



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES ALLOWANCE REVIEW

(Matter 11 of 2026)

MS B O’NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 21 OCTOBER 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 modernise Special Operations Forces (SOF) allowance arrangements to improve alignment between remuneration and contemporary workforce design, operational risk, service conditions, and administrative governance.

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 28 July 2026. Mr P Keane appeared for the ADF assisted by Mr P Rudd. Mr K Wong appeared for the Commonwealth. Colonel Paul Mostafa, Commandant of the Defence Special Operations Training and Education Centre, Holsworthy Barracks, gave evidence for the ADF.

Background

[3] SOF personnel are recognised for their capacity to integrate across domains and work with other government agencies. They require the capability to operate ‘*independently in remote, austere, denied and contested environments*’ undertaking actions such as reconnaissance and surveillance, and strike and recovery.² These tasks impose sustained physical and cognitive demands and expose personnel to elevated risk in high-consequence settings.³

[4] The Tribunal has previously considered a number of matters relating to Special Operations remuneration including Matter 16 of 2013 *Review of Special Forces, Paratrooper and Specialist Operations Allowances*, Matter 5 of 2014 *Special Forces Salaries: Special Forces Support Staff and Command*, Matter 8 of 2022 *ADF Allowance Modernisation Tranche 2: Military Factor Framework* and Matter 9 of 2023 *Special Forces Salary Structure*.⁴

[5] The Military Factor Framework (MFF), determined through Matter 8 of 2022 and implemented in 2024, consolidated Special Forces (SF) disability, sustainability and paratrooping allowances into a common remuneration framework. In Matter 9 of 2023 the Tribunal approved significant workforce reform within Special Operations Command (SOCOMD), establishing three workforce types: SF Operators, SF Integrators and SOF Enablers. The Tribunal noted the ADF's intention to subsequently review SOF allowances to ensure they aligned with the new workforce model.⁵

[6] The current proposal fulfills SOCOMD's undertaking to conduct a comprehensive review following the workforce redesign and the transition to the MFF.⁶ The proposal is forecast to deliver cost savings and better alignment with contemporary service conditions by '*updating definitions and payments to reflect current SOF team structures, contemporary training and instruction, and modern high-risk activities such as advanced parachute descents*'.⁷

Submissions

[7] The ADF submits that SOF workforce structures have evolved significantly since the introduction of many current allowances, and this has '*exposed misalignments between the existing allowance framework and the contemporary SOF workforce structure*'.⁸ The ADF submits that this misalignment has resulted in inconsistent application of allowances, leading to perceptions of inequity across the SOF workforce.⁹

[8] Specifically, the ADF seeks to:

- Establish an annual SF Integrator Allowance at Tier H of the MFF.
- Expand SF Trainee Allowance eligibility to include SF Integrator trainees.
- Establish a consolidated SF Instructor Allowance at Tier H of the MFF.
- Remove four instructor-related allowance constructs.
- Introduce daily allowances for SF High Risk Descent and SF High Risk Descent plus High Altitude Parachute Operation (HAPO) activities.
- Amend the eligibility settings for support allowances to reconnect entitlement with interoperability.
- Update SOF allowance nomenclature to improve administrative clarity.¹⁰

[9] The ADF submits allowance settings should recognise the demanding and hazardous nature of service within SOCOMD and '*must support retention and growth of a highly specialised workforce*'.¹¹

[10] The ADF states that SF Integrator personnel operate as fully embedded members of SF teams and routinely experience environmental, physical and psychological risks comparable in nature to those faced by SF Operators. The current allowance framework does not adequately distinguish this workforce from broader support functions.¹²

[11] Similarly, SF Integrator trainees undertake prolonged periods of high-risk tactical and technical training alongside SF Operator trainees, yet receive no equivalent allowance during training. Extending trainee allowance eligibility would address this inequity while supporting growth of the SF Integrator workforce.¹³

[12] In relation to instructors, the ADF submits that the current framework relies on multiple overlapping disability and sustainment allowances developed when instructional roles were performed predominantly by SF Operators. Currently both SF Operators and SF Integrators serve as instructors, and a consolidated allowance would more appropriately reflect contemporary duties and liabilities.¹⁴

[13] The ADF submits that SOF parachuting profiles have evolved significantly and now include advanced activities such as vector descents, tandem descents, tethered-bundle descents and developmental parachuting activities. The ADF notes that these activities involve levels of risk not contemplated by the existing allowance framework, and that *'change is required to address this gap by better aligning remuneration with actual exposure to modern high-risk descent profiles'*.¹⁵

[14] The ADF states that the proposal is forecast to generate annual savings of approximately \$4.2 million through improved governance and rationalised eligibility, while maintaining appropriate recognition for genuine risk and disability exposure.¹⁶

[15] The Commonwealth supports the entire proposal, agreeing that the creation of an SF Integrator position definition and allowance *'will provide clarity, consistency and equity across the workforce and better reflect the role and risk exposure of SF Integrators'*.¹⁷

[16] The Commonwealth also notes the creation of a consolidated SF Instructor Allowance and the removal of four legacy instructor allowances, agreeing that the proposal simplifies administration while recognising the contemporary workforce profile of instructors.¹⁸

Witness Evidence

[17] Colonel Mostafa provided written and oral evidence in support of the proposal. He described the development of the SOF workforce model, explaining that *"the key change was the creation of three distinct workforce types"* consisting of SF Operators, SF Integrators and SOF Enablers¹⁹. He explained that the SF Integrator workforce was created to recognise personnel who are screened, selected and specially trained to operate as part of SF teams while applying advanced technical capabilities.²⁰

[18] Colonel Mostafa stated that SF Integrator personnel complete a common spine of SF skills, and subsequently apply specialist engineering, communications or medical expertise within

integrated SF teams. He explained that SF Integrators *‘are exposed to the same kinds of risks in the environment as the SF Operators are’* however as they *‘spend time also focused on some of their technical skilling’* the frequency of the exposure is slightly lower.²¹

[19] In relation to trainees, Colonel Mostafa gave evidence that SF Integrator trainees currently undertake SF basic training alongside SF Operator trainees. He observed that under current arrangements *‘we have Operator Trainees who are receiving the SF Trainee Allowance training alongside SF Integrator Trainees who receive zero allowances’*²². He considered this disparity difficult to justify given both groups were undertaking the same training activities.

[20] Colonel Mostafa provided evidence regarding the role of SF Instructors and the current practice of drawing instructors from both the Operator and the Integrator streams. He stated that SF Instructors are responsible for training in *‘the ADF’s most hazardous activities’* and these roles involve *‘sustained exposure to elevated training risk’* whilst requiring instructors to maintain full tactical currency within their trade.²³ He noted that instructors often experience repeated exposure to hazardous activities and may face a greater cumulative burden than trainees, because they repeatedly demonstrate and supervise high-risk tasks over extended posting periods.²⁴

[21] During the course of the hearing, we sought evidence regarding the implementation of the new workforce categories, arising from Matter 09 of 2023, including whether the ADF had experienced any unforeseen challenges. Colonel Mostafa’s evidence demonstrated that implementation has resulted in *‘a larger administrative burden on both the units, and in particular the training centre’*.²⁵ This is partially mitigated by the development of administrative tools to assist in managing the new arrangements. The ADF intends to return to the Tribunal in November with a proposal to establish an SF Integrator trade as a means to *‘better recognise and manage that workforce’*, reflecting lessons learned through the execution and implementation of the workforce reforms.²⁶

[22] We also sought further information regarding the impact on personnel transitioning from the existing SF Support 2/3 allowance to the proposed SOF 1 allowance.²⁷ Colonel Mostafa’s evidence indicated that members understand that these allowances are linked to employment in particular roles and environments, rather than being an entitlement attached to a qualification.²⁸ He noted that the ADF has been *‘very transparent with the entirety of the workforce throughout the allowance review process about what changes are going to come through’*, including through workforce consultation, working groups and regular communications.²⁹

Consideration

[23] The proposal is made in the context of the Government’s capability priorities and its strong focus on people as outlined in the *2026 National Defence Strategy*.³⁰ It also fulfils the undertaking given by the ADF to review SOF allowances. The material before the Tribunal indicates that SOF *‘require a workforce that is adaptable, interoperable and able to deliver complex effects in support of national objectives’*.³¹

[24] The evidence before the Tribunal demonstrates that SF Integrators now constitute a distinct category within SOF teams who are '*routinely exposed to environmental, physical, and psychological risks equivalent in nature to those faced by SF Operators, albeit at a marginally lower frequency*'.³² Establishment of a dedicated SF Integrator Allowance is appropriate recognition of the work value, disability, and risk profile associated with this workforce, whilst maintaining an appropriate distinction from SF Operators.

[25] The Tribunal considered the workforce impacts identified by the ADF. Approximately 180 qualified SF Integrators will transition to the proposed SF Integrator Allowance, approximately 30 SF Integrator trainees will gain access to the SF Trainee Allowance, and 45 personnel currently serving in instructional positions will transition to the new SF Instructor Allowance. These outcomes align remuneration more closely with the contemporary duties, liabilities and risks associated with each workforce group.³³

[26] The reductions in eligibility for some categories have the potential to generate concern amongst affected personnel. However, the evidence before the Tribunal indicates that extensive consultation and communication has occurred throughout the review process and that many of the affected workforce members have already transitioned under interim governance arrangements. The Tribunal is encouraged by Colonel Mostafa's evidence that the workforce has been informed throughout the review process and that changes have been communicated transparently.³⁴

[27] SOCOMD's analysis demonstrates that the revised allowance structure is expected to deliver annual savings of approximately \$4.2 million.³⁵ The evidence indicates that these savings arise principally from improved governance, clearer eligibility settings, and better alignment of allowances with actual exposure to risk and disability. Financial savings are not the primary justification for the proposal however, as the principal objective is aligning the SOF allowance framework with the contemporary workforce structure.³⁶

Conclusion

[28] The current SOF allowance framework no longer fully reflects the workforce design, training continuum and operational environment that now exists within SOCOMD. The reforms approved in 2023 created new workforce structures that require corresponding changes to allowance arrangements.

[29] The proposed SF Integrator Allowance appropriately recognises a workforce that is selected, trained, and employed as part of SF teams, and resolves inconsistencies in the recognition of that workforce.

[30] The extension of the SF Trainee Allowance, and the introduction of a consolidated SF Instructor Allowance, more appropriately recognise the risks, responsibilities, and liabilities associated with training and instructional duties within the SOF environment.

[31] The proposed changes to HAPO allowances appropriately recognise contemporary SOF parachuting activities and maintain consistency with the broader MFF. The revision of the SOF

support definitions and eligibility arrangements will improve consistency, transparency, and governance, and better align remuneration outcomes with genuine interoperability and operational exposure.

[32] We are encouraged by the implementation arrangements proposed by SOCOMD and note that transition activity that has already occurred. We ask the ADF to report back to the Tribunal within two years of commencement on implementation outcomes, workforce impacts and the effectiveness of the revised allowance framework.

[33] Determination 13 of 2026 will give effect to our decision from 28 January 2027.

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

¹ BP57219404/ 5 May 2026 *Listing Application*

² ADF Submission *Matter 11 of 2026 Special Operations Forces Allowances Review*, filed 09 July 2026 (ADF1); page 23, paragraph 4.2

³ ADF1, page 23, paragraph 4.2

⁴ ADF1 page 12, paragraphs 2.1-2.2

⁵ ADF1, page 16, paragraph 2.11; [Special Forces Salary Structure | Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal](#)

⁶ ADF1, page 9, paragraphs 1.7-1.9

⁷ ADF1, page 16, paragraphs 2.11-2.12

⁸ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 1.7

⁹ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 1.7

¹⁰ ADF1, page 10, paragraph 1.12

¹¹ ADF1, page 9, paragraph 1.6

¹² ADF1, page 24, paragraphs 4.4-4.5

¹³ ADF1, pages 24-25, paragraphs 4.7-4.9

¹⁴ ADF1, pages 25-26, paragraphs 4.12-4.14

¹⁵ ADF1, page 26, paragraphs 4.15-4.16

-
- ¹⁶ ADF1, page 54, paragraph 6.16
- ¹⁷ Commonwealth Submission *Matter 11 of 2026 Special Operations Forces Allowance Review*, filed 13 July 2026 (Comm1), page 10, paragraph 38
- ¹⁸ Comm1, page 10, paragraph 40
- ¹⁹ Transcript, page 11, lines 38-39
- ²⁰ Affidavit of Colonel Paul Mostafa, dated 27 July 2026 (ADF2), pages 1-2, paragraphs 8-12
- ²¹ Transcript, page 14, lines 17-21
- ²² Transcript, page 15, lines 24-25
- ²³ Transcript page 5, lines 14-19
- ²⁴ ADF1, Annex E, subparagraph 2.10(b)
- ²⁵ Transcript, page 21, lines 33-34
- ²⁶ Transcript, page 22, lines 5-9
- ²⁷ Transcript, page 22, lines 14-16
- ²⁸ Transcript, page 22, lines 25-26
- ²⁹ Transcript, page 22, lines 26-28
- ³⁰ [2026 National Defence Strategy and 2026 Integrated Investment Program | About | Defence](#)
- ³¹ ADF1, page 23, paragraph 4.1
- ³² ADF1, page 31, paragraph 5.3
- ³³ ADF1, pages 51-52, paragraphs 6.3-6.4
- ³⁴ Transcript, page 22, lines 26-33 and 34-40
- ³⁵ ADF1, page 54, paragraph 6.16
- ³⁶ ADF2, page 6, paragraph 39