

MARRIAGES AND BIRTHS AUSTRALIA

OFFICIAL MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGO UNTIL 10:00am – Saturday 1 April 2023

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BLENDING NAMES ACT – proposed change in legislation

The Commissioner for Marriages and Births Australia, Dr Robert Dickson-Whitehead AO has announced this morning the Department’s intention to ban all hyphenated surnames in Australia, commencing at 12:01am on Monday 1 January 2024.

It is said that the change was initiated when a newly married couple wanted to register their new surname as a hyphenated version of their existing surnames, McCartney-Richards and Harrison-Watts to create the four-barrelled surname, McCartney-Richards-Harrison-Watts. Systems experts warned that most existing database software was unable to accommodate three hyphens in a single surname, creating the possibility of database corruption across all industries in Australia.

Dr Dickson-Whitehead, who will adopt the surname of Whiteson said, “During the next nine months, all people who are officially registered with hyphenated surnames will have an opportunity to select a preferred blending surname, based on their existing name. If they choose not to change their name, the Department will automatically select a shortened version for them.

Where the existing constituent names have multiple syllables, the new name will consist of one syllable from each part of their name. If they don’t have multiple syllables, their new name will use a few letters from each of constituent surnames.”

Asked for comment, the Director of the Australian Personal Referencing Institute of Learning, Ms April Nichols, she replied that, while she could see the value in the change, she had been looking forward to taking on a hyphenated surname when she married her fiancé, David Ford, later this year.

“Being April Ford-Nicholls was always my plan, but I guess we’ll just have to live with whatever the department comes up with. David and I were both uncomfortable with taking his surname for our family and so the shortened version will become our kids’ surname as well.”

The Department acknowledges that this announcement will create uncertainty and anxiety for many families, particularly those with well-known double-barrelled names. A dedicated web site has been set up with an outline of the proposed changes and the answers to what we expect to be a range of questions from impacted people. The web site can be accessed at www.blendednames.com.au.

Dr Dickson-Whitehead said “We have decided to provide nine months’ notice of this change so that people can start thinking about choosing their own new surname, making arrangements, ordering new passports, updating electoral rolls, etc. New parents will be encouraged to choose the new surname for any babies born between now and the end of 2023 to save having to go through the change process at the end of the year.”

In keeping with this proposal, Marriages and Births Australia will shorten its name as well and will become known as Mirth Australia from 1 January 2024.

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For further information and media enquiries, please visit the Department’s dedicated Blending Names web site – www.blendednames.com.au.