



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

Royal Australian Air Force Recruit Instructor Allowance

(Matter 08 of 2026)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 16 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 expand eligibility for the Tier C Recruit Instructor Allowances within the Military Factor Framework (MFF) to include select Air Force Recruit Instructor (AFRI) positions.

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 28 May 2026. Mr P Keane assisted by Wing Commander J Cotterell appeared for the ADF and Ms T Karacic assisted by Mr K Wong appeared for the Commonwealth.

Background

[3] Recruit Instructor (RI) roles across the three services ensure enlisted recruits and student officers undergoing Initial Military Training (IMT) graduate with the essential knowledge, skills, and values to enable them to become effective members of the ADF.

[4] This proposal will align select AFRI allowances with the majority of current Army and Navy RI allowances, recognising for this role that disability and sustainment issues are similar across all services. The Tier C allowance is presently \$20,050 per annum.²

Submissions

[5] The ADF submits that attracting appropriate personnel to key recruit instructor roles has historically been a challenge. For Air Force this challenge is compounded by geographical factors. The Officer's Training School (OTS) in Sale, Victoria, and the Number 1 Recruit Training Unit (1RTU) in Wagga Wagga NSW, hold the largest number of AFRI positions. These bases are both approximately three hours' drive from a capital city, making them rural and undesirable posting locations.³

[6] Additionally, Air Force is managing upcoming accelerated recruitment initiatives and the introduction of agile approaches to IMT delivery, increasing the demands and complexity placed upon AFRI personnel.⁴

[7] In this submission the ADF specifically seeks to:

- Expand eligibility for Tier C in the MFF to include AFRI positions.
- Transition eligible members into Tier C in the MFF from the proposed commencement date of 2 July 2026.⁵

[8] The ADF proposes a member is eligible for the allowance if they meet all the following conditions:

- The member holds one of the following ranks:
 - Corporal
 - Sergeant
 - Flight Sergeant
 - Warrant Officer⁶
 - Flying Officer
 - Flight Lieutenant
- The member is posted to, or performing, CDF approved temporary duty in a recruit instructor position at:
 - OTS
 - 1RTU
- The member is qualified and reasonably expected to perform duty in that position.

[9] The ADF proposes to complement these financial incentives with two other initiatives to attract and retain high quality applicants to fill critical RI positions:

- Visible recognition through introduction of an Air Force Instructor Badge.
- Improved promotion board recognition.

[10] The ADF submits that its analysis of AFRI positions reveals that personnel in these roles incur similar disability and sustainability factors as Navy and Army instructors. Limitations on home contact, the lack of leisure time, a range of strenuous working conditions, and unpredictable

working hours all impact instructor roles. AFRI personnel should therefore receive an allowance at the same tier as their Navy and Army counterparts.⁷

[11] The Commonwealth supports the proposal, noting Air Force’s sustained difficulty in attracting applications to RI postings due to both the lack of workforce incentives and the impacts of posting to a regional location.⁸

[12] The Commonwealth recognises that the proposal will align AFRI members with their colleagues in Navy and Army, who are currently in receipt of the RI allowance, and who undertake highly similar duties in highly similar geographical locations.⁹

Consideration

[13] This Tribunal last considered RIs in Matter 9 of 2024 Navy Recruit Instructor.¹⁰ We note this proposal’s similar approach to that matter, and further note that within that decision we stated:

*We accept Air Force may bring a case forward when their RI workforce structure has ‘been reviewed and a fulsome proposal developed’. We encourage that in due course.*¹¹

[14] We accept this proposal has been made in the context of that workforce structure review and the 2026 National Defence Strategy (NDS) objectives.¹² These objectives have raised recruit throughput targets, thereby increasing the span and demand of RI training. We agree with the evidence provided in the instructor workload schedules that *‘the demands and complexities placed on RIs is increasing as the ADF prepares for accelerated recruitment initiatives and more agile approaches to IMT delivery.*¹³

[15] We considered the evidence that *‘attracting appropriate members to RI roles is a challenge across the ADF’* and that *‘Air Force currently has difficulty filling RI positions’.*¹⁴ We accept the RI workforce is currently understaffed across all work segments, and despite these staffing shortfalls, output demands on instructors have increased.¹⁵

[16] We accept an RI is a role model for recruits to look to who is expected to *‘consistently maintain the highest standard in skills, conduct, bearing, appearance and communications’.*¹⁶ We note the importance of providing recruits with a positive start to their ADF career, both for their individual military preparedness and to effectively contribute to the defence of Australia. The need for highly skilled RIs within Air Force is further justified by the common practice of deploying 1RTU recruits and OTS students on overseas operations within 12 months of graduation, heavily relying upon the quality of the IMT provided.¹⁷

[17] We accept the prior use of attraction bonuses on several occasions, noting the most recent bonus ended in January 2026.¹⁸ We accept that whilst these monetary efforts have temporarily alleviated attraction issues, they have not produced lasting workforce stability. We agree that *‘a permanent allowance better aligns with the persistent nature of the workforce challenge’* and expect this will ensure *‘stable staffing for critical training functions central to Air Force capability generation’.*¹⁹

[18] We note the evaluation of disability and sustainability factors indicating AFRI roles are comparable to RI roles in both Navy and Army. We accept that *‘due to the high training tempo of each course, there is little to no opportunity to maintain normal contact with family or friends,’* and that this impact extends to limitations on leisure time, participation in sporting teams, and local interest groups.²⁰

[19] We acknowledge AFRI personnel *‘must undertake a range of strenuous duties as well as endure exposure to extreme environmental elements’* including periods of living in austere field conditions.²¹ We note instructor roles are unpredictable in both working hours, which will change depending upon the course program, and in the need to deal *‘with untrained civilians of different backgrounds in unfamiliar, stressful and demanding environments’*.²² We agree that *‘the assessed disability elements confirm that Air Force RIs meet all criteria for Tier C placement under the MFF’*.²³

Conclusion

[20] In closing we agree that attraction of high-quality RI candidates will have a positive effect on the quality of IMT training, ensuring recruits are given the best possible start to a long and successful career in Air Force.

[21] We agree it is appropriate to align the AFRI allowance with that received by Navy and Army due to the similarity of the disability encountered by RI personnel across all services. We commend this increasingly common integrated approach wherever it is justified, noting the ADF’s approach to remuneration guidelines of *‘same by default, separate by necessity, and similar by exception’*. Further, we agree this will simplify administration by standardising processes and procedures.

[22] We agree Tier C of the MFF appropriately recognises the disability faced by RIs and provides a framework for future inclusions and amendments that may be needed to meet increased capability requirements under the NDS.

[23] This allowance, in conjunction with the Instructor badge and improved promotion board recognition, will enhance the status of the AFRI roles. This will not only validate the importance of those personnel selected for these roles but will also contribute to increased attraction and retention within the workgroup.

[24] 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.²⁴

[25] Determination 4 of 2026 gives effect to our decision from 2 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

Ms T Karacic for the Commonwealth assisted by Mr K Wong

¹ BN120049633/ 6 March 2026 *Listing Application*

² ADF Submission *Royal Australian Air Force Recruit Instructor Allowance*, filed 24 April 2026, (ADF1), page 26, paragraph 5.1

³ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 2.1

⁴ ADF1, page 1, paragraph 1.5

⁵ ADF1, page 2, paragraph 1.8

⁶ This rank will only be used to backfill vacant Flight Sergeant Military Skills Instructor, Flight Sergeant Directing Staff and Flight Lieutenant Directing Staff positions.

⁷ ADF1, page 19, paragraph 4.5

⁸ Commonwealth Submission *Royal Australian Air Force Recruit Instructor Allowance*, filed 15 May 2026, (Comm1), page 4, paragraph 19

⁹ Comm1, page 6, paragraph 31

¹⁰ DFRT Decision – Matter 9 of 2024 – [Navy Recruit Instructor](#)

¹¹ DFRT Decision – Matter 9 of 2024, page 5, paragraph 24

¹² ADF1, page 7, paragraph 3.5

¹³ ADF1, page 7, paragraphs 3.1 and 3.5; ADF1 Annex A and Annex B

¹⁴ ADF1, page 1, paragraph 1.5

¹⁵ ADF1, page 7, paragraphs 3.4 and 3.7

¹⁶ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 3.12

¹⁷ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 3.11

¹⁸ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 2.6

¹⁹ ADF1, page 24, paragraphs 4.19 and 4.20

²⁰ ADF1, page 19, paragraph 4.7

²¹ ADF1, page 20, paragraph 4.7

²² ADF1, page 21, paragraph 4.7

²³ ADF1, Annex D; page 21, paragraph 4.8

²⁴ ADF1, page 31, paragraph 8.3