

DEFENCE FORCE REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL

HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYING CATEGORY

TRADE RESTRUCTURE

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has sought a new structure and new Pay Groups for sailors in the Hydrographic Surveying category.

This category is fundamentally responsible for the provision of hydrographic, meteorological and oceanographic information which is used to formulate an understanding of the battle environment and is necessary for all stages of operational planning and execution. The category also has a civilian role in that it is responsible for providing information on Australia's maritime areas to permit safer and more efficient navigation, as well as promoting sustainable development of the maritime environment.

BACKGROUND

The Hydrographic Surveying category consists of members of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) who have completed the necessary training to undertake the duties as either Hydrographic Systems Operators or Hydrographic Systems Managers. The category has a current strength of 130 personnel. Its structure was last formally reviewed in 1993 and consists of two tiers from Pay Group 3 (for basic and intermediate skill grades) to Pay Group 4 (for the advanced skill grade).

In 1999, to more accurately reflect the nature of employment in the category, Marine Science sailors were renamed Hydrographic Systems Operators/ Managers. The ADF did not propose to change the structure or remuneration of the trade at that time as new surveying platforms and systems were about to be introduced and the full impact of such implementation could not be assessed at that stage.

INSPECTION

The Tribunal had the benefit of an inspection of the hydrographic surveying capability at HMAS Cairns on 12 October 2003. The Tribunal toured the Leeuwin class Hydrographic Survey Ship, HMAS Melville, and was briefed on the roles and responsibilities of each skill grade in respect to their duties conducting single and multi beam operations as well as using towed array side scan sonar.

The Tribunal was also given a practical demonstration of the shallow water surveying capability of Survey Motor Launches using single beam operations.

Finally, the Tribunal was given an opportunity to witness the unique operating environment of laser airborne depth sounding through a sortie in a modified Fokker F27 aircraft.

SUBMISSIONS AND EVIDENCE

The Australian Defence Force (ADF)

The ADF submitted that a new structure for the Hydrographic Surveying category should be introduced to reflect recent operational changes. The proposed structure provides for remuneration at Pay Group 3 for sailors completing their Basic Hydrographic and Seamanship qualifications, Pay Group 4 for sailors completing their Intermediate qualifications and Pay Group 5 for those obtaining their H2 Hydrographic qualification. This structure would reflect recent changes in the nature of the work performed by the category and would contain training and development activities aimed at adequately preparing personnel for progression in each skills grade.

The ADF submitted that there were four main reasons to introduce a new structure:

1. Introduction of new platform and equipment

The most fundamental change that has occurred since this structure was last reviewed is the introduction of the Leeuwin class vessels in 2000. These vessels have significantly increased computing capabilities. This has allowed more data to be captured, which must be analysed and processed. For example, the new vessels now have multi beam echo sounder technology with the

capability to integrate with digital side scan sonar data. Also, hydrographic surveying platforms are now equipped with 3D modelling technologies that enhance the quality of the final product.

An increase in complexity is also evident in the operation of the smaller Survey Motor Launches. These now have their own digital portable echo sounding systems and have the ability to use a towed side scan sonar which provides clearer data. The multiple sensors and systems employed on these vessels demand higher technical proficiency and greater skill levels to operate, coupled with a demand for increased knowledge of hydrographic surveying principles.

2. Expansion of roles and responsibilities

Sailors within the Hydrographic category are continually learning new skills and becoming more proficient in both core and non core-tasks. For example, Grade 1 sailors now perform single beam analysis combined with wet lab sampling and initial data validation; tasks historically undertaken by higher grade sailors. Similarly, Grade 2 sailors now perform many of the data processing functions that were previously performed by senior sailors and Grade 3 sailors, who have completed the H2 Hydrographic Surveying Course, perform survey functions more usually undertaken by the officer corps.

The practice of minimum manning on ships combined with the new technologies has brought with it greater responsibility for more junior personnel. Where in the past, the checking and processing of survey data was usually conducted by officers, and supervision was the responsibility of a senior sailor, these responsibilities have devolved to lower ranks.

3. Requirement for increased accuracy in survey reports

With more than 90% of Australia's trade imports and exports being transported by sea, it is essential that shipping lanes are accurately surveyed. This has been especially important in the past ten years with the trend towards building larger ships with increased drafts operating with minimum under keel clearances. The increased accuracy of Global Positioning Systems and the ability of vessels to receive real time tidal information have meant that the accuracy of data collected today is being relied upon more than ever. The importance of high quality and accurate data can not be underestimated, especially in environmentally sensitive areas such as the Great Barrier Reef and in shallow shipping lanes such as in the Torres Strait.

4. Changes in content and quantity of training

As a result of the expansion of the hydrographic capability, sailors within the category have seen a significant increase in the complexity and quantity of their training. Hydrographic Systems Managers must now complete 44 weeks of trade specific training compared to 34 weeks when the category was last formally reviewed in 1993. The training courses have been significantly overhauled to cater for the quantum leap in technologies that has occurred over the past ten years and the new H2 Hydrographic Surveying course is now internationally accredited.

The ADF called one witness. Captain R. Nairn, Director Hydrographic Operations and Capability and Deputy Commander of the Australian Hydrographic, Meteorological and Oceanographic Force Element Group, gave evidence that there has been a significant expansion of roles and responsibilities as a result of the increase in capability brought about with the introduction of the new Hydrographic Surveying vessels. Captain Nairn also deposed that lower ranks and intermediate sailors now routinely supervise most of the survey data collection, a responsibility that historically had been undertaken by more senior sailors. Witness statements were provided by Petty Officer C. Bell, Leading Seaman D. Martin and Able Seaman J. Yates.

The ADF proposed a transition period whereby existing members of the Hydrographic Surveyors category would be skill audited. Those members currently at the Tier 3 level who have not attained the new H2 qualification would be given two years to successfully complete a five week bridging course. Senior members, however, who have extensive experience via seniority and on-the-job training would be governed by special arrangements and would be deemed at the Tier 3 equivalent.

The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth supported the structure and rates proposed by the ADF. The Commonwealth acknowledged that there had been a significant shift in responsibilities and related technologies as a result of changing capability requirements and increased complexity and range of technology and equipment used. As examples, the Commonwealth cited increases in processing requirements due to greater data retrieval from the improved sonar equipment on the Leeuwin class vessels and the requirement for specific training for operation of the Laser Airborne Depth Sounder.

The Armed Forces Federation of Australia

The Armed Forces Federation of Australia supported the ADF's proposal submitting that the new structure was correctly aligned with the Combat Systems Operator (Mine Warfare) category. Some concern was expressed that two years may not be an adequate transition time to allow existing sailors to acquire the necessary qualifications to transfer to the new structure. The Federation, in conjunction with the ADF, agreed to re-examine the transition arrangements in 18 months time.

DECISION

Having regard to the evidence and submissions, the Tribunal has decided to approve the new structure and associated Pay Groups as sought by the ADF.

It is clear that the nature and role of the category has changed substantially since its structure was last reviewed in 1993. The introduction of new hydrographic surveying platforms and equipment has meant that sailors in this category have had to familiarise themselves with highly complex technology. The Tribunal notes that the ADF has increased the intensity and demand of the training courses by reducing the amount of time embedded into formal course work and moving it into continuing training guides as required tasks, prior to the completion and signing off of competency logs.

In addition to better trained sailors operating more complex equipment, there is also the factor of 'minimum manning' on Navy vessels. With less crew, operations previously carried out by higher ranks are now being conducted by more junior personnel. This change of role brings with it greater responsibility.

The Tribunal recognises the importance of the role of the hydrographic surveying category to both the ADF and civilian shipping companies who, by building larger vessels and sailing 'optimised' routes, are relying more heavily on highly accurate data.

In approving the new structure, the Tribunal has also had regard to other ADF employment categories, in particular the Combat Systems Operator (Mine Warfare).

As agreed by the parties, the date of effect of the new structure and Pay Groups will be on and from 18 December 2003.

APPEARANCES: R Kenzie QC, Defence Force Advocate with Lieutenant D Talbot, for the Australian Defence Force

H Lavey and L Cox for the Commonwealth

G Howatt for the Armed Forces Federation of Australia

DATE AND PLACE OF HEARING:

9 December 2003

Canberra