



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

ARMY MARITIME OFFICER and ARMY MARINE SPECIALIST

(Matters 16 and 17 of 2025)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 15 DECEMBER 2025

MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from two listing applications from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for a determination to be made under Section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903* (the Act). The listing applications¹ seek to create a new Army Maritime Officer employment category, and restructure the existing Army Marine Specialist employment category by introducing additional skill grades and pay grades developed around the Defence Professional Mastery Framework.

[2] Noting the overlap between the employment categories we elected to consider the matters together and issue this decision in the same way. We considered these matters in a hearing on 2 December 2025. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF and Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth. Lieutenant Colonel (LCOL) Mark Ripper, Officer in the Australian Regular Army, appeared as witness for the ADF.

Background

[3] The Army Maritime employment categories will enable the generation of a modern, specialised workforce that will use the ocean as a tactical and operational manoeuvre space. The Army's Littoral Manoeuvre Program² will provide 41 various vessels and associated facilities, with the first vessels expected to launch in 2026.³

[4] Army Maritime Officers will be qualified as vessel commanders and will support a range of sea-going and shore-based duties. Army Marine Specialists operate and manage watercraft in combat support roles, load and unload vessels, and hold driver proficiencies for some land-based vehicles. Commanding, operating, and maintaining the Army's littoral fleet will require personnel to attain a higher level of seagoing mastery and maritime technical skills than currently seen in any Army employment category.⁴

[5] The *National Defence Strategy 2024* (NDS) directs the Army to expand on its long history of conducting amphibious operations and optimise for littoral manoeuvre.⁵ To fulfil this priority direction, Army needs to enhance and expand its current maritime force on an accelerated timeline.

Submissions

[6] In these combined matters the ADF seeks to create the Maritime Officer employment category, and restructure and contemporise the current Marine Specialist employment category, to provide the specialist workforce required to operate the littoral fleet. In Matter 16 the ADF seeks to:

- a. Establish the Army Maritime Officer employment category within the Royal Australian Corp of Transport, with associated pay placements under the Graded Officer Pay Structure (GOPS); and
- b. Align the rank and pay structure with the General Service Officer taxonomy in Army.⁶

[7] In Matter 17 the ADF specifically seeks to contemporise the Marine Specialist employment category by:

- a. Removing the skill grade 'Marine Specialist Grade 1';
- b. Renaming the skill grade 'Marine Specialist Grade 2' to 'Marine Specialist Foundation 1' and retaining placement in the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) at pay grade (PG) 3;
- c. Renaming the skill grade 'Marine Specialist Grade 3' to 'Marine Specialist Foundation 2' and retaining placement at PG 4;
- d. Renaming the skill grade 'Marine Specialist Advanced' to 'Marine Specialist Intermediate' and retaining placement at PG 4;

- e. Renaming the skill grades ‘Marine Specialist Supervisor’ and ‘Marine Specialist Manager’ to ‘Marine Specialist Advanced’ and increasing placement from PG 4 to PG 5;
- f. Creating a new skill grade named ‘Marine Specialist Master’ and placing at PG 6;
- g. Renaming the skill grade ‘Marine Specialist Manager A’ to ‘Marine Specialist Master A’ and increasing placement in Schedule B.9⁷ from PG 4 to PG 6; and
- h. Renaming the skill grade ‘Marine Specialist Manager B’ to ‘Marine Specialist Master B’ and increasing placement in Schedule B.9 from PG 5 to PG 6.⁸

[8] The ADF submits that the future role requirements and working conditions for Army Marine Specialists will undergo significant transformation under these proposals. The introduction of larger littoral vessels necessitates an expanded skillset and an increase in deployment days at sea, with an expectation for these vessels to operate for up to 150 days annually.⁹

[9] The proposed updates to the Army Marine Specialist employment category align with the Defence Professional Mastery framework, streamlining the skill set by removing many of the general logistician competencies. This shift allows soldiers to focus solely on the delivery of littoral manoeuvre effects.¹⁰

[10] The accelerated timeline to grow this workforce, as dictated by the NDS, means an accurate understanding of the skill sets and the work value of the workforce is not fully established at this time. Therefore, the proposal seeks to establish the Army Maritime Officer at a minimum viable capability that is scalable, affordable, and sustainable with the intention to revisit and assess the category in 2027.¹¹

Commonwealth

[11] The Commonwealth supports the ADF proposal, acknowledging ‘*the clear directive arising from the NDS to establish a littoral manoeuvre force, including an Army Maritime Officer category*’,¹² and the ‘*accelerated nature of the directive, necessitating an interim arrangement approach to begin establishing and growing the Army Maritime workforce*’.¹³

[12] The Commonwealth notes the estimated cost of the proposal and that this estimation relates to salaries only and not allowances. It further notes the intent of the ADF to bring a submission outlining proposed allowances to this Tribunal in 2026.

[13] The Commonwealth supports the proposed salary preservation for a period of up to five years for members transferring to the Army Marine Specialist workforce, and notes the intent to provide this Tribunal with a review of the implementation of the amending determination within two years of its commencement.

Witness Evidence

[14] LCOL Ripper gave written and oral evidence of the strategic drivers for change, including the need to *‘deter through denial of our northern approaches to any potential adversaries’* and the intent for Army to focus on littoral movement.¹⁴ He outlined how *‘close combat will always be something Army has to be a master in’* however its reach is limited by the lack of airfields and the depths of the ocean when transporting personnel and equipment to operational areas.¹⁵

[15] LCOL Ripper explained how it will take more than just the acquisition of vessels to transform Army’s marine capability. The soldiers who will command, operate, and maintain the littoral vessels will be required to *‘uplift skills from a ‘near coastal’ qualification and experience to enable transit across the ocean’*.¹⁶ Traversing ‘blue water’ zones¹⁷ necessitates an increase in regulatory, qualification, and training requirements relevant to operating in international ports and commanding vessels in international waters. He noted that in order to meet Army’s obligations to the United Nations Convention of Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) and to be classified as a warship, with the privileges and immunities that come with that status, *‘UNCLOS requires, among other things, that a vessel is to be under the command of a commissioned officer’*.¹⁸

[16] LCOL Ripper spoke about the watchkeeping component of the training continuum, noting that whilst the Army will leverage the Royal Australian Navy’s experience and training, Army needs to train personnel to a higher level than is achieved under Navy’s Limited Navigation Watchkeepers Certificate.¹⁹ He explained *‘Army is limited in crew size on vessels and therefore needs our soldiers to progress through to unrestricted watchkeeping’*,²⁰ including having control of the bridge on both Landing Craft Medium and Landing Craft Heavy as Officer of the Watch.²¹ A further difference is that Army is expected to beach craft whereas Navy do not, therefore Army will *‘seek to integrate landing craft training into the pipeline or ... do a training intervention at the end’*.²²

Consideration

[17] We acknowledge this proposal has been made in the context of the priorities and directions outlined in the NDS. We accept the need for the ADF to move towards becoming an *‘integrated, focused force’* with the Indo-Pacific region identified as *‘the most important geostrategic area of interest’*.²³ We further accept that as part of the integrated force *‘the Army is required to conduct littoral operations in our northern region that enables its capabilities to strike at distance’*.²⁴

[18] We acknowledge the submission that up to 131 full time Army Maritime Officers are required to fully staff the new littoral capability.²⁵ We accept that in order to build a sustainable Army marine workforce, recruitment of 10-12 maritime officers annually over the next decade is required.²⁶ We acknowledge that modelling shows pressures on the supply of Marine Specialists, and the expectation that *‘in order to build an adequately sized workforce, Army will also continue in-service transfers of suitable applicants’*.²⁷ We expect the improved pay progression and expanded training continuum provided by this proposal will support recruitment and retention efforts.

[19] During the course of the hearing we questioned the impact of the increased time at sea on command responsibilities. LCOL Ripper explained the known challenges for extended sea travel with regard to maintenance of vessels and the wellbeing of personnel. We accept the response that the *'the longer you are at sea the more difficult the command and leadership challenge becomes. ... So the longer you're away, the harder their challenge in their role is, and that has to be taught, to manage fatigue, to manage people, to manage these processes'*.²⁸

[20] We accept that the Army Maritime Officer employment category is submitted as an interim solution at minimal viable capacity, and the next two years are expected to clarify educational requirements and work value propositions.²⁹ We considered the evidence showing that until the Army Maritime Officer ranks are more mature, *'Marine Specialists will play a critical role as part of the bridge command organisation'*.³⁰

[21] We considered the evidence of the future role requirements, noting the impact of new vessels and working conditions, which *'will require Marine Specialists to hold a high level of skills across a significant range of tasks'*.³¹ We note the practicalities of aligning the Army Marine Specialist role with similar roles in Navy, namely the Boatswains Mate, as this will provide *'greater utility across the ADF to meet Government direction'*.³²

Conclusion

[22] In closing, we agree the ADF approach is necessarily conservative, noting we do not have the benefit of immediate knowledge of how these workgroups may evolve. Many aspects of the Army Maritime Officer role are not developed at this time, and we are mindful of the possibility that additional work value may be identified in the future.³³

[23] We consider the approach of aligning the Army Maritime Officer employment category within the General Service Officer Framework to be clear and sensible. It is well suited to the accelerated nature of the NDS directive, allowing immediate establishment and growth of the employment category.

[24] For both employment categories we consider the work value elements to be appropriately aligned with skill and pay grades. A logical continuum is provided to demonstrate how Army will develop and deliver the new skills and qualifications that are required for both the new officer roles and modernised specialist category, noting the requirement for flexibility as the categories mature. The proposals are operationally justified, aligned with the NDS, and are industrially sound.

[25] We agree to provide salary preservation arrangements for five years for personnel electing to transfer to the Army Maritime Officer employment category.

[26] Finally, we acknowledge the ADF intends to provide this Tribunal with a review of the implementation of the amending determinations within two years of their commencement.

[27] In relation to the Army Maritime Officer, determination 18 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 16 December 2025.

[28] In relation to the Army Marine Specialist, determination 19 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 1 July 2026.

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 BN101558511 3 June 2025 *Listing Application Army Maritime Officer* and BN107444722 23 September 2025 *Listing Application Army Marine Specialist*

² Project LAND 8710 executes the Government's acquisition of new littoral manoeuvre capabilities and infrastructure. These capabilities will strengthen the ADF's capacity to rapidly project force or sustain ADF operations in the region.

³ ADF Submission *Army Marine Specialist*, filed 6 November 2025, (ADF2), page 1 paragraph 1.4

⁴ ADF2, page 2, paragraph 1.6

⁵ [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#)

⁶ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 1.7

⁷ Schedule B to the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal Determination No. 2 of 2017, *Salaries* contains the PG placements for Warrant Officer Class 1 and equivalent.

⁸ ADF2, pages 2 and 3, paragraph 1.8

⁹ ADF2, pages 18-19, paragraphs 4.14-4.17

¹⁰ ADF2, page 27, paragraph 5.4

¹¹ ADF Submission *Army Maritime Officer*, filed 6 November 2025 (ADF1), page 25, paragraph 4.27

¹² Commonwealth Submission *Matter 16 of 2025 Army Maritime Officer*, filed 25 November 2025, (Comm1)page 6, paragraph 29

¹³ Comm1, page 6, paragraph 30

¹⁴ Affidavit of Lieutenant Colonel Mark Ripper, declared on 19 November 2026,(ADF3) page 4 paragraph 15

¹⁵ Transcript Matters 16 & 17 of 2025 (transcript) page 15, lines 32-33 and page 16 lines 19-21

¹⁶ ADF2, page 6, paragraph 20

¹⁷ Blue water zones are open ocean, and contrast with brown water zones which refer to shallow, inland, or coastal waters.

¹⁸ ADF2, page 8, paragraph 25

¹⁹ Transcript page 24, lines 15-19

²⁰ ADF3, page 12, paragraph 41

²¹ Transcript, page 5, lines 42-44

²² Transcript page 26, lines 9-10

²³ [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#)

²⁴ ADF2, page 3, paragraph 1.2

²⁵ ADF1, page 29, paragraph 5.12

²⁶ ADF1, page 29, paragraph 5.12

²⁷ ADF2, page 29, paragraph 5.15

²⁸ Transcript page 23 lines 36-39 and page 24 lines 11-15

²⁹ Transcript page 25, lines 18-22

³⁰ ADF2, page 27, paragraph 5.6

³¹ ADF2, page 19, paragraph 4.17

³² [2024 National Defence Strategy | About | Defence](#)

³³ ADF2, page 24, paragraph 4.25