



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

Navy Submarine Executive Officer and Submarine Warfare Officer

Employment Category

(Matter 03 of 2026)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 29 JUNE 2026

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 address remuneration concerns impacting Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Submarine Executive Officers and contemporise the nomenclature for the Submarine Warfare Officer employment category.

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 27 May 2026. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF, assisted by Mr P Rudd. Mr K Wong appeared for the Commonwealth, assisted by Ms T Karacic. Captain (CAPT) Byron Williamson, Deputy Commander Australian Submarine Force, gave written and oral evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] The Submarine Executive Officer (SMXO) is a key position with an inherently important role on board the RAN's six Collins Class Submarines (CCSMs). As second-in-command, the SMXO holds advanced warfare skills and experience to support and advise the Submarine Commanding Officer (SMCO) in submarine war-fighting evolutions. The SMXO is responsible for the discipline, training, general organisation and morale of the submarine's personnel², and is Head of Department for the executive and supply departments. The role is performed at the rank of Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) and is placed within the Maritime Warfare Officer – Submariner (MWOSM) employment category.³

[4] The SMXO needs to be capable of assuming authority and responsibility for missions and tasks in the absence of the SMCO. To be eligible for SMXO selection, the following prerequisites need to be obtained, the latter two needing SMCO endorsement before attendance:

- Bridge Warfare Certificate
- Submarine Officer Training Course – Warfare (26 weeks)
- Submarine Navigating Officer Course (4 weeks)
- Submarine Dived Watchkeeper proficiency (PDL)
- Submarine Advanced Warfare Course (16 weeks)
- Submarine Attack Coordinator Course (8 Weeks)⁴

[5] The MWOSM employment category provides maritime warfare personnel proficient in submarine warfare, operations and maritime systems, and who may be employed at sea or ashore. Personnel are currently placed within pay grades 6 to 9 of the Graded Officer Pay Structure (GOPS), with the SMXO receiving pay grade 7 as shown in Table 1.⁵

Table 1: Current MWOSM Placement in GOPS

MWOSM Classification	Pay Grade
Qualified	6
Executive Officer Major Fleet Unit	7
Minor War Vessel Command	7
Warfare Officer	7
Shore Command	8
Major Fleet Unit Command	9
Submarine Command	9

[6] The SMXO was placed at pay grade 7 due to recognition of the broadly equivalent work value with the Major Fleet Unit Head of Department placement, in accordance with the Chief of Navy's 2006 guidance.⁶

[7] In Matter 8 of 2024 *Navy: Surface Warfare Officer* the Tribunal considered the roles, responsibilities and pay placements of components within the Maritime Warfare Officer family, and created the employment category of Surface Warfare Officer.⁷ The current proposal seeks to create a discrete employment category for Submarine Warfare Officers within the Maritime Warfare Officer family.⁸

Submissions

[8] The ADF submits the current placement of the SMXO at pay grade 7 does not reflect the high work value of the role within the CCSM continuum. In order to recognise the higher work value of the SMXO role, and to adjust the internal relativities between initial warfare and full SMXO qualifications, the ADF specifically seeks to increase the pay grade placement for SMXOs by one pay grade to pay grade 8.⁹

[9] It further seeks to establish a stand-alone employment category to be known as Submarine Warfare Officer (SMWO), which will provide a common naming convention for Submarine Warfare Officers across a submarine career.¹⁰

[10] In order to give effect to these proposals, amendments to the current employment category and skill grades are required, with the proposed structure of the SMWO employment category outlined in Table 2.¹¹

Table 2: Proposed SMWO Placement in GOPS

SMWO Classification	Pay Grade
Under Training	2
Under Training - Navigation Watchkeeping Certificate Qualification	3
Primary Qualification	4
Submarine Qualified	6
Warfare Qualified	7
SMXO	8
Submarine Command	9

[11] The Commonwealth supports the proposal, recognising the need to retain CCSM personnel to support the AUKUS pathway as directed by Government defence policy.¹²

[12] It acknowledges the ‘*increase in work value and capability contribution delivered by the SMXO role and finds the proposed pay grade adjustment appropriate*’.¹³

Witness Evidence

[13] CAPT B Williamson RAN gave oral and written evidence of the responsibility and work value of the SMXO role. He explained that whilst both SMXOs and Watch Leaders are qualified Warfare Officers, *'appointment as the SMXO represents a clear step-change in Mastery, authority, responsibility and accountability'* and that the SMXO *'acts as the Commanding Officer's principal deputy, and must be ready to assume command immediately if required'*.¹⁴ Additionally, the SMXO posting is a mandatory developmental step prior to being considered suitable for the Submarine Command Course.¹⁵

[14] CAPT Williamson spoke about the experience and qualifications needed in the SMXO role, noting *'to become an SMXO you need to have gone through all of the other positions and mastery levels on a submarine. The SMXO is regarded as an Advanced Plus level of mastery, whereas the Watch Leader, as a Submarine Warfare Officer, is an Advanced level of mastery'*.¹⁶

[15] CAPT Williamson detailed how these two warfare qualified roles are currently placed at pay grade 7, noting *'the misalignment exists due to a rank upgrade to the senior Watch Leader position made in 2016 that removed any salary differential between these two roles'* and submitted that *'a placement for the SMXO at pay grade 8 rather than pay grade 7 would correct this imbalance and better recognise the role's true value'*.¹⁷

[16] The issues of attraction and retention, and the need to motivate personnel into the SMXO role were highlighted by CAPT Williamson. He explained the need for *'as many people to get to the SMXO level as possible, particularly with a view to the importance placed on the undersea warfare domain within the 2026 National Defence Strategy and our trilateral technology sharing partnership AUKUS'* and that the ADF *'needs lots of people at the Advanced Plus mastery level to introduce [AUKUS] capabilities and operate them into the future years'*.¹⁸

[17] CAPT Williamson noted that recognition of the work value of the SMXO role *'will better reflect contemporary responsibilities and supports the sustainability of the submarine command pipeline'* and that the proposed nomenclature changes appropriately *'reflect contemporary submarine warfare employment, and support clarity, cohesion, and professional identity within the submarine officer workforce'*.¹⁹

Consideration

[18] We acknowledge this proposal is made in the context of the Government's capability priorities and recommended initiatives outlined in the *2026 National Defence Strategy* and the *2026 Integrated Investment Plan*.²⁰ These materials identify the importance of the ongoing operational viability of the CCSM fleet, at a time when Australia is progressing nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pathway.

[19] We are aware from several recent cases that the ongoing and future requirements for CCSMs oblige the ADF to perform a difficult balancing act. We acknowledge the challenges of *‘continuing to attract and retain a highly performing cohort of Collins Class Submariners while simultaneously developing a Submariner workforce for nuclear-powered submarines’* and note this need will *‘likely require lots of careful monitoring and calibration of attraction and retention mechanisms’* for CCSM crews.²¹

[20] We accept that *‘the acquisition of submarines under AUKUS requires the RAN to grow a significant pool of experienced and capable Submarine Commanders in this challenging employment category for recruiting’*.²²

[21] We note the MWOSM employment category has been assessed as either *Critical*²³ or *At-Risk*²⁴ since 2012. We accept the current improved assessment of *At-Risk*, however note that this is based on an improvement in category health at the junior trainee level, and is *‘not reflective of the critical shortfalls of available Suitably Qualified and Experienced Personnel (SQEP) at the LCDR and Commander ranks’*.²⁵ We further note this shortfall of SQEP has impacted recent SMXO and SMCO selections, and agree that increased recognition and remuneration for SMXOs will provide incentive for personnel to progress to the role.²⁶

[22] We considered the evidence of the MWOSM career continuum, and the training and mastery requirements needed to successfully fulfil the SMXO role. We note the Mastery Career Pathway and the mastery level assessment of *‘Advanced Plus’* assigned to SMXO personnel. We acknowledge the SMXO is a milestone position within the MWOSM continuum, with personnel needing to achieve advanced warfare skills and significant experience to support and advise the SMCO.²⁷ We agree that the *‘support and advise function represents greater work value compared with the Submarine Watch Leader’*.²⁸

[23] We agree that the proposal will provide *‘internal relativity between initial warfare and SMXO qualifications’*²⁹ and will be a more appropriate placement for the SMXO relative to the Submarine Engineering Head of Department, which is placed at pay grade 9 post the Targeted Workforce Segments initiative.³⁰ We note the proposal *‘will provide a point of comparison when developing future salary cases for the SSN SMXO position’*³¹ in line with the Submarine Workforce Remuneration Strategy.³²

[24] We accept that the operational capability and safety of a submarine depends upon an SMXO having the same knowledge as the SMCO, and being ready and able to take command if needed. We acknowledge the SMXO *‘holds continuous responsibility and accountability, both at sea and ashore, for the professional conduct and discipline of the ship’s company’* and importantly *‘the coordination and assurance of readiness for operations, exercises and deployment’*.³³ We agree there is a *‘significantly increased level of skill and responsibility associated with the SMXO role’* and that the proposed pay grades shown in Table 2 above are appropriate.³⁴

[25] Conclusion

[26] In closing, we agree that recognition of the SMXO role with an increase to pay grade 8 accurately reflects the work value inherent in the position, supports the long term sustainability of the submarine command pathway, and is likely to improve workforce morale and attraction initiatives.

[27] We are cognisant of the workforce challenges within both the CCSM and the AUKUS pathways, and note the hollowness at the LCDR and Commander levels. We agree the proposed increase in pay grade is a more sustainable and enduring workforce solution than the use of retention bonuses.³⁵

[28] We agree the nomenclature changes sought will provide a logical common naming convention for submarine officers across their submarine career.

[29] We note that in accordance with sub section 58(6) of the *Defence Act 1903*, the ADF intends to return to the Tribunal with a review of the implementation of the changes within two years of the determination taking effect.³⁶

[30] Determination 7 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 02 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 Mr P Rudd

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Ms T Karacic

¹ BN121110915/ 4 March 2026 *Listing Application*

² With the exception of the efficiency and technical training of the engineering personnel, who fall under the remit of the Head of Department Engineering.

³ ADF Submission *Matter 3 of 2026 Navy Submarine Executive Officer and Submarine Warfare Officer Employment Category*, filed 23 April 2026 (ADF1). Page 9, paragraphs 3.2-3.4

⁴ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 3.5

⁵ ADF1, page 12, paragraph 3.11

⁶ ADF1, page 10, Footnote 22.

⁷ ADF1, page 6, paragraph 2.11; [Navy: Surface Warfare Officer | Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal](#)

⁸ ADF1, page 6, paragraph 2.11

⁹ ADF1, page 2, paragraph 1.7

¹⁰ ADF1, page 2, paragraph 1.7

¹¹ ADF1, page 15

¹² Commonwealth Submission *Matter 3 of 2026 Navy Submarine Warfare Officer*, filed 18 May 2026, (Comm1), page 4, paragraphs 26-28

¹³ Comm1, page 4, paragraph 29

¹⁴ Affidavit of Captain Byron Williamson, dated 13 May 2026 (ADF2), page 2, paragraph 9

¹⁵ ADF2, page 5, paragraph 20

¹⁶ Transcript, page 7, lines 42-45

¹⁷ ADF2, page 2, paragraph 10

¹⁸ Transcript, page 8, lines 34-40

¹⁹ ADF2, page 6, paragraphs 27-28

²⁰ Transcript, page 1, lines 24-43; [2026 National Defence Strategy and 2026 Integrated Investment Program | About | Defence](#)

²¹ Transcript, page 1, lines 34-40

²² ADF1, page 16, paragraph 4.6

²³ *Critical* is defined as “A Category or Occupation that is experiencing, or is anticipated to experience, a shortfall in personnel that could severely limit or degrade strategic and operational effectiveness and/or the ability to deliver Group or Defence outcomes expected of that workgroup”.

²⁴ *At-Risk* is defined as “A Category or Occupation that is experiencing, or is anticipated to experience, a shortfall in personnel that could moderately or temporarily limit or degrade strategic and operational effectiveness and/or the ability to deliver Group or Defence outcomes expected of that workgroup”.

²⁵ ADF1, page 18, paragraph 4.12 and Transcript page 8, lines 42-45 and page 9 lines 1-6

²⁶ ADF1, page 18, paragraph 4.12

²⁷ ADF1, page 16, paragraph 4.8

²⁸ ADF1, page 17, paragraph 4.8

²⁹ ADF1, page 13, paragraph 4.2

³⁰ ADF1, page 20, paragraph 5.5; [Targeted Workforce Segments | Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal](#)

³¹ ADF1, page 19, paragraph 4.16

³² ADF1, page 16, paragraph 4.16

³³ ADF2, page 3, paragraph 13

³⁴ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 2.5

³⁵ ADF1, page 18, paragraph 4.13

³⁶ ADF1, page 23, paragraph 6.3