



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

Navy Undersea and Geospatial Warfare Officer and Specialist (Matters 06 and 07 of 2026)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 25 AUGUST 2026

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 applications combined to seek the creation of new employment categories from existing specialisations within the Mine Warfare and Maritime Geospatial employment categories. The two officer employment categories proposed within the Graded Officers Pay Structure (GOPS) consist of the Geospatial Warfare Officer (GWO) and Undersea Warfare Officer (UWO).¹ The two specialist employment categories proposed within the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) consist of the Geospatial Warfare Specialist (GWS) and Undersea Warfare Specialist (UWS).² Noting the overlap between the workforces, we elected to consider the matters together, and issue this decision in the same way.

[2] In October 2025 we inspected HMAS Waterhen and HMAS Watson, focusing on the employment categories of mine warfare, clearance divers and maritime geospatial warfare. We engaged with current members who explained how their roles were changing with the introduction of new technology and increased autonomy at the junior ranks. We received briefings about the plans for the introduction of Navy's Underwater and Geospatial Warfare (UGW) workforce in preparation for considering Matter 14 of 2025 *Maritime Warfare Officer* and the matters which are the subject of this decision.

[3] We considered these matters in a hearing on 29 July 2026. Mr P Keane assisted by Wing Commander J Cotterell appeared for the ADF. Mr K Wong appeared for the Commonwealth. Captain R Brickacek CSC DSM RAN, of HMAS Kuttambul, appeared as a witness for the ADF.

Background

[4] Navy's UGW workforce is undergoing significant transformation to enable a shift from forces centred around vessels and vessel-based capabilities, to a deployed mission team structure. These deployable teams will consist of capability bricks which deliver the required effects and make significant use of remote and autonomous systems which can be utilised in a variety of environments. These changes to capability include the development of uncrewed underwater and surface vessels.³

[5] A number of matters previously considered by the Tribunal are relevant to the proposed UGW workforces. Most recently in Matter 14 of 2025 *Maritime Warfare Officer* the Tribunal considered the establishment of pay grade (PG) 3 within the Maritime Warfare Officer continuum and the appropriateness of a ramp-off milestone for future UGW personnel, in preparation for the current matters.⁴

[6] Other recent matters include Matter 10 of 2025 *Navy Clearance Divers* and Matter 8 of 2024 *Navy Surface Warfare Officer*, both of which amended training continuums to provide the necessary training and skillsets more efficiently. Matter 4 of 2025 *Targeted Workforce Segments* applied a plus one PG to selected categories, including Hydrographic Systems operators and Maritime Geospatial Officers with specialisations in Meteorology, Oceanography or Hydrography.⁵

Submissions

[7] The ADF proposal involves consolidating eight Mine Warfare and Maritime Geospatial employment categories into five UGW employment categories. Skill stages and PGs will be aligned with the Navy Mastery System and, where relevant, are proposed to be consistent with the existing Maritime Warfare Officer family.⁶

[8] The proposed GWO warfare workforce would encompass specialisations in hydrography, meteorology or oceanography, whilst the UWO covers mine warfare and clearance diving. These personnel are expected to be placed between PG 2 and PG 9, in alignment with the Navy Mastery System as per Table 1 below. Officers who transfer to these roles from the existing Maritime Warfare Officer family structure will be undertaking work of a similar value to their current position, and no additional remuneration is sought for the proposed employment categories.⁷

Table 1: Proposed GWO and UWO Structure⁸

Undersea and Geospatial Warfare (UGW) Officers					
GWO Mastery Stage	Indicative Rank	PG	UWO Mastery Stage	Indicative Rank	PG
Under Training	MIDN-SBLT	PG 2	Under Training	MIDN-SBLT	PG 2
Foundation	SBLT-LEUT	PG 3	Foundation	SBLT-LEUT	PG 3
Foundation Plus	SBLT-LEUT	PG 4	Foundation Plus	SBLT-LEUT	PG 4
Intermediate	LEUT-LCDR	PG 5	Intermediate	LEUT-LCDR	PG 5
Intermediate Plus	LEUT-CMDR	PG 6	Advanced	LEUT-CMDR	PG 6
Shore Charge	LCDR-CMDR	PG 6	Shore Charge	LCDR-CMDR	PG 6
Advanced	LCDR-CAPT	PG 7			
Master	CMDR-CAPT	PG 7	Master	LCDR-CAPT	PG 7
XO MFU and MWV Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 7	XO MFU and MWV Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 7
Shore Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 8	Shore Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 8
MFU Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 9	MFU Command	LCDR-CAPT	PG 9

[9] The proposed UGW specialists encompass GWS, UWS and clearance divers. GWS and UWS personnel are expected to be placed between PG4 and PG8 in alignment with the Navy Mastery System and as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Proposed GWS and UWS Structure⁹

Undersea and Geospatial Warfare (UGW) Specialist					
Geospatial Warfare Specialist (GWS)			Undersea Warfare Specialist (UWS)		
GWS Mastery Stage	Indicative Rank	Pay Grade	UWS Mastery Stage	Indicative Rank	Pay Grade
Foundation	SMN-AB	PG 4	Foundation	SMN-AB	PG 4
Foundation Plus	SMN-AB	PG 5			
Intermediate	AB-LS	PG 5	Intermediate	AB-LS	PG 5
Intermediate Plus	AB-LS	PG 6			
Advanced	LS-WO	PG 7	Advanced	LS-WO	PG 6
Advanced Plus	LS-WO	PG 8			
Master	PO-WO	PG 8	Master	PO-WO	PG 7

[10] The clearance diver employment category is not subject to change in this submission, and career progression remains aligned with the broader UGW restructure as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Current Clearance Diver Structure¹⁰

Clearance Diver		
Skill Grade	Capability	Pay Grade
SG 1	IET	PG 6
SG 2	Intermediate CD	PG 7
SG 3	Advanced CD	PG 8

[11] For the UGW Officer workforce the ADF specifically seeks to:

- Establish a dedicated employment category named GWO that will bring together officer specialisations in hydrography, meteorology and oceanography.
- Establish a dedicated employment category named UWO that will bring together officer specialisations in mine warfare and clearance diving.
- Establish defined pay placements for the proposed GWO and UWO employment categories in the GOPS, aligned to the Navy Mastery System.
- Disestablish the following employment categories for recruiting and/or transfer:
 - Maritime Geospatial Officer – Hydrographer (MGO-H)
 - Maritime Geospatial Officer – Meteorology and Oceanography (MGO-M)
 - Maritime Combat Officer – Meteorology and Oceanography (MCO-M)
 - Mine Clearance Diver Officer (MCDO)
 - Surface Warfare Officer – Mine Warfare (SWO-MW).
- Introduce a five year non-reduction provision to ensure that officers can transition to the UGW employment category without financial detriment.¹¹

[12] For the UGW Specialist workforce the ADF specifically seeks to:

- Establish a dedicated employment category named GWS into which Hydrographic Systems Operator sailors will transition.
- Establish a dedicated employment category named UWS into which Combat Systems Operator Mine Warfare sailors will transition.
- Establish defined pay placements for the proposed GWS and UWS employment categories in the GORPS.
- Transition the Clearance Diver employment category to the UGW workforce without any change.
- Disestablish the following employment categories for future entry, including recruiting and transfer, over the planned three year transition period:
 - Hydrographic Systems Operator
 - Combat Systems Operator Mine Warfare
- Remove qualifications that are no longer in use, such as the Laser Airborne Depth Sounds.
- Introduce a five year non-reduction provision to ensure that sailors can transition to the UGW employment category without financial detriment.¹²

[13] The ADF is supporting these actions with the development of an integrated UGW workforce concept to *‘enable maritime geospatial, mine warfare and clearance diving professions to transition to meet current and emerging capability requirements.’*¹³ The ADF submits these capabilities will allow more flexibility in the delivery of maritime warfare and geospatial intelligence effects.¹⁴

[14] The ADF submits the military effects from UGW-related capabilities are becoming increasingly important to tactical success throughout the full spectrum of warfare. This growing importance has led Navy to develop the discrete and specialised UGW workforce to deliver warfare effects *‘that integrate with, and complement, capabilities across all of the domains, so not just in the maritime domain but in air, land, sea and space’.*¹⁵

[15] The ADF submits that the UGW workforce will necessitate deep specialisation by its personnel who will be operating within a fast moving area of technology and warfare. Due to the emerging nature of the sought-after skills and attributes needed for UGW roles, and the evolving transition from platform-centric warfare to deployable teams, Navy may need to revisit PG placements or redesign the GWO and UWO employment categories as these capabilities mature.¹⁶

[16] The Commonwealth supports the proposals, recognising a contemporary UGW is necessary to deliver the strategic outcomes of the National Defence Strategy, including protection of our nuclear-powered submarine capability.¹⁷

[17] The Commonwealth acknowledges the proposals *‘are not only responding to updated technologies, but to workforce directives to shift from a platform focus to a deployable-effects focus. Broadly this has resulted in Navy members exercising greater authority and decision making earlier in their careers and requiring more in-depth knowledge across technical and intelligence effects.’*¹⁸

Witness Evidence

[18] Captain Brickacek CSC DSM RAN, HMAS *Kuttabul*, provided written and oral evidence for the ADF. Captain Brickacek explained the strategic need for the UGW workforce, describing the *‘proliferation of disruptive technologies and an increasing prospect of high intensity conflict’* and how Navy’s warfare employment categories must *‘adapt and innovate to meet current and future capability requirements’.*¹⁹

[19] He outlined current and emerging UGW operational requirements within the National Defence Strategies of 2024 and 2026, and the 2026 Integrated Investment Plan priorities. These include strategic undersea warfare effects such as target identification and minefield planning, diving and underwater strike effects, developing a full range of maritime robotic and autonomous systems vehicles, and mission planning and post-mission analysis.²⁰

[20] Captain Brickacek detailed the nature of the proposed work assessments for the UWO, GWO, UWS and GWS categories, noting that they are an accurate reflection of the increased work

value of the roles. He highlighted the introduction of new technologies and remotely deployable teams, noting this will result in sailors providing ‘*the full range of organic functions relating to the operation of remote and autonomous systems, including command and control*’.²¹ This will devolve responsibility to lower ranks, including for decisions over the use of lethal force, and will mean ‘*sailors are taking on greater levels of responsibility and autonomy, and accountability for mission outcomes at lower ranks than is the case for operators on ships, who operate under greater levels of supervision and control*’.²² He remains fully supportive of the need for this change, and notes the importance of retaining these specialists within the ADF.²³

[21] During the hearing we sought clarification on the expected need to ‘test and adjust’ the UGW workforce. Captain Brickacek explained the workforce is subject to a balancing act. Consultations are ongoing for external training organisations to provide efficient upskilling of personnel, and the pressures from industry on retention of trained staff are currently unknown. He noted that as the workforce is operating in such a technologically fast-paced environment, further proposals addressing pay placements or training continuums may be submitted to the Tribunal relatively quickly. Mr Keane stated the current proposals are relatively conservative in nature, with either no increase in pay or small increases at some skill levels. He noted the ADF will need to ascertain what the competition from industry is likely to be for the personnel who gain the necessary technological skills, education and experience to be successful in the UGW roles.

[22] We sought Captain Brickacek’s views on whether the current GOPS and GORPS frameworks remain suitable for the deep specialisations required of UGW personnel, noting evidence that the technical skills required to operate the new vehicles and systems have been compared to those needed to pilot an aircraft. He advised that he was not aware of any current consideration being given to adopting an alternative framework.²⁴

[23] We also sought details on ab initio recruitment of people currently working in compatible technological roles. Captain Brickacek detailed the possibility for recruitment from industry and the need to map any existing skills into the Mastery Framework at an appropriate level, noting the need to upskill those recruits into the military side of the roles.²⁵

Consideration

[24] We acknowledge this proposal is made in the context of the Government’s capability priorities and recommended initiatives outlined in the National Defence Strategy documents of 2024 and 2026, and the *2026 Integrated Investment Plan*.²⁶ We also note the critical importance of ‘*accelerating the delivery of advanced capabilities under the AUKUS agreement, including developing cutting-edge payloads and enabling systems for Uncrewed Undersea Vehicles*’.²⁷

[25] We acknowledge the directions within Navy’s Plan MERCATOR for strategic shaping of the maritime domain and its place in Australia’s security and national interests. We note Plan MERCATOR directs Navy’s transition from ‘*a capability focused on a platform-based model (ships) to one that utilises task-organised Deployable Mission Teams*’.²⁸ We agree this will offer ‘*more flexibility in the delivery of maritime warfare and geospatial intelligence effects*’.²⁹

[26] We considered the evidence and information obtained in our inspection of HMAS Waterhen and HMAS Watson. During the inspection we were briefed on the need for enhanced capabilities to detect, monitor, and respond to increasingly sophisticated threats, including the protection of undersea infrastructure and submarines. We engaged with personnel who spoke about the need to develop and sustain underwater and geospatial capabilities, and the shift required within the current workgroups to enable this transition. We agree this proposal reflects the requirements we were briefed on, including acquisition of enhanced capabilities in undersea warfare and the expansion of geospatial expertise.

[27] We considered the evidence of the proposed career continuums, training and mastery requirements. We note the shift to use of the Mastery Framework for these employment categories and how this seeks to create flexibility for personnel to be remunerated based on *‘Education, Experience and Exposure (EEE) and competence, rather than rank driven progression as the principal remuneration methodology’*.³⁰

[28] We acknowledge the proposal is designed to evolve and modernise the UGW workforce, noting in particular the Specialists who will be taking on greater levels of responsibility and autonomy to deliver technically complex outcomes at all stages of the continuum.³¹ We agree the proposed progression requirements provide a logical and efficient framework with clear trigger points that reduce the risk of over-training the workforce.³²

[29] We considered the evidence that the proposal removes the Bridge Warfare Certificate requirement from the UGW Officer career continuum and requires personnel to select a specialisation earlier in their career. This will result in UGW Officers no longer holding the qualifications and skills to successfully fill roles in Minor War Vessel and Major Fleet Unit Charge and Command.³³ We accept this change will benefit Navy *‘by reducing the training liability, which will open the training pipeline for the Surface Warfare Officer employment category to complete the Bridge Warfare Certificate’*.³⁴

[30] We accept that gap training will be offered for personnel who require additional skills to align with an appropriate Mastery Career level. We note a skills gap assessment will be conducted as part of career management plans and that personnel will be notified in writing of gap training requirements.³⁵ We note there is a three year transition period into the UGW workforce for both officer and specialist employment categories.³⁶

Conclusion

[31] In closing, we agree that the restructuring of the UGW workforce is necessary to meet Australia’s strategic needs and Government priorities. The evidence demonstrates that the work value of UGW roles has increased through the adoption of new warfare operating concepts, expanded geospatial intelligence requirements, the transition to deployable mission teams, and increased technological demands at all levels of the workforce. We are satisfied that the greater autonomy and decision-making required in deployable mission teams justify the proposed PG placements.

[32] We note personnel will be provided with non-reduction provisions, where required, for a period of five years.

[33] We acknowledge the emerging nature of work within the UGW domain and the potential for the ADF to revisit PG placements throughout the continuums. We note that in accordance with sub section 58(6) of the Act, the ADF intends to provide us with a review of the implementation of these changes within two years of the determination taking effect.

[34] Determination 9 of 2026 gives effect to our decision from 10 September 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 John Cotterell*

Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth

-
- ¹ BN111144097/ 2 March 2026 *Listing Application*
- ² BN115289805/ 2 March 2026 *Listing Application*
- ³ Transcript of combined matters 6 & 7, (Transcript) page 1, lines 29-33 and page 2, lines 8-10
- ⁴ Transcript page 1, lines 18-23
- ⁵ ADF1, page 8; ADF2 page 8
- ⁶ ADF1, page 5, paragraph 1.9
- ⁷ ADF1, page 5, paragraph 1.9
- ⁸ ADF Submission *Navy Undersea and Geospatial Warfare Officer*, (ADF1) filed 26 June 2026, paragraphs 1.8-1.9
- ⁹ ADF Submission *Navy Undersea and Geospatial Warfare Specialist*, (ADF2), filed 26 June 2026, paragraphs 1.6-1.7
- ¹⁰ ADF2, page 18, paragraph 3.12
- ¹¹ ADF1, page 4, paragraph 1.7
- ¹² ADF1, page 4, paragraph 1.5
- ¹³ ADF1, page 6, paragraph 2.3
- ¹⁴ Transcript page 2, lines 22-23
- ¹⁵ Transcript page 2, lines 25-30
- ¹⁶ ADF1, page 49, paragraph 6.18
- ¹⁷ Commonwealth Submission *Navy Undersea and Geospatial Warfare Specialist* (Comm2), page 11, paragraphs 36 and 37.
- ¹⁸ Transcript page 9, lines 31-42
- ¹⁹ Affidavit of Captain Richard Brickacek, affirmed on 16 July 2026, (ADF3) page 3, paragraph 13
- ²⁰ ADF3, page 3, paragraph 14
- ²¹ Transcript, page 7, lines 17-20
- ²² Transcript, page 7, lines 24-27
- ²³ ADF3, pages 6 and 7, paragraphs 29 and 30.
- ²⁴ Transcript, page 26, lines 8-13
- ²⁵ Transcript, page 25, lines 22-26
- ²⁶ [2026 National Defence Strategy and 2026 Integrated Investment Program | About | Defence](#); [2024 National Defence Strategy and 2024 Integrated Investment Program | About | Defence](#)
- ²⁷ ADF2, page 1, paragraph 1.3
- ²⁸ ADF2, page 2, paragraph 1.5
- ²⁹ ADF2, page 2, paragraph 1.5
- ³⁰ ADF2, page 27, paragraph 5.5
- ³¹ ADF1, page 34, paragraph 5.24
- ³² ADF1, page 48, paragraph 6.16
- ³³ ADF1, page 44, Paragraph 6.4
- ³⁴ ADF1, page 44, paragraph 6.5
- ³⁵ ADF2, page 40, paragraph 6.16 and ADF1, page 47 paragraph 6.14
- ³⁶ ADF2, page 40, paragraph 6.16