



Australian Government
Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Determination of the salaries and relevant allowances to be paid to members

AIR FORCE FLIGHT TEST ENGINEERS

(Matter No. 8 of 2013)

THE HON. A. HARRISON, PRESIDENT

THE HON. A. BEVIS, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 24 OCTOBER 2013

BRIGADIER W. ROLFE, AO (Ret'd), MEMBER

[1] This decision concerns an application by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to selectively provide access for experienced Air Force Flight Test Engineers to the Officer Aviation Specialist Stream (OASS).

[2] A hearing was conducted on 25 September 2013 in Canberra. During the hearing Mr R Kenzie AM QC appeared on behalf of the ADF, Mr J. O'Reilly appeared for the Commonwealth and Air Commodore R. Rodgers, (Director General Personnel - Air Force) appeared as a witness for the ADF.

Background

[3] The ADF's proposal sought to provide an alternative management option for experienced Flight Test Engineers. This is intended to provide a remunerative outcome for members who forgo promotion and career broadening experience to remain exclusively engaged in frontline Flight Test Engineer roles¹.

[4] In addition to enhancing overall capability, the ability to retain qualified Flight Test Engineers at the technical level, beyond the standard two posting cycle, will provide Air Force with the ability to further maximise the return on the flight test training investmentⁱⁱ.

[5] The OASS was established as part of Matter No 3 of 2009 *Officer Aviation Remuneration Structure* (OARS) and provides a mechanism for retaining levels of aviation skill and experience at the technical/frontline level.

[6] Access to the OASS will provide an option for experienced Flight Test Engineers who wish to remain at the technical level and this would in turn maintain a critical aspect of capability. Flight Test Engineers who accept an OASS contract will be remunerated in accordance with the OASS pay structure for the duration of the contract. On completion of that contract, if the member is not offered a further contract or transferred to the Reserves, they would revert to their previous Graded Officer Pay Scheme placementⁱⁱⁱ.

[7] It is proposed that, while in the OASS, Flight Test Engineers have a worn rank of Flight Lieutenant. A Squadron Leader entering the OASS would not wear Squadron Leader rank for the duration of their contract period and would not accrue seniority at the Squadron Leader rank for the period of the contract^{iv}.

[8] In matter No 8 of 2006 *ADF Engineering Pay Case* the ADF included proposals to remunerate Flight Test Engineers as part of the Engineering group. At the time of the case, the ADF also noted that Flight Test Engineer capability was not experiencing any sustainability issues. However it was submitted that if sustainability subsequently became an issue the need for future placement might be reconsidered.

[9] Navy and Army do not intend to seek access to OASS for their Flight Test Engineers at this time. Both Services support Air Forces' requirement.

Submissions

[10] The ADF submission is intended to provide a remunerative solution (as an alternative to a management solution) and provide flexibility to maintain flight test capability by encouraging a small number of experienced Flight Test Engineers to remain in, or return to, a specialist technical stream. This selection would forego available competency based salary increases and rank progression that would otherwise be realised in the Engineering career stream.

[11] Qualified Flight Test Engineer members will be placed into the OASS via an expression of interest process. Those eligible would be at the Flight Lieutenant, Squadron Leader and Wing Commander rank who:

- a) have completed test and evaluation postings, and
- b) have completed their Initial Minimum Period of Service or Return of Service Obligation.

[12] In his affidavit, Air Commodore Rodgers outlined Air Force expectations to employ up to five Flight Test Engineers in the OASS and to do so with gradual implementation by offering single contracts each year instead of several at once. In this way, the intention is to build the resilience of the capability while avoiding the creation of a ‘hump’ that would need to be managed further down the track^v. Air Commodore Rodgers gave further evidence that this mechanism allowed two postings of equivalency in a position providing a depth of systems knowledge giving a valuable return on investment.

[13] The Commonwealth supports the ADF submission on the grounds it is to be used on a limited basis, applies a fixed tenure and is targeted at specially skilled personnel at specific ranks to perform specialist tasks. The Commonwealth noted the proposal provides flexibility to maintain flight test capability and is consistent with the intentions of the OASS.^{vi}

Remuneration

[14] Two contract examples were provided in the ADF submission to assist with the understanding of the remuneration implications for a member who elects to take up a six year contract^{vii}. These reflected an annual increase in line with OASS. One example is included below for illustrative purposes.

YEAR	FTE OASS REMUNERATION
2013	Qualified FTE Flight Lieutenant; 7 years’ experience as an FTE. Current remuneration is Pay Grade 4 increment 5 \$87 206
	Placed onto Aviation Specialist Pay Level 3 \$89 547
2014	Aviation Specialist Pay Grade 4 \$92 947
2015	Aviation Specialist Pay Grade 5 \$96 346
2016	Aviation Specialist Pay Grade 6 \$99 746
2017	Aviation Specialist Pay Grade 7 \$103 145
2018	Aviation Specialist Pay Grade 8 until contract expires \$106 545
	By mutual agreement the member returns to Graded Officer Pay Grade 4 increment 5 (\$87 206) or transfers to the Reserve Forces

Note: Dollar amounts given do not reflect future WRA increases.

Consideration

[15] We considered that the proposal is only intended to provide flexibility to maintain flight test capability and not to address a work value change.

[16] We considered that the proposal will offer Air Force the ability to further maximise the return on flight training investment.

[17] We further considered that the offers of contracts reflect the intent of the Officer Aviation Specialist Stream and that no financial disadvantage will be caused to the members in accepting a Flight Test Engineer contract under OASS.

Conclusion

[18] Having considered the submissions and information before us we are satisfied that the proposal to grant access to the Officer Aviation Specialist Stream to a selected number of Flight Test Engineers is a sound and flexible solution to maintaining flight test capability. Accordingly we make our Determination 16 of 2013 on 24 October 2013 with a date of effect of 01 November 2013.

THE HON. A. HARRISON, PRESIDENT

THE HON. A. BEVIS, MEMBER

BRIGADIER W. ROLFE, AO (Ret'd), MEMBER

Appearances:

Mr R Kenzie AM QC of counsel for the ADF

Mr J. O'Reilly for the Commonwealth

ⁱ ADF Submission, Matter No 8 of 2013, page 4, paragraph 3.

ⁱⁱ ADF Submission, Matter No 8 of 2013, page 12, paragraph 30.

ⁱⁱⁱ ADF Submission, Matter No 8 of 2012, page 22, paragraph 52.

^{iv} ADF Submission, Matter No 8 of 2012, page 23, Example 2 note.

^v Affidavit of Air Commodore Robert Rodgers, page 6, paragraph 18.

^{vi} Commonwealth Submission, Matter 8 of 2013, page 1, paragraph 6.

^{vii} ADF Submission, Matter 8 of 2012, page 22, paragraph 54.