th April via phone 44210222 or southcoast@parliament.nsw.gov.au. If you have any dietary requirements, please be sure to let us know.

My staff will also be on hand throughout the day if you have an issue you would like to raise. I look forward to seeing you there - let's make sure every household has the information and support to stay safe, confident, and connected.

Kind regards,

Liza Butler

Liza Butler MP
Member for South Coast

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Letters to the Editor

Great Newsletter !!

Vicki Portelli (celebrant)

Good to see you are still doing an awesome job. Well done.

Update - I have now retired from the marriage celebrant world however always happy to say hello. Hope this finds you and yours well. Life in Queensland is fine and plan to then spend time with my sons family for awhile in the UK. Life' tough but you just have to keep on. Have a great 2026.
Best wishes
Nola Debney

Hi Lou

Happy New Year!

And I hope this email finds you well.

Thank you so much for the updated email.

Regards,

Tasia LIU (CMC)

Thanks Lou

Once again a very informative newsletter.

Thank you for sharing your knowledge with others.

Take care and stay healthy.

Marion Way

A really wonderful Newsletter again. Congrats. I read it all.

Barbara Bell

When we check a person's passport and it is a foreign passport, we may not realise the need to remind that person to check with their local consulate or embassy if they need to advise them before marrying. I highly recommend everyone read Lou's March newsletter where he has a 3 page very informative article on this subject. If you do not subscribe then it is worth asking Lou to send you a link. I have printed this article and have a copy in my red folder that I take to all interviews. Gold.

Phil Timbrell

Another wonderful newsletter, Lou.

The article on the bans of marriage was very interesting to me. I remember when Deborah Nance, in her ignorance, forbade celebrants to discuss any marriages because they violated the right to privacy! For 3000 to 4000 years marriage has always been a public act. That it was publicly announced contributed to its status and its importance in the community. I made myself very unpopular trying to speak truth to ignorant power. The article on symbolic sub ceremonies was very constructive. After the movie, Hamnet, there could be a resurgence of handfasting!!

Some celebrants seem to be constantly opting for the shortest and most meaningless ceremony they can get away with. I haven't checked the statistics lately, but all reports say the number of marriages in relation to the population is declining. Urging celebrants to defend marriage is essential. Celebrants should encourage readings and quotations which defend the worth of marriage as a powerful influence, which encourages couples to believe in their relationship, and to work on it. One of my favourites is an extract from Winnie the Pooh (*see also the Poetry section in this newsletter*).

So wherever I am, there's always Pooh,

There's always Pooh and Me.

'What would I do?' I said to Pooh,

'If it wasn't for you,' and Pooh said: 'True,

It isn't much fun for One, but Two

Can stick together,' says Pooh, says he.

'That's how it is,' says Pooh, says he.

'That's how it is,' says Pooh.

by A.A.Milne

Daily Messenger III

Hi Lou

Lovely read. Well done again.

Your comment at the end of the present World problems maybe affecting Celebrants is even more appropriate as each day seems to be even more worrying for so many around the World.

Regards

Robyn Foster



COORDINATOR COMMENTS



There is a l w a y s more to learn and that is a beautiful. Amazingly, the more we learn, the more

we discover how much more there is to learn. I am occasionally called upon to deliver education sessions or to write articles for various association newsletters which I am always happy to do, time permitting, despite the fact that I have slowed down just a little over the past year or so. Followers will also be aware that last year, I was questioning whether to continue with this newsletter for various reasons, one of which was several AMC members on the south coast had retired but another was that I thought I had covered such a variety of subjects over the past 5 years that perhaps there was a diminishing need for this newsletter however I now admit that I was wrong in that consideration.

- The MLCS has reported that the outcome of 2025 OPD was disappointing and that numerous Celebrants were to be contacted for possible additional education.
- When questions that had not been encountered for a year or more, arose in Celebrant forums, many Celebrants, myself included, were unsure of the full & correct answers,
- as mentioned in the body of this newsletter, some Celebrants, even some very experienced Celebrants, gave incorrect answers to forum questions.
- At some education sessions, presenters demonstrated limited knowledge on broader Celebrancy matters
- Anecdotally, there seemed to be a diminishment of innovation and inspiration.
- To top it off, a highly qualified, Australian born professional asked if Hobart was in Queensland.

All this reminds us of the ongoing need of education, research, innovation, self-improvement and revision.

It is said that there are two types of knowledge:

1. That which you retain.
2. That which you know where to find.

I will add two more to the list:

3. That which has been forgotten and refound.
4. That which is yet to be discovered.

I cannot promise that you will find all the answers in this newsletter but with your cooperation, your submission of articles, ideas and questions, together we can continue to improve our own skills, and help to continually raise the standard of Celebrancy.

Together we can achieve, grow & improve.

"quotations"



Everyone has a friend during each stage of life. Some are fortunate to have the same friend in all stages of life
(from unknown)

A true friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future and accepts you just as you are.
(from unknown)

The one you choose to marry is all of that but more, As this is the person before you, who treasures your past: the good and the not-so-good, because that has made you the person you are today; believes in your future together and can see no other, and cherishes you just as you are.
– Lou Szymkow

"When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too."
– Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

"A life with love will have some thorns, but a life without love will have no roses." – Author unknown

"Love is like standing in wet cement, the longer you stay the harder to leave and you can never leave without leaving your marks behind." Author unknown

For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; and for poise, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone.'
– Audrey Hepburn

We are each the products of our unique environments and the sum of our experiences, but are all seeking love & happiness which should always be celebrated.
- Lou Szymkow

