

The Coalition of Celebrant Associations (CoCA) Inc Position as regards Same Sex Marriage

The Coalition of Celebrant Associations (CoCA) Inc is a group of associations under one banner and is recognised by the Attorney General (AG), the Attorney General's Department and the Marriage Law & Celebrant Section (MLCS) as the Peak Body for Commonwealth marriage celebrants.

Whether Australia will move to change the definition of marriage to include same sex couples or not, CoCA Inc's position is that this decision remains with the Australian people and their government.

If Marriage Act 1961 is to be changed, CoCA recommends Australia uses the opportunity to address Child and Forced Marriage concerns by ensuring Australia applies the same simple basic conditions in **all** marriage ceremonies (religious and civil) as recommended below.

Upholding marriage as a relationship between **two consenting adults** can then form part of an educative strategy on the nature of marriage under Australian law.

CoCA recommends the following:

1. Every marriage ceremony includes consent by the parties to the marriage in the presence of an authorised celebrant and their witnesses, whether the ceremony is religious or civil - **revise Section 45 to include all marriage celebrants.**
2. The Marriage Vows for all marrying couples to be in plain English and modernised from the 1836 version upon which they were based to ensure the parties to the marriage state clearly "*I, A (or B), take you, B (or A), to be my wife (or husband or spouse) or words to that effect*" - **revise Section 45 to include all couples.**
3. Every marriage celebrant makes clear to the parties of the marriage, their witnesses and all guests that a marriage according to Australian law is being conducted and that the celebrant is authorised by law to witness and register the marriage - **revise Section 46 and 113 to apply to all marriage celebrants.**
4. *If the definition of marriage is changed to allow all couples to marry - it is recommended to be as follows - "marriage means the union of two consenting adults to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life."*

Relevant Background Marriage Information:

- [Marriage in Western culture](#) commenced and continues to be as a civil, not religious, function.
- Australia already has a very tolerant view of couples' religious views by allowing [religious celebrants](#) to conduct valid marriages on behalf of the government. *This is not the case in all countries.*
- Under [Section 47](#) of the current Australian Marriage Act, religious celebrants already have the right to refuse to marry a couple. *ie religious celebrants can discriminate now upon any grounds - marital status, differences in religious beliefs, etc.*
- [72.5% of couples](#) choose civil ceremonies so they can celebrate their relationship with family and friends in an inclusive and meaningful ceremony consistent with their values.
- Prior to Australia's independent civil celebrant program, marriage [dominated by religious ceremonies](#) often brought shame, hardship and in many cases, fractures in family structures when people were forced to marry "*behind the altar*" or "*change religion*" to marry the person they loved.