



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

Navy Chief of the Boat

(Matter 15 of 2025)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 27 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 establish a common pay grade placement within the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) for personnel engaged as the Chief of Boat (COB).

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 15 October 2025. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF, and Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth. Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Stephen Rule, Employment Category Manager within the Directorate of Navy Employment Category Development Branch, gave evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] The Navy COB position is a leadership role on board Collins Class Submarines (CCSM) performed at the CPO rank upon posting. There is currently no dedicated pay grade for the COB position. Whilst engaged as the COB, personnel do not undertake duties relevant to their employment category of origin.²

[4] Candidates for the COB role are drawn from the following Navy Maritime Warfare employment categories³:

- a. Acoustic Warfare Analyst Submariner (AWA-SM)
- b. Communications and Information system Submariner (CIS-ISM); and
- c. Electronic Warfare Submariner (EWSM)

[5] Personnel engaged as the COB who originate from the employment categories of CIS-ISM and EWSM are remunerated at pay grade 10, whilst personnel who originate from the AWA-SM employment category are remunerated at pay grade 9.⁴

Submissions

[6] The ADF proposal seeks to align the salaries for all personnel who are engaged as the COB regardless of their employment category origin. To address this current inequity the ADF specifically proposes to establish a common pay grade placement at pay grade 10 in the GORPS upon posting as CCSM COB for the employment categories of AWA-SM, CIS-ISM and EWSM.

[7] The Commonwealth supports the ADF submission, recognising that the proposal will result in pay equity for personnel engaged as the COB.⁵

[8] The Commonwealth notes that the ADF considers any relativities with the Navy surface fleet to be low risk, due to the well-established distinction between surface and submarine fleet, and that the proposal is strongly supported by the CCSM workforce.⁶

Witness Evidence

[9] CPO Rule gave written and oral evidence in support of the proposal, noting *‘the COB role is always at the rank of CPO and despite working with other CPOs, their position imbues status as the highest enlisted rank on the boat’*.⁷

[10] CPO Rule explained that for personal and professional growth, and career progression, the role of COB is a position submariners aspire to, noting *‘there is a requirement for sailors to undergo a minimum of one year at sea prior to being eligible for promotion to Warrant Officer, and undertaking the COB role is a way to attain the required sea time.’*⁸

[11] He spoke to the intended benefits of the proposal, noting *‘personnel across all three categories would be on the same pay grade...So it is more of an attraction, I guess, that everyone is equal. They’re doing the same job, however they got there...’*⁹

Consideration

[12] We acknowledge the inequity of the current situation, and accept the only current option for career progression to pay grade 10 for personnel in the AWA-SM employment category is mutually exclusive with a COB placement. This is because *‘AWA-SMs only access the highest pay grade if they choose to stream to the Acoustic Intelligence role as a specialist’* and *‘for those AWA-SM that stream to the COB role, there has been no additional pay grade in which to place them.’*¹⁰

[13] We acknowledge the extent of the current workforce challenges facing the ADF, and in particular the Navy submariner employment categories, with regard to recruitment and retention. We accept the difference in pay grade for the COB position has been a longstanding point of friction for CCSM Maritime Warfare personnel.

[14] We accept this proposal has been made in light of the Submarine Workforce Remuneration Strategy principles¹¹, which use a work value analysis of CCSM salary placements to inform salary placements for future nuclear powered submarine (SSN) workgroups. We agree with the ADF submission that this proposal will assist with the requirement for improving CCSM personnel retention, at the same time as building the new SSN workforce.¹²

Conclusion

[15] In closing we note the proposal is consistent with established principles, reflecting the leadership nature of the COB role and the work value of a pay grade 10 placement.

[16] We acknowledge approximately ten Acoustic Warfare Analysts will be affected by this decision, including one currently serving in the COB role.¹³ We agree with the logic behind the proposal and view it as timely.

[17] We note the ADF intends to provide us with a review of the implementation of these changes within two years of the determination taking effect.¹⁴

[18] Determination 17 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 4 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 Commander L Hawkett

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Ms T Karacic

¹ BN100463808, Listing Application Navy Chief of the Boat, 3 June 2025

² ADF Submission *Navy Chief of Boat*, filed 17 September 2025 (ADF1), page 1, paragraphs 1.2 - 1.4

³ ADF1, page 1, paragraph 1.3

⁴ ADF1, page 2, paragraph 1.6

⁵ Commonwealth Submission *Navy Chief of Boat*, filed 30 September 2025, (Cwlth1) page 4, paragraph 17

⁶ Cwlth1 page 4, paragraphs 19-20

⁷ Affidavit of Chief Petty Officer Stephen Rule, dated 19 September 2025 (ADF2), page 6, paragraph 23

⁸ ADF2, page 7, paragraph 30

⁹ Transcript, page 13, lines 7-14

¹⁰ ADF1, page 5, paragraph 2.8

¹¹ This is a strategic plan approved by Chief of Navy in 2023 to inform the development of the Navy's future SSN workforce. ADF1, page 15, paragraph 4.7

¹² ADF1, page 18, paragraph 6.1

¹³ Transcript page 14, lines 32-35

¹⁴ ADF1, page 18, paragraph 6.3