



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

Army Driver Specialist

(Matter 18 of 2025)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 23 December 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 restructure the Royal Australian Corps of Transport (RACT) to provide a modernised, more appropriately experienced, multi-skilled, and sustainable workforce for Army within the Driver Specialist employment category.

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 2 December 2025. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF and Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth. Major (MAJ) Phillip O'Donnell, Employment Category manager for the Army Logistics Training Centre at Latchford Barracks, gave evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] Driver Specialists are employed in most units across the Army, in full and part-time capacities, with more land vehicles being operated now than ever before. The ADF submit that this increase has created a marked growth in driver training and driver instructor liability across the ADF.²

[4] The Tribunal previously considered RACT employment categories in Matter 8 of 1997, resulting in a broad restructure and changes in work value for some Driver Specialists.³

[5] The Army driver workforce was assessed as part of a Distribution Workforce Segment Review (DWSR), which was finalised in October 2024. The review outcome acknowledged the increased complexity, knowledge and skills required to operate the oversize and over-mass (OSOM) heavy vehicle fleet, including various associated communication and other technological equipment.⁴

[6] On 21 October 2024, members of the Tribunal visited RAAF Base Amberley as part of a broad engagement with ADF establishments in the Brisbane area. Army Driver Specialists of the 9th Force Battalion showcased a range of heavy vehicles, and demonstrated the complexity and skill needed for their operation. Workplace briefings were provided on recruitment and retention challenges for a number of employment categories, including Army Driver Specialists and Vehicle Technicians.

Submissions

[7] The ADF submission proposes to restructure the Driver Specialist employment category by amending nomenclature and pay grade (PG) placements for some of the current skill grades, and contemporising the career continuum.

[8] The ADF specifically seeks to:

- a. Amend nomenclature for some existing skill grades resulting in new skill grade names of Driver Grade 1, Driver Grade 2, Driver Heavy Vehicle, Driver Heavy Vehicle Advanced and Transport Operations Supervisor Grade 1;
- b. Establish one new skill grade of Transport Operations Supervisor Grade 2 to be placed at PG 5;
- c. Increase the PG placements for some skill grades, specifically Driver Heavy Vehicle, Driver Heavy Vehicle Advanced, Operator Specialist Vehicle Grade 1, Transport Operations Manager, Transport Operations Manager A, and Transport Operations Manager B; and
- d. Disestablish Driver Specialist Grade 3, Driver Specialist Advanced and Operator Heavy Advanced employment categories.

[9] In November 2024, in addition to the DWSR, a *Capability Statement for the Driver Specialist employment category* was approved by Army.⁵ The ADF submits this capability statement ‘has been shaped by upgrades to major systems, increased compliance and governance overheads, updated strategic direction and changes to work requirements’.⁶ Additionally, the statement acknowledges the rebalancing of Army’s force structure to meet strategic objectives in the Defence Strategic Review 2023.⁷

[10] The ADF proposal details a structure designed to provide flexible entry options and ease of transferring between service categories (SERCATs) as it will open all skill grades to both permanent and reserve personnel. This is designed *‘to enable more flexible entry pathways for reserves, employment category transfers, lateral transfers and Recognition of Current Competency and Recognition of Prior Learning applicants’*.⁸

[11] The Commonwealth supports the proposal, noting the implementation date, transition plan, and the request for salary protection for up to five years for personnel losing a PG through this process.⁹

[12] The Commonwealth queried several points of the ADF proposal, including: the magnitude of change resulting from the introduction of OSOM vehicles; amendments to the Heavy Vehicle National Law and associated regulations; the low health of the current Reserve Workforce; and the PG placement of the Transport Operations Supervisor Grade 2.

[13] The ADF clarified its proposal, noting additional governance, training, and administration responsibilities for Driver Specialists, and acknowledging SERCAT 5 numbers are low across Army regardless of employment category.

Witness Evidence

[14] MAJ O’Donnell provided written and oral evidence in support of the ADF proposal. He outlined the introduction of new and enhanced capabilities that Driver Specialists are expected to fulfil, noting *‘as the battlefield becomes more sophisticated, so do logistics systems’*.¹⁰ He explained Driver Specialists are now key tactical logisticians, expected to *‘move, shoot and communicate’* in high threat environments.¹¹ Consequently they *‘need a high level of tactical acumen in order to maximise the mission system, achieve the mission, and ultimately ensure their own survival.’*¹²

[15] MAJ O’Donnell explained the significant impact on Driver Specialists of changes to the permit process and ‘chain of responsibility’. The ADF complies with the Heavy Vehicle National Law and regulations enforced by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. Valid permits are required for OSOM travel, and drivers must ensure their vehicle complies with the criteria of all relevant permits, and that the permit/s remains valid for the entire journey.¹³

[16] Chain of responsibility sets *‘legal and irrefutable responsibility on all personnel that have an effect on the carriage of cargo on roads’*.¹⁴ Driver Specialists carry the burden of not only a personal responsibility, but the need to ensure their superiors understand the legalities of heavy vehicle transit. MAJ O’Donnell noted that as Driver Specialists progress through the ranks *‘the expectations of them to advise Command and ensure compliance with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (via the Landworthiness Framework) becomes all the more pertinent and necessary.’*¹⁵

[17] MAJ Donnell outlined the current challenges for retention in the Driver Specialist category, noting that the high quality ADF training produces organised, efficient, highly skilled and qualified personnel who are appealing to civilian employers. He spoke about the need to *‘retain that skill and effort that we’d already put into an individual, and then provide an avenue that remunerates them effectively and gives them that motivation to remain in service and take on that extra responsibility...’*.¹⁶

Consideration

[18] We accept this proposal has been made in the context of the Defence Strategic Review 2023 and Army’s internal reviews of the RACT. We note this material’s assessment of the current state of the Driver Specialist employment category and the broader strategic drivers for change.

[19] We considered the evidence that Driver Specialists are posted in most units across Army, however this is not replicated in the other services. We acknowledge this is due to driving being considered a skill and not a job by Navy and Air Force workforces.¹⁷ Army Driver Specialists are therefore relied upon across the ADF to provide expert advice on complex law and regulations, and to provide driver training. We note this proposal has the support of Navy and Air Force.¹⁸

[20] We acknowledge the additional work value of the proposed training requirements, including the Driver Instructor course and range qualifications. We note the Driver Specialists are now expected to *‘shoot, move and communicate safely, and support the training of learner firers in the range appointment of safety supervisor’*.¹⁹ We agree this expanded skill set will allow Driver Specialists to *‘defend themselves and others in varied threat environments when transporting for military operations’*.²⁰

[21] We considered the proposed continuum and skill grade triggers, noting in particular the flexibility for Reserve members and personnel transferring with either Recognition of Current Competency or Recognition of Prior Learning to undertake gap training courses. We note Army acknowledges *‘that the Driver Specialist category is large and as such has reserved resources for this task’* of creating individual transition plans and providing gap training.²¹

[22] We agree the proposal offers more flexible entry pathways and training options, and is expected to benefit both Reservist personnel and civilian heavy vehicle drivers who can potentially be expedited to a PG 4 role within 12-18 months. We agree that a *‘reduction of two to three years in training and experience means new enlistees being able to contribute to an advanced capability sooner and more effectively’* is a positive outcome.²²

[23] We acknowledge the attraction of an industry salary and working conditions. We note the need to increase retention efforts to maintain a well-trained, highly qualified and very desirable workforce, which is *‘viewed by external industry as a professional, viable, and safe recruitment’*.²³

Conclusion

[24] In closing we agree the ADF must develop and maintain a modern and versatile road transport fleet, appropriately staffed by skilled and experienced Driver Specialists. We acknowledge that in order to deliver on retention targets, the employee value proposition needs to include clear skill grade progression, with flexible entry and training options, in addition to increased remuneration.

[25] We find the remuneration proposal to be conservative and industrially sound, reflecting the increased work value associated with the Driver Specialist roles at each respective skill grade.

[26] We agree to provide salary protection for a period of up to 5 years to ensure no personnel are financially disadvantaged through the transition process.

[27] We note the ADF intends to provide us with a review of the implementation of these changes within two years of their commencement.

[28] Determination 20 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 2 April 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 Wing Commander JA Cotterell

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Ms T Karacic

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- ¹ BN109179926 *Listing Application: Army Driver Specialist: Restructure of Employment Categories (Other Ranks)*
- ² ADF Submission *Matter 18, Army Driver Specialist*, filed 7 November 2025, (ADF1), page 3, paragraph 1.3
- ³ ADF1, pages 9-10, paragraphs 2.4-2.5
- ⁴ ADF1, page 9, paragraphs 2.2-2.3
- ⁵ ADF1, page 16, paragraph 4.2
- ⁶ ADF1, page 17, paragraph 4.9
- ⁷ ADF1, page 19, paragraphs 4.14-4.16
- ⁸ ADF1, pages 28-29, paragraphs 5.16-5.17
- ⁹ Commonwealth Submission *Matter 18 of 2025 Army Driver Specialist*, filed 25 November 2025, (Comm1), page 8, paragraph 30 and page 9, paragraphs 37-39
- ¹⁰ Affidavit of Major Phillip O'Donnell, dated 21 November 2025, (ADF2), page 6 paragraph 29
- ¹¹ ADF2, page 6 paragraph 29
- ¹² ADF2, pages 6-7, paragraphs 27, 29 and 30.
- ¹³ ADF2, page 8, paragraphs 34-36.
- ¹⁴ ADF2, pages 8 and 9, paragraph 37
- ¹⁵ ADF2, pages 8 and 9, paragraph 37
- ¹⁶ Transcript page 12, lines 4-7
- ¹⁷ ADF1, page 32, paragraph 6.12
- ¹⁸ ADF1, page 33, paragraph 6.17
- ¹⁹ ADF1, page 24, paragraph 5.5
- ²⁰ ADF1, page 24, paragraph 5.5
- ²¹ ADF1, page 31, paragraph 6.9
- ²² ADF1, page 33, paragraph 6.16
- ²³ ADF1, page 32, paragraph 6.14