

DEFENCE FORCE REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL

SPECIAL FORCES DIRECT RECRUITING SCHEME

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has sought to establish an additional tier within the Commando trade structure to accommodate the introduction of the Special Forces Direct Recruiting Scheme (SFDRS). The ADF has proposed that a new Commando Grade 1 skill level be created for SFDRS members who have completed a number of commando training courses and have achieved a minimum level of employability within their trade.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with a Government directive, the Army, in January 2004, instituted a 'direct to Commando' recruiting scheme to augment the existing lateral entry scheme from within the ADF. This was considered necessary to grow and sustain Australia's Commando capability to the level specified under the Government's direction for the expansion of the ADF's Special Forces.

A Commando Regiment is a Special Forces Unit that conducts large-scale offensive operations beyond the scope and capability of other ADF elements. These include, but are not limited to, special recovery, special reconnaissance, offensive operations and support operations.

The SFDRS aims to attract 23-29 year old males with high fitness levels and a proven ability to excel. The higher recruitment standards aim to assist not only in enlisting people of the desired quality, but also in accelerating them through the training system.

INSPECTION

The Tribunal had the benefit of an inspection of Commando Capability at 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (Commando), Holsworthy Barracks on Wednesday 4 August 2004. The Tribunal was briefed on the history, purpose and structure of the scheme, shown static demonstrations of the training and equipment involved and had the opportunity to meet and talk with recruits who had enlisted through the scheme and were currently undergoing training.

SUBMISSIONS AND EVIDENCE

The Australian Defence Force (ADF)

The ADF submitted that a new skill level, payable at Pay Group 2 and applicable after completion of the special forces weapons and commando training courses, would ensure that members recruited under the SFDRS are paid commensurate to their skills and work value.

Under the SFDRS, recruits would move directly to the Special Forces Accelerated Infantry Training upon completion of their Initial Employment Training. At the end of the accelerated training they would complete the Special Forces Entrance Test and be posted to a Commando Regiment for the duration of the Commando Reinforcement Training Continuum. Six months employment in a Commando Regiment as a Commando Grade 1 and completion of the Commando Reinforcement Training Continuum would allow the development of the requisite knowledge, experience and skills for the full range of competencies required for Commando Grade 2 (Pay Group 3).

From the commencement of Recruit Training, it will take 32 weeks for Special Forces Direct Entry recruits to progress to Commando Grade 1 (Pay Group 2). This compares to 19 weeks for members who are recruited through general enlistment. The ADF submitted that this was appropriate because it is at this stage that Special Forces Direct Entry recruits are first employable within a Commando Company with a basic range of competencies. Due mainly to the Special Forces Accelerated Infantry Training, it is expected that Special Forces Direct Entry recruits will attain Commando Grade 2 after approximately 68 weeks of development and on the job training, compared to a minimum of 86 weeks for general enlistees.

The ADF called three witnesses. Major General Duncan Lewis, Commander Special Operations Command, gave evidence regarding the Government's directive to expand the Special Operations Command and the need to generate a large number of Commando soldiers for 4 RAR (Cdo). General Lewis stated that Special Forces Direct Entry recruits would be disadvantaged compared to their general enlistment counterparts, if the new skill level was not introduced.

Major Gary Bergman, Officer Commanding the Development Group at the Special Forces Training Centre, gave evidence regarding the training undertaken by Special Forces Direct Entry recruits. Major Bergman stated that the first point in which the recruits are operationally employable is after they have completed the Special Forces Weapons and Commando Training Courses.

Warrant Officer Darren Hunt, Company Sergeant Major of Operational Support Company, 4 RAR (Cdo), gave evidence that the six months on the job training between Commando Grades 1 and 2 was necessary to ensure that the socialisation process and other requirements had been completed.

The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth supported the inclusion of a new skill level at Pay Group 2 for Special Forces Direct Entry recruits, submitting that this would appropriately reflect the level of qualifications, skills and knowledge required of them. The Commonwealth also submitted that the ADF's proposal would not unfairly disadvantage Commando recruits who joined through general enlistment.

The Armed Forces Federation of Australia

The Armed Forces Federation of Australia was generally supportive of the ADF's proposal; however, it had reservations about the placement of Pay Group 2, in that the arrangement proposed moved away from the current practice of awarding Pay Group 2 after completion of the Infantry Initial Employment Training.

DECISION

Having regard to the evidence and submissions, the Tribunal has decided to approve the new skill level and pay point within the Commando Trade structure to accommodate the Special Forces Direct Recruiting Scheme.

The new pay point, at Pay Group 2, will be applicable once the Special Forces Weapons and Commando Training Courses have been successfully completed.

The Tribunal considers that movement from trainee pay is warranted once a member reaches a level of employability as a Commando. Additionally, the Tribunal is satisfied that remuneration at Pay Group 2 is appropriate considering the work value of the highest function regularly performed at that stage of the Special Forces Direct Entry recruit's training.

As agreed by the parties, the date of effect of the new structure will be on and from 26 August 2004.

APPEARANCES: R Kenzie QC, Defence Force Advocate with Lieutenant Commander H Cameron, for the Australian Defence Force

J Shingles with H Marshall for the Commonwealth

G Howitt for the Armed Forces Federation of Australia

INSPECTION:

4 August 2004 Holsworthy Army Base

DATE AND PLACE OF HEARING:

23 August 2004 Canberra