



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

MARITIME WARFARE OFFICER

(Matter 14 of 2025)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 3 NOVEMBER 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 application¹ seeks to amend the 'Under Training' Mastery Level of Navy's Maritime Warfare Officer (MWO), Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) and Maritime Warfare Officer Submariner (MWO-SM), and introduce an additional pay grade (PG) placement at PG3 within the Graded Officer Pay Structure (GOPS) for these employment categories upon attainment of their Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate.²

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 15 October 2025. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF, and Mr K Wong appeared for the Commonwealth. Lieutenant Commander (LCMDR) S Fenech RAN, Officer in Charge Bridge Training Facility at HMAS Watson, gave evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] Since the establishment of the GOPS, a number of changes and modernisations have occurred within the MWO family of employment categories.³ Matter 6 of 2011 – *Seaman Primary Qualification Review*⁴ resulted in the establishment of numerous MWO specialisations. Later matters had the benefit of a 2019 internal review which '*produced the modernisation of the Warfare Officer workforce through the Navy Warfare Mastery paradigm*'.⁵

[4] Several current employment categories include remunerative recognition through the Graded other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) for personnel who hold navigation certificates. Boatswains, Navy Hydrographic Survey Operators and Navy Combat Systems Operators Mine Warfare were all granted additional pay grade placements upon award of the Limited Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate and/or the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate.⁶ Similarly in Matter 7 of 2022 – *Boatswains Mate Sailor*⁷ a pay grade increase was awarded to Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officer Boatswains Mate personnel who earned navigation certificates.

[5] The Navy Warfare Mastery Project recommendations include remediation of ‘*existing chokepoint impacts in the MWO workforce system*’ and rebalancing of ‘*warfare workforce specialist and generalist SKAPs [Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes and Proficiencies]*’.⁸ This internal review focused on Navy’s shift from a platform-centric to a system-centric and capability-centric workforce, to best leverage Navy’s emerging capabilities. Remunerative recognition of personnel who have achieved a Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate reflects desired outcomes in both this review and aspects of the 2024 National Defence Strategy.⁹

Submissions

[6] The ADF submission proposes to introduce PG3 into the MWO family continuum to recognise the achievement of personnel who obtain the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate and to provide an appropriate milestone in mariner training for emerging employment categories.¹⁰

[7] The ADF specifically seeks to:

- a. Establish PG3 in the GORPS for members in MWO, SWO, and MWO-SM employment categories on attainment of the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate.
- b. Insert the following skill grade names at PG3 in Schedule B.11 of the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal Determination No.2 of 2017, *Salaries* and the continuums for each of the relevant employment categories:
 - i. MWO - Under Training – Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate Qualification
 - ii. SWO - Under Training – Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate Qualification
 - iii. MWO-SM - Under Training – Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate Qualification

[8] The Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate is a significant qualification, allowing personnel to provide tangible capability at the Unit level by taking charge of navigation watch by day or night in limited circumstances. It is attained during the Maritime Warfare Officer Course (MWOC), with the normal training continuum being progression to attainment of a Bridge Warfare Certificate and Major Fleet Unit endorsement prior to returning to sea.¹¹

[9] The ADF anticipates bringing forward a submission in 2026 to establish Undersea and Geospatial Warfare (UGW) employment categories. It is envisioned that these categories will fulfil the emerging requirement for ‘*skills that underpin Tasking, Collection, Production, Exploitation,*

*and Dissemination to support and conduct missions that deliver warfare effects from anywhere within an area of operation’.*¹²

[10] The ADF submits that attainment of a Bridge Warfare Certificate will not be required for specialists within the UGW employment categories, with achievement of the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate serving as an appropriate milestone for readiness for selected MWO personnel to off-ramp to the UGW stream.

[11] The Commonwealth supports the ADF proposal, agreeing that *‘there is justification of the pay grade 3 placement for Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate achievement on the grounds of parity across the MWO categories’.*¹³

[12] The Commonwealth notes the Nature of Work assessment provided, and the ADF’s view the proposed PG3 placement meets Navy’s work value principles and is consistent with other Navy officer placements.

Witness Evidence

[13] LCMR Fenech, Officer in Charge, Bridge Training Faculty at HMAS Watson, provided written and oral evidence in support of the proposal. He outlined the significant responsibility placed on MWO personnel who achieve the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate in the foundational stages of their careers, noting it provides trainees with *‘the authority to take charge of a navigation watch by day and night whilst single ship steaming and steering or manoeuvring in-company during a coastal or ocean transit with no warfare or aviation overlay’.*¹⁴

[14] LCMR Fenech gave evidence of the capacity challenges faced by MWOC personnel in completing training, noting that *‘due to limited sea-going platforms and high demand across the Royal Australian Navy, securing sufficient bunks for students to gain the required experience and consolidation before Fleet Board can be difficult’.*¹⁵

[15] LCMR Fenech outlined what he perceived to be the benefits of introducing PG3 into the MWO continuum, noting in particular it would *‘enable a modest and equitable salary increase for MWOs upon attainment of their Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate’* and it would also *‘provide a formal placement for approximately 20 members of the MWOC cohort who will off-ramp from the course earlier than their peers, in order to support staffing of the new UWF categories’.*¹⁶

Consideration

[16] We accept this proposal has been made in light of Plan Mercator 2036, the Navy’s strategic framework for its evolution and future role in Australia’s security and national interests, and in direct response to the 2024 National Defence Strategy. We note the current assessment presented in this material of the need to increase deployable capability, and the justification presented for change, including requirements for developing deep subject matter experts and evolved warfare specialists.¹⁷

[17] We accept the submission that other Navy employment categories with similar skills, not within the MWO family, receive a PG increase upon attainment of either the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate or the Limited Navigation Warfare Certificate.¹⁸ We agree the proposed establishment of PG3 is justified.

[18] We support the ADF's attempts to address current MWOC training challenges. We agree with the expectation that dual benefits of mitigating potential overtraining and relieving capacity pressures on the training system will be recognised by providing an appropriate ramp-off milestone for future UGW personnel who do not require the Bridge Warfare Certificate.

[19] We agree with the evidence of LCMDR Fenech that both retention and morale are expected to increase once the operational value of obtaining the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate is acknowledged and rewarded. This recognition, in combination with greater career pathway clarity, is expected to provide motivation to trainees who may become overwhelmed with the two-year training commitment within the MWOC.¹⁹

Conclusion

[20] In closing we agree the establishment of PG3 within the MWO family will provide pay parity across the employment categories at the point of attaining the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate.

[21] We further agree that the creation of a milestone in mariner training at PG3, after attainment of the Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate, will avoid overtraining of those personnel who do not require a Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate. This will benefit the broader MWO family by increasing capacity in the training pipeline.

[22] We note that no specific plans were submitted to provide updates on this matter. We ask the ADF to return to us within two years to provide a review of the success of the implementation of the Amending Determination.

[23] Determination 13 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 04 December 2025.

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

Appearances:

Mr P Keane for the ADF assisted by Squadron Leader L Hawkett

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Ms T Karacic

¹ BN101701624 250603 *Listing Application*

² The employment categories of Maritime Warfare Officer, Maritime Warfare Officer Submariner and Surface Warfare Officers are together known as the Maritime Warfare Officer Family.

³ ADF Submission Matter 14 of 2025 Navy: Maritime Warfare Officer, filed 17 September 2025 (ADF1) page 7, paragraph 2.1

⁴ [Salaries – Amendment – Maritime Warfare Officers and Maritime Combat Officers](#)

⁵ ADF1 page 8 paragraph 2.7

⁶ Matter 3 of 2008 *Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure Volume 3 Family Submission 1 (Support/Logistics, Health, Combat 1 and Combat 2)*

⁷ [Boatswains Mate Sailor](#)

⁸ [Navy Mastery | Royal Australian Navy](#)

⁹ [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#)

¹⁰ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 1.4

¹¹ ADF1, page 13, paragraph 3.7

¹² ADF1, page 17, paragraph 4.5

¹³ Commonwealth Submission Matter 14 of 2025 Navy: Maritime Warfare Officer, filed 1 October 2025 (Cmwlth 1) page 5

¹⁴ Affidavit of LCMR Simon Fenech RAN dated 18 September 2025, (ADF2) page 3, paragraph 8

¹⁵ ADF2, page 7, paragraph 22

¹⁶ ADF2, page 8, paragraph 25

¹⁷ [RAN WIN RAS-AI Strategy 2040](#) and [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#)

¹⁸ Transcript page 2, lines 31-39

¹⁹ ADF2, page 9, paragraphs 27-29