



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

JOINT CAPABILITY GROUP: SPACE EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES

(Matter 11 of 2025)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 6 AUGUST 2025

MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from a listing application from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for a determination to be made under Section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903* (the Act). The listing application seeks to establish employment categories and career pathways for Space professionals within the Graded Officer Pay Structure (GOPS) and the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS).¹

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 12 June 2025. Ms K Hagan appeared for the ADF and Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth. Major General G Novak AM, Commander Space Command, and Wing Commander I Martin, Deputy Director Space Employment Category Plans, gave written and oral evidence for the ADF. Warrant Officer D Hickey CSC, of No.1 Space Surveillance Unit, Space Command, provided written evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] Although Space domain capabilities were first established in Australia in the 1950s, no dedicated employment category addressing these functions exists.² Recent developments within the Space domain include Air Force creating a Space Division in 2020, establishment of Space Command in 2022, and leadership of the Space domain being transferred to the Chief of Joint Command in 2023. This transfer

was in response to the *Defence Strategic Review 2023* and a direction from the Chief of Defence Force to develop the Joint Capabilities Group into a ‘Service-like’ organisation.³

[4] ADF workforce briefings in 2024 and 2025 have informed this Tribunal on the commitment to establish and grow a Space workforce encompassing personnel from all three services to meet the Government’s intent to build and sustain a trained, professional space workforce.⁴ These briefings were complemented by a site visit in June 2024 to the Australian Space Operations Centre at Headquarters Joint Operations Command.⁵

[5] Various employment categories across the services currently deliver discrete Space capabilities, including Signals Officers (Army), Electronic Warfare Operators (Navy) and Air Surveillance Operators (Air Force).⁶

Submissions

ADF

[6] The three Services jointly propose to introduce two new career structures for the conduct of Space operations. These structures are designed to enable development of deep technical mastery of the domain, and mitigate issues caused by the current approach of posting personnel from disparate employment categories into the Space domain.

[7] The ADF specifically seeks to set remuneration structures and pay grade placements within GOPS and GORPS to:

- a. create a new employment category structure for Officers, to be named Space Operations Officer (SOO); and
- b. create a new employment category for Other Ranks, to be named Space Operations Specialist (SOS)

[8] The ADF submits ‘*national power for space is critical and is central to how we conduct multi-domain operations.*’⁷ The *Defence Strategic Review 2023* highlighted that:

- a. Defence should establish a method for building and sustaining a trained Defence space workforce, including a defined career path for space professionals;
- b. Australia must have a fully integrated and more capable Defence Force, operating across all five domains – maritime, land, air, space and cyber; and
- c. Defence needs to work seamlessly on joint operations to deliver enhanced and joined-up combat power.⁸

[9] The ADF submission details the proposed placement of the Space employment category within the Communications and Cyber Strategic Workforce Segment.⁹ The relativity in the skills, knowledge and duties between Space and Cyber is strong, with both domains having a civil-military nexus in their technologies, sharing common physical architecture, and using sophisticated technologies operated by highly skilled, technically capable personnel.¹⁰ The ADF initially explored the use of the Officer Aviation Pay Structure (OAPS) fixed pay spine due to the similarities and

linkages between Cyber warfare and Space operations, including mastery career pathways, career management, and desired remuneration outcomes.¹¹

[10] The proposed pay grades align closely with those seen in the Cyber workforce prior to that employment category moving to the OAPS framework, but after the impact of the Targeted Workforce Segments matter.¹² The ADF submits external relativities are difficult to assess, as *‘there are minimal similar jobs in the civilian or defence industry to allow a robust analysis of market salaries at this point in time. The ADF expects external relativities to increase in relevance as the nascent space industry becomes more established over time’*.¹³ Accordingly, use of GOPS and GORPS is the current preferred solution, with an undertaking to report back to the Tribunal at both the two year and five year mark after implementation.

[11] The ADF submission detailed a further driver for the proposed change is the limited formal skilling and training programs for space professionals.¹⁴ Additionally, there are few space related occupation classifications included in the official Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) job codes.¹⁵

[12] In order to support the proposed employment category by meeting the growth in training needs, the ADF submission includes plans to *‘define and create an Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) linked space-training continuum’*.¹⁶ This is intended to lead to less reliance upon overseas training options, and provide a continuum which is repeatable and sustainable. The ADF views the creation of this training as a national endeavour which should, over time, *‘enable the development of an ecosystem of Government, academic, and private education providers’*.¹⁷

Commonwealth

[13] The Commonwealth supports the ADF proposal, recognising the *‘need to introduce dedicated employment categories for the space domain in order to develop the relevant Mastery and sustainable workforce structure in the long term.’*¹⁸

[14] The Commonwealth notes the consideration by the ADF of use of the OAPS and cautions that *‘any future consideration for the SOO or SOS employment categories to be transitioned into the OAPS would need to be compelling in its justification and considered in accordance to the facts of the particular situation.’*¹⁹

Witness Evidence

[15] Major General (MAJGEN) G Novak AM, Commander Space Command, provided written and oral evidence in support of the proposal. He outlined the strategic drivers underpinning the proposal, citing the *Defence Strategic Review 2023*²⁰ and the *2024 National Defence Strategy*²¹, noting, *‘Australia faces its most challenging strategic environment since WWII.’*²² He elaborated that for the Space domain, future expectations include a wide set of missions, additional workforce requirements to operate major capabilities, and new technologies to be delivered under the Integrated Investment Program.²³

[16] MAJGEN Novak explained the environmental characteristics of the Space domain and how the five domains of Land, Air, Maritime, Cyber and Space work together as an integrated force. He detailed that Space is *‘a domain defined by vacuum, by electromagnetic energy, by debris and by extreme*

*temperatures...It also encompasses a ground segment where our terrestrial infrastructure will be. So how we speak to satellites, how we affect telemetry and control of space craft and make sure orbital effects are brought down to earth...then that's connected by the link signal, which is largely the electromagnetic spectrum, how we communicate between ground and space.'*²⁴ The MAJGEN noted that Space used to be regarded as providing support activities only, however, it now contributes as much to integrated force successes as the other domains.²⁵

[17] MAJGEN Novak gave evidence of positive factors, and some challenges, in the current workforce structure. He explained that Space Command is a fully integrated workforce with ADF personnel from all three services and Australian Public Service personnel in both administrative and technical roles.²⁶ He explained the challenges of a growing workforce, noting *'it's on a growth path because it needs to be. And we're doing it in a very measured and deliberate way because of workforce pressures, and...the fact that we at the moment are borrowing our workforce from the services. So we have to be cautious as we grow for our operational need, we're not doing so in a manner that...creates pressure elsewhere in the three services.'*²⁷

[18] Wing Commander (WGCDR) I Martin, Deputy Director Space Employment Category Plans, gave oral evidence in addition to his affidavit provided in this matter. He detailed how the remuneration proposal would enable creation of appropriate employment categories in each service, with the personnel to be managed as a single workforce under the Space and Cyber Career Management Directorate.²⁸ He summarised the imperative of the proposal is to *'establish the workforce in time to grow at a fast enough pace to have the right personnel, with the right skills, at the right time, in order to operate new capabilities.'*²⁹

[19] WGCDR Martin gave evidence of the proposed modes of entry to the employment category, detailing the process for both internal transfers and ab initio employment through Air Force recruitment.³⁰

[20] Warrant Officer (WOFF) D Hickey CSC, No 1 Space Surveillance Unit, provided written evidence in this matter. He described the type of work performed in space operations and outlined the perceived benefits of creating a Space employment category. WOFF Hickey focused on the challenges of recruitment and retention, the need to create and foster a shared identity for Space personnel, and the expected efficiencies of having an independent career pathway within a dedicated employment category.³¹

[21] WOFF Hickey stated *'without a stand-alone Space Category, a dedicated career pathway is not currently realistic and the ADF's space professional expertise becomes fragmented and diluted, or even potentially lost altogether.'*³² He elaborated that at times *'members are absorbed back into their contemporary (service) categories or, as I have personally witnessed, look to seek employment in a space career outside of the ADF.'*³³

Consideration

[22] We accept this proposal has been made in the context of the clear strategic guidance within the *Defence Strategic Review 2023* and the *2024 National Defence Strategy*. We note this material's assessment of the strategic security environment, and the need for Space capabilities within the integrated five-domain approach.³⁴

[23] We accept the requirement of Joint Directive 13/2023 ‘*to define a career pathway and establish an employment category for Space professionals*’³⁵ and the statement in Domain Concept SELENE that such establishment ‘*will purposefully include positions and workforce from all three Services*’.³⁶ We accept that in order to meet the Government’s intent to build and sustain a trained Space workforce, the creation of a dedicated Space employment category is essential.

[24] In relation to consideration of use of the OAPS, we agree with the submission that the environment of rapid advancement in the Australian and global space industries makes it problematic to justify its use, noting ‘*the nascent state of learning and development requirements, unknown potential of space as a career field, and the unknown competitiveness of the external market provide insufficient justification for the use of OAPS*’.³⁷ We further note our decision in Matter 5 of 2016, wherein the Tribunal stated that any future utilisation of the OAPS would require persuasive justification.³⁸

[25] During the Hearing we sought advice on a number of aspects detailed in the proposal, including the future need for technical specialists, the extent of career management support proposed, ease of internal transfers into and out of the Space employment category, potential capacity constraints within training programs, and potential bottlenecks in promotional avenues. We accept the responses, noting the ADF plans to report back in two years and five years, allowing assessment of data collection covering recruitment, retention, impact on personnel salary and workforce planning models to be provided to the Tribunal.³⁹

[26] We also sought clarification on the need for personnel who have transferred to the Space employment category to return to their previous category to complete service-based advanced courses. We accept the response, provided on notice, that such courses are optional. We further note that a level of continued exposure to service-based education is advantageous to personnel, by increasing competitiveness for promotion.⁴⁰

Conclusion

[27] In closing we agree that the current reliance upon temporary postings, and lack of progression pathways linked to promotion and pay increases, limit the ADF’s ability to ‘*raise, train and sustain*’ a professional workforce in the Space domain.

[28] We agree that creation of a Space employment category will provide the means to develop a mature Space capability with deep technical mastery that will not only be attractive to personnel, but will also meet Defence strategic requirements now and into the future.

[29] We note the ADF anticipates a future submission to this Tribunal will be necessary to make adjustments to salary placements as required over time.⁴¹

[30] We note the non-reduction provisions sought and the expected recruitment outcomes. We endorse the requested amendment to Chapter 3 Part 2 Division 5 of Defence Determination 2016/9 to the effect that ‘*An ADF member who transfers to the SOO or SOS employment categories before 8 September 2030 is to be afforded salary protection for a period of five years from the date of their transfer*’.⁴²

[31] Determination 10 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 6 August 2025.

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT
MS A LESTER, MEMBER
MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

Appearances:

Ms K Hagan for the ADF assisted by Squadron Leader L Hawkett

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Ms Tea Karacic

¹ DMR BN99321366 Listing Application: Space Operations Employment Category: Initial Salary Structure and Placements, received 17 April 2025

² ADF Submission Matter 11 of 2025 *Joint Capabilities Group: Space Employment Categories* dated 9 May 2025 (ADF 1) page 9 paragraph 2.2

³ ADF 1 page 9 paragraph 2.5

⁴ ADF 1 page 5 paragraph 1.6

⁵ Transcript page 3 lines 42-45

⁶ ADF 1 page 10 paragraph 2.6

⁷ ADF 1 page 4 paragraph 1.2

⁸ Department of Defence, (2023), [National Defence: Defence Strategic Review](#), Commonwealth of Australia, pages 19, 26 and 106

⁹ ADF 1 page 47 paragraph 6.5

¹⁰ Transcript page 5, lines 23-33

¹¹ ADF 1 page 42 paragraph 5.1

¹² Transcript page 5, lines 35-38; [Targeted Workforce Segments Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal Matter 4 of 2025](#)

¹³ ADF 1, page 58, paragraph 6.26

¹⁴ ADF 1, page 15, paragraph 3.11

¹⁵ The OSCA was established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and is a standardized framework for storing, organising and reporting on occupation-related information. The limited number of space related classifications were developed by the ABS in consultation with the Australian Space Agency.

¹⁶ ADF 1 page 16, paragraph 3.16

¹⁷ ADF 1, page 16, paragraph 3.16

¹⁸ Commonwealth Submission Matter 11 of 2025 *Joint Capability Group: Space Employment Categories* dated 28 May 2025 (Cmwlth 1) page 8, paragraphs 29 and 30

¹⁹ Cmwlth 1, page 8, paragraph 32

²⁰ Department of Defence, (2023), [National Defence: Defence Strategic Review](#), Commonwealth of Australia

²¹ Department of Defence, (2024), [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#); Commonwealth of Australia

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- ²² Affidavit Major General Gregory Novak, AM, Commander Space Command, affirmed 28 May 2025 (ADF 4), page 3, paragraph 9
- ²³ Department of Defence, (2024), [2024 Integrated Investment Program | About | Defence](#); Commonwealth of Australia
- ²⁴ Transcript page 17 lines 39-45 and page 18 lines 1-7
- ²⁵ Transcript page 28 lines 26-30
- ²⁶ Transcript page 18 lines 18-24
- ²⁷ Transcript page 18 lines 35-41
- ²⁸ Affidavit Wing Commander Ian Martin, Deputy Director Space Employment Category Plans, affirmed 29 May 2025 (ADF 5), page 4, paragraph 14
- ²⁹ ADF 5, page 9, paragraph 34
- ³⁰ ADF 5, pages 7, paragraph 26
- ³¹ Affidavit of Warrant Officer Daniel Hickey CSC, No 1 Space Surveillance Unit, affirmed 2 June 2025, (ADF 3), pages 6 and 7, paragraphs 20-24
- ³² ADF 3, page 6, paragraph 21
- ³³ ADF 3, page 6, paragraph 21
- ³⁴ Transcript, page 14, lines 23-35
- ³⁵ The Secretary and Chief of Defence Force Joint Directive 13/2023, Annex A
- ³⁶ Concept SELENE; an ADF Domain Concept. Domain concepts describe how a domain supports ADF integrated warfighting.
- ³⁷ ADF 1 page 42 paragraph 5.6
- ³⁸ [Air Force – Officer aviation pay structure](#); DFRT Matter 5 of 2016
- ³⁹ The ADF propose to satisfy the statutory obligation under section 58H(6) with an interim review included in the 2027 Annual Review of Determinations with a final review in 2030.
- ⁴⁰ Response provided on notice by Squadron Leader Lucy Hawkett, Directorate of Military Remuneration, via email on 12 June 2025
- ⁴¹ ADF1 page 8, paragraph 1.13
- ⁴² ADF 1, page 60, paragraph 7.7