



Australian Government
Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903

s.58H(2)(a)—Determination of the salaries and relevant allowances to be paid to members

AIR FORCE COMBAT CONTROLLER AND COMBAT CONTROL OFFICER

(Matter 11 of 2014)

THE HON. A. HARRISON, PRESIDENT

THE HON. A. BEVIS, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 01 JUNE 2015

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

[1] This decision relates to an application¹ made by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) pursuant to s.58H of the *Defence Act 1903* to recognise combat controllers and combat control officers as a separate Air Force capability and set remuneration structures accordingly.

[2] The matter proceeded to a hearing where Mr R. Kenzie AM QC appeared for the ADF and Mr J. O'Reilly appeared for the Commonwealth. Wing Commander H. Reynolds AM, Commanding Officer 4 Squadron (4 SQN) gave evidence for the ADF at the hearing.

Background

[3] The combat control capability operates in support of Special Forces (SF) and has elements within Air Force headquarters to support Air Force combat functions. A combat controller (other ranks) provides integration of air power into advanced force operations; a combat control officer commands, leads and manages combat control elements.

[4] The combat controller capability was initially established as the Special Tactics Squadron in 2007. Special tactics personnel were given pay grade placements under the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) in 2007 and Graded Officer Pay Structure

(GOPS) in 2008. The special tactics category changed its title in 2012ⁱⁱ and since then combat controllers have been considered a separate mustering within Air Force.

[5] In 2010 Chief of Air Force (CAF) directed 4 SQN to provide training, management and sustainment of a combat control capability for the ADF. In establishing the requirement, CAF determined that combat control personnel were to be a minimum rank of Sergeant due to the range and complexity of the role. Officers would be a minimum rank of Flight Lieutenant with both drawn from existing Air Force categories.

[6] In April 2014 we attended an inspection at Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy Barracks relating to SF allowances; during that inspection we met combat controllers integrated into SF elements. We were further informed by an inspection to Darwin during *'Exercise Pitch Black'* in August where we met with combat controllers and were briefed on their roles and the current employment structure.

Submissions

[7] The ADF seeks to reform the pay structure for combat controllers and combat control officers by removing the replication of Commando pay grades and implementing revised skill grades aligned with Air Force training continuums. The proposal remains affiliated with Commando pay placements in recognition of similar work value however recognises that combat controllers do not require all SF training and skills in order to integrate with an SF element.

[8] The timing of this matter has been aligned to the concurrent SF reviewⁱⁱⁱ noting the role that combat controllers undertake in support of SF tasking.

[9] Specifically, the ADF seeks:

- a) In relation to combat controllers (other ranks) to:
 - a. implement skill grade name changes;
 - b. confirm the current pay grade placements (spanning GORPS pay grades 6-8); and
 - c. advise of the amended career continuum.
- b) In relation to combat control officers to:
 - a. establish skill grades within existing Air Force officer employment categories;
 - b. place combat control officers within the GOPS (spanning pay grades 4-7) across three skill grades;
 - c. replicate the Air Force command taxonomy of awarding a +1 pay grade for a command position; and
 - d. advise of the new combat control officer career continuum.

[10] The Commonwealth submits that “*Combat Controllers undertake specific elements of Commando selection and tactics training*” and that “*the revised career continuum balances special forces skills with the air power integration skills necessary to...support special operations.*”^{iv}

[11] The Commonwealth supports the ADF proposal.^v They acknowledge that combat controllers are an individual employment category and that “*once trained... the member is then liable to perform at the same level of work value whether assigned to a Special Forces unit or otherwise.*”^{vis}

Combat Controllers (Other Ranks)

[12] The ADF submit that combat controllers operate in a range of roles varying from pay grade 6 to pay grade 8 dependent on skill level and experience. For example:

- a combat controller at pay grade 6 meets the minimum requirements of Commando selection and initial training to be operationally employed and is trained to conduct only one specialist skill;
- combat controller ‘specialists’ and combat controller ‘supervisors’ (pay grade 7) are trained in all skills and are multi-mission and multi-role capable; and
- a combat control ‘capability adviser’ (pay grade 8) is a subject matter expert who fills a position in headquarters advising key commanders on the use of the capability.

Combat Control Officers (Officer Ranks)

[13] The ADF is seeking to establish pay grade placements for combat control officers without establishing a separate employment category. Combat control officers, unlike combat controllers, may return to postings within their parent specialisation after a combat control posting.

[14] A combat control officer ‘qualified’ (pay grade 4) has completed Commando selection and initial training and is also single mission capable. A combat control officer ‘advanced’ (pay grade 6) is the team Commander and delivers a multi role capability. The ADF further submit that the two pay grade jump remains reflective of the Commando structure and provides recognition of the increased work value.

[15] A combat control officer ‘executive’ (pay grade 7) delivers a flight commander level of capability and an officer posted to unit command would, aligned with Air Force taxonomy, receive pay grade 8. Pilots and air combat officers who were employed in a command position would be placed on pay grade 9 due to their higher parent category. The Commonwealth acknowledges this is an effect^{vii} of GOPS and does not endorse the differential effect caused by parent specialisations.

Amended training and career continuums

[16] The ADF submit the proposed amendments replace some of the SF skill sets with skill sets of a similar work value and outline the processes Air Force will use to move to the new continuum.^{viii} Combat controllers and combat control officers will still be required to undertake Commando selection and initial training but where subsequent specific Commando training has been removed it will be replaced with air power integration requirements.

Evidence

[17] Wing Commander (WGCDR) Reynolds gave evidence that when combat controllers are posted to 4 SQN they “do not undertake the full extent of special forces integration roles... but still simulate the same or similar conditions, training and working...[as well as] conduct training such as parachuting [and] tactical vehicle operations... without SOCOMD involvement.”^{ix}

[18] He also gave evidence that the present training continuum “requires controllers to not only complete all the Special Forces training required of Commandos [but that] members complete all their airpower integration courses as well. This has led to duplication of skills and provision of unnecessary training.”^x For example: while the training will not require a combat controller to be trained to the full Commando standard in combat, they will instead be required to develop a reconnaissance skill set – a capability considered by WGCDR Reynolds to be of equivalent work value.^{xi}

Consideration

[19] We considered the proposed structure which seeks to recognise the work value of the combat controllers and accept that the proposal seeks to rename skill grades.

[20] We gave consideration to the evidence that not all Commando skills are required to deliver combat control capability and that some specific airpower integration skills are required and can be achieved through alternative training within Air Force. We considered that the amended career continuum has replaced some of those Commando skills and replaced them with airpower skills of equivalent work value thereby maintaining a link to SF skills.

[21] After the hearing we requested further information about the proposed alignment with SF allowances paid to combat controllers. In reply to a request we sent through the Secretariat, the ADF confirmed the proposal for combat controllers to be eligible for SF support staff rates when posted to 4SQN or to a SOCOMD unit “based on the disability exposure of...combat controllers which is equivalent to that experienced by other Tier 2 support staff”.^{xii}

[22] We considered the Commonwealth view that the proposal “moves the capability from reliance on the Commando employment continuum to a structure that recognises the exclusive nature of combat controller employment”.^{xiii}

Conclusion

[23] Although there is no change in the substance of the combat control roles we conclude that the changes of name and training continuum will serve to simplify the allowances and nomenclature in the manner described by the ADF. We approve the changes as sought in paragraph 9 (a) and (b) of this decision.

[24] A determination to this effect was issued on 20 March 2015.

THE HON. A. HARRISON, PRESIDENT
THE HON. A. BEVIS, MEMBER
BRIGADIER W. ROLFE, AO (Ret'd), MEMBER

Appearances:

Mr R Kenzie AM QC with Ms S Robertson for the ADF

Mr J O'Reilly with Mr A McKechnie for the Commonwealth

Witness:

Wing Commander H Reynolds AM, Commanding Officer 4 Squadron.

ⁱ ADF 1 – ADF Submission Remuneration Proposal Air Force Combat Controller and Air Force Combat Control Officer – Matter 11 of 2014 dated 13 November 2014.

ⁱⁱ DFRT Determination 8 of 2012 – Salaries – Combat Controller – Amendment dated 20 July 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matter 16 of 2013, Special Forces, Paratrooper and Allowances for Specialist Operations.

^{iv} Commonwealth 1 - Commonwealth Submission Air Force Combat Controllers Matter No 11 of 2014 of dated 10 November 2014, page 4, paragraph 17.

^v Commonwealth 1.

^{vi} Commonwealth 1 page 3, paragraph 16.

^{vii} Commonwealth 1 page 5, paragraph 25.

^{viii} ADF 1 paragraphs 1.24 to 1.27.

^{ix} Affidavit – Wing Commander H Reynolds AM of 12 November 2014 page 2, paragraph 8.

^x Ibid page 5, paragraph 20.

^{xi} Ibid page 5 paragraph 21.

^{xii} ADF letter dated 19 November 2014.

^{xiii} Commonwealth 1 page 4, paragraph 17.