

British Marine's response to Ministry of Justice's public consultation 'Tying the Knot' Reforming Wedding Law in England and Wales - 23rd September 2026

Submitted via email to weddingslawconsultation@justice.gov.uk

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About you

- Joanna Richardson, External Relations Manager, British Marine.
- British Marine is the national trade association for the UK leisure, superyacht and small commercial marine industry. We are a membership organisation, consisting of some 1300 members drawn from both the sea going and inland marine sectors. Members include boat builders, marine engine and equipment manufacturers, marinas, as well as hire boat companies, yacht charter and inland and coastal passenger boat businesses. Further information can be found at www.britishmarine.co.uk.
- British Marine has long campaigned for wedding law in England and Wales to be updated to expand opportunities within the UK marine industry, enabling more marine businesses to offer weddings onboard boats whilst still maintaining the dignity of marriage. We were pleased to facilitate a visit by the Deputy Prime Minister to British Marine member, Hobbs of Henley, in July 2026 to hear more about the benefits such reforms can bring and to coincide with the launch of this consultation.

Chapter 2: Preliminaries

1. Should information and signposting be provided on the online notice platform in order to support and safeguard couples including in relation to forced marriage, consent and capacity?

Yes

2. Do you agree with the type of information the Government proposes should be provided at the online notice stage? This includes material to help individuals recognise potential indicators of coercion or control, as well as any information about how to seek help through the Forced Marriage Unit, how to raise concerns during the preliminaries process and signposts to relationship support and guidance.

Yes – combining safeguarding guidance with practical information to support couples is very sensible.

3. What are your views about the type of evidence that should be required for the harm-based exemption from online publication of a notice? No comment

4. Do you agree that at the in-person interview, registrars should be required to ask a specific set of questions aimed at identifying forced, predatory or sham marriage? Yes

Chapter 3: The Legal Formation of Marriage

5. Do you agree with the proposal to allow consent to be expressed through the performance of actions in religious and non-religious belief ceremonies? Yes

6. Do you agree with the proposed required words for civil weddings? Yes

7. Are there any specific variations to the required words that should be considered acceptable "words to the same effect" should apply? No comment

Chapter 4: The Dignity Framework

8. Do you agree with the Government's proposed new dignity framework to support officiants in their legal duty to ensure that weddings are dignified?

Yes – British Marine strongly supports the proposed Dignity Framework as a way to safely expand choice for couples in regard to the ceremony and location of their wedding whilst ensuring the legality and dignity of marriage is maintained.

9. Do you agree with our proposed overarching dignity standard?

- The wedding enables the couple to express free and informed consent to marry, in a manner that is intelligible.
- The wedding is not undermined by distraction or trivialisation.
- The wedding reflects the significance and seriousness of marriage as a major life event and lifelong commitment.

Yes.

10. Do you agree with the proposed supporting standard that will support the officiant to agree a dignified wedding location?

- The wedding location permits participants to attend safely.
- The wedding location permits participants meaningfully to participate in the ceremony.
- The wedding location minimises risk of any distraction that could have reasonably been foreseen and prevented.

Yes

11. Do you agree with the proposed supporting standard that will support the officiant to agree a dignified wedding ceremony?

- The ceremony should focus on the proceedings
- The ceremony should treat the occasion with respect
- The ceremony should avoid the risk of making marriage appear trivial or lacking in significance.

Yes

12. Do you agree with the proposed factors that an officiant should consider when making a decision about whether a location is dignified?

Yes - The proposed factors give officiants clear guidelines to assess location suitability while respecting couples' personal choices.

13. Do you agree with the factors that officiants should consider when determining whether a wedding ceremony will be dignified?

Yes. British Marine, which has long called for legal wedding ceremonies to be permitted onboard vessels, whether moored or underway, very much welcomes this consultation and especially the factors proposed to assess whether a location would be safe and whether a ceremony could be conducted with dignity and without undue distraction or interruption.

14. Do you think there should be restrictions on the consumption of food or drink, including alcohol, during a wedding ceremony? Yes

15. Do you think there should be specific restrictions on gimmick-based or trivialising acts or elements within a wedding ceremony? Yes – the wedding ceremony should be the focal point of the event with the details approved by the officiant who has responsibility for overseeing the Dignity Framework.

16. Should religious or non-religious belief content be permitted in a civil ceremony, provided that the ceremony does not replicate, or amount to, a full religious or non-religious belief service?

No comment

If you have answered "Yes", the Government has given examples of individual religious or non-religious belief elements, such as the exchange of rings or a Bible reading, that may be suitable for inclusion in a civil ceremony and examples of combinations of elements that may amount to a full religious or non-religious belief service. Are there any further examples that you think would help illustrate this distinction between service and belief elements in practice?

Please provide reasons where possible.

17. Do you agree that state-employed officiants, i.e., registrars, should not be permitted to lead or participate in religious or non-religious belief content? Please explain your reasoning in the text box. No comment

Chapter 5: Specific Locations for Weddings

18. Do you agree that wedding venues should be able to apply for pre-authorisation, should they choose to? Please explain your reasoning in the text box.

Yes we think it would be beneficial to both couples searching for venues and for businesses, such as passenger boat companies keen to expand their wedding offers, to be allowed to apply for pre-authorisation as suitable wedding venues, and for that list of established venues to be made available. However, we also agree that the officiant would retain responsibility for assessing suitability of venues and therefore have the right to visit and assess pre-authorized venues if they wish to do so.

19. Do you agree that approval for pre-authorized venues should be subject to a fixed period, renewal requirements and revocation where the conditions of approval are no longer being met?

Yes

If you answered "Yes", what should the fixed period be?

3 years - this would be proportionate in terms of process, providing a level of commercial certainty for venues whilst also helping to ensure the physical safety, accessibility, and dignity standards of a venue are periodically reviewed and enforced, irrespective of any additional assessments an officiant may choose to undertake.

20. Are there other safeguards required to (1) protect against forced, predatory or sham marriage and (2) ensure the safety of ceremonies conducted in private homes? Please explain your reasoning in the text box. No comment

21. Do you agree that weddings should be able to take place in territorial seas and inland waters, subject to the assurance that safety and dignity are maintained?

Yes

British Marine strongly supports the proposal that weddings be allowed to take place on inland and territorial seas, where the safety, dignity and legality of a marriage can be assured. In addition to ensuring the Dignity Framework and its associated standards are upheld, British Marine would recommend that, where marriages take place on territorial seas (as well as in international seas) the exact GPS coordinates for locating the vessel at the precise time of the ceremony is provided by the vessel's captain or senior crew to the officiant for recording in the statutory register or marriage schedule. We consider this sensible given territorial waters cross into international waters and, in some cases, into other waters where English and Welsh law does not apply.

22. Do you agree that weddings should be permitted in international waters on UK-registered cruise ships with a port of choice in England and Wales, provided they abide with the civil preliminaries process?

Yes, although British Marine thinks it would be unnecessarily restrictive to limit this reform to only UK registered *cruise* ships, and should instead be extended to all UK-registered commercial vessels. This is because maritime regulations require all commercial sea going vessels to be professionally crewed and all such vessels have the expertise to ensure that the necessary safety standards for conducting wedding ceremonies onboard could be met and that the precise location of a UK commercial vessel at the time of a wedding ceremony could be accurately recorded.

By allowing weddings onboard all UK registered commercial ships cruising in both British and international waters would not only help meet the growing demand for weddings onboard cruise ships but would also open up new potential market opportunities in the superyacht sector and onboard other large vessels, such as UK registered tall ships.

Chapter 6: Role of Officiants

23. Do you agree that all officiants should have a legal duty to uphold the dignity and significance of marriage?

Yes

24. Do you agree that organisations should have to be established for a minimum of three years before nominating officiants to conduct legal weddings?

Yes

25. Do you agree that for a belief organisation to be able to nominate officiants to carry out legally binding weddings the minimum number of households who are members of that organisation should be 100?

Yes

26. Should the Government have express exclusions on certain groups being precluded from being able to nominate officiants as belief organisations? Yes.

If yes, please tick which of the following groups should be expressly excluded.

Please explain your reasoning in the text box:

- Political Parties
- Trade Unions
- Chambers of Commerce
- Organisations that promote unlawful purposes X
- Other (please state)

If you disagree that there should be express exclusions, please explain why below.

27. Do you agree with allowing independent officiants to conduct legally binding weddings?

Yes

Please explain your reasoning in the text box

This change fits with the Government's commitment to modernise weddings and will increase choice for couples

28. Do you agree with allowing maritime officiants to conduct legally binding weddings on international waters on cruise ships registered in the UK?

Yes in principle but maritime officiants should not be limited to deck officers on cruise ships, but also include deck officers of other UK registered commercial vessels. (see comments under Q.22 above)

Whilst British Marine supports the introduction of 'maritime officiates' for weddings in international waters it thinks there would be merit in allowing a more collaborative model, whereby deck officers would retain responsibility for confirming the location of the vessel at the time of a wedding ceremony, and also for ensuring all appropriate safety arrangements are in place, but that the ceremony itself could be conducted by either a maritime officiate or, if feasible, by an independent officiate of the couples' choice.

29. Do you agree that only deck officers should be authorised as maritime officiants, but with a preference for ships captains? Yes, but maritime officiants (including deck officers and captains) should also be extended to include deck officers and or captains of other UK registered commercial vessels. (see comments under Q.22 above). We also recognise that restricting maritime officiant status to deck officers could unnecessarily increase pressure / responsibilities that already fall to deck officers and, although unlikely, could potentially lead to conflicts of interest arising.

Chapter 7: Regulation of Officiants

30. Do you agree with the definition of 'fit and proper' outlined above?

Yes

31. Do you think there are further measures the Government could introduce, in addition to the monitoring requirements proposed by the Law Commission, to help identify poor practice?

No comment

32. Do you agree that all officiants (excluding Anglican clergy) should be required periodically to renew their authorisation every 5 years?

Yes

33. Do you agree that officiants who fail to apply the dignity framework, the fit and proper person standards and their other duties and responsibilities should be subject to sanctions, including deauthorisation?

Yes – British Marine strongly supports the principle behind these proposed reforms i.e. to expand choice and market opportunities whilst maintain the dignity

34. Do you agree with having a central regulator monitor complaints for nominated, independent and maritime officiants? Yes

35. Do you agree that membership organisations should be responsible for monitoring independent officiants, subject to oversight by the central regulator? Yes

36. Do you agree that the proposed eligibility criteria (relating to organisational structure and their role in appointing and overseeing officiants) is sufficient? Yes

37. Do you agree that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) should act as the membership organisation for maritime officiants? Yes

This is sensible given the MCA is already the statutory authority that regulates UK deck officers and maritime safety and will help ensure a seamless integration with existing maritime competency standards and log-keeping requirements.

38. Do you agree that, as with belief groups, membership organisations should be responsible for delivering training, subject to the central regulator establishing the standard for training? [Yes](#)

39. Do you agree with the Law Commission that the GRO would be the organisation most suited to undertake the role of central regulator? [Yes](#)

Should you require any clarification or further information about the comments we have provided above please contact Joanna Richardson on email jrichardson@britishmarine.co.uk.