

# **DEFENCE FORCE REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL**

## **RAAF FIREFIGHTER RESTRUCTURE**

### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has sought the introduction of a new structure and the determination of appropriate Pay Groups for the RAAF Firefighter mustering.

The category provides rescue and firefighting services within the RAAF and is currently in Pay Group 3.

### **BACKGROUND**

The RAAF Firefighter has been in its current Pay Group since 1978 and there has not been a previous review of the mustering by the Tribunal. The existing structure is at Annex A.

In 1999 the Tribunal introduced a new trade structure and pay groups for the Army Emergency Response trade. Members of this trade were formerly in the Army Firefighter and Inspector Fire Services categories in pay group 3. The new Army trade structure consisted of five tiers in pay groups 3, 4 and 5. It recognised the introduction of complex equipment with commensurate increases in skill, greater responsibilities at all levels and substantial changes in roles and duties. The Army Emergency Response structure also established appropriate training and development structures.

At that time the ADF advised that it was not bringing the RAAF Firefighter mustering before the Tribunal for similar consideration because there was uncertainty about the future of the mustering.

### **INSPECTION**

On 15 February 2002 the Tribunal inspected the work of RAAF Firefighters at the RAAF Security and Fire School located at RAAF Amberley.

The Tribunal was provided with detailed briefings on the roles and responsibilities of personnel in the mustering and viewed demonstrations of the range of work carried out by members.

The Tribunal had the opportunity to speak with members of the trade from all ranks.

## **SUBMISSIONS AND EVIDENCE**

### **Australian Defence Force**

The ADF has proposed a five tier structure in Pay Group 3, 4 and 5. The proposed structure is at Annex B.

The role of the RAAF Firefighter category is “to provide rescue and firefighting services within the RAAF necessary to save life and reduce damage to material resulting from an aircraft crash, enemy attack, industrial or domestic accident, fire and explosion”. There are currently 192 members in the mustering.

The ADF submitted that there have been changes in the roles and responsibilities of RAAF Firefighters and that significant changes have also occurred as a result of the introduction of new technologies, equipment and firefighting procedures. It was further submitted that with the decrease in the number of firefighters from 343 in 1986 to 192 in 2002 there has been a significant devolution of responsibility and accountability.

The changes that have occurred since 1981 were said to be:

- “a. the centralising and restructure of fire fighting training in 1988;
- b. a substantial skills increase in all levels;
- c. the requirement for Firefighters to attend many additional formal courses and conduct regular currency training;
- d. the reorganisation of the RAAF Fire Service to cater for the change in the RAAF’s structure and size;
- e. the requirement to accept substantially greater responsibilities at all levels within the trade, including increased levels of accountability and legal liability for the consequences of their actions;

- f. the introduction of complex equipments, increasing the skill levels required to operate and maintain them; and
- g. substantial change in the duties and responsibilities of the Firefighter at all levels.”

Under the ADF proposed structure members will complete the base level Firefighter training of 16 weeks and then will commence employment as a Tier 1 Firefighter at Pay Group 3. Members will then complete mandatory training and development requirements as well as a competency book over a minimum period of 12 months and will advance to Tier 2 Firefighter Grade 1 in Pay Group 4.

After further training, including the Instructional Technique Course and Airfield Controllers Course and a further competency log book, members will advance to Firefighter Grade 2 at the Tier 3 level, still in Pay Group 4. Additional courses such as the High Angle Rescue Instructors Course may be completed as required. The Firefighter Grade 2 may be in charge of a domestic crew of four firefighters and be second in charge of an airfield firefighting and rescue crew. Members at this level will also be responsible for operations requiring the extraction of fatalities and casualties from motor vehicles, either on-base or on civilian roads.

To progress to Firefighter Grade 3 (Tier 4) members will complete additional courses including the Fire Scene Investigators Course, the Hot Fire Trainer Operators Course, the Fire Safety Inspectors Course and the Firefighter Managers Course. The Grade 3 is to be the Senior NCO in charge of the Airfield Firefighters and Rescue crew of nine Firefighters and will be the Senior NCO in charge of on-the-job training. At this level members will be responsible for the instruction, supervision and testing of subordinates and as Trade Testing Officer will certify the competency of members. The Grade 3 will be minimum rank Sergeant and it is proposed that Pay Group 5 apply at this level.

Finally, members may progress to Tier 5 as Firefighter Manager at Flight Sergeant rank. Members will have to complete further courses such as the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Decontamination Instructor Course and the Hazardous Materials Instructor Course. The Manager is generally responsible for 21 to 42 Firefighters. Additional duties at this level include the provision of technical advice to Commanding Officers. Pay Group 5 will also apply to the Manager.

It was submitted that the work value changes supporting the new structure and changes are:

- a. significant changes in roles;
- b. the addition of new skills; and
- c. increased levels of responsibility throughout the rank and employment structure.”

With respect to increased responsibility it was submitted that the Firefighter Grade 1 or 2 could now be responsible for all personnel at a fire, road rescue or hazardous materials incident scene, regardless of rank. Sergeant Firefighters are second in command of RAAF Fire Stations in the absence of the Senior Firefighter and also provide instruction at Fire Training School as well as working on course development. Flight Sergeants command Fire Sections and provide advice to commanders at Bases and in the field during contingencies.

The ADF submitted that the present RAAF Firefighter structure is inequitable when considered against the Army Emergency Response category. The Army category is in a five tiered structure in Pay Groups 3, 4 and 5. Although there was doubt in 1999 about the future of the RAAF Firefighter mustering, this has now been resolved and “RAAF Firefighters are performing roles of similar work value, exercising similar levels of responsibility and accountability and are subject to a similar training program and similar civilian accreditation levels”.

The ADF sought the introduction of the new structure and Pay Groups on and from 11 April 2002.

Witness evidence was provided by Warrant Officer R Dickson, Warrant Officer Firefighter at Combat Support Group RAAF Base Amberley. Additional statements were provided by Wing Commander N Vroomans, Wing Commander G Burton, Flight Sergeant A Thorpe, Sergeant P J R Crawford, Corporal R W Gilbert, Leading Aircraftsman R Trims and Aircraftsman T M Watkins.

### **Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth supported the proposed structure and Pay Group placements. It was submitted that the ADF proposal is consistent with the ADF Productivity Arrangement: 1999 – 2002 and with the work value change principle of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission principles. It was also said that the Pay Group placements are consistent with other ADF categories.

The Commonwealth noted that the proposed RAAF Firefighter placements were comparable with those for Army Emergency Response trade.

It was submitted that the Firefighter category “has advanced from a limited trade skill and a rank oriented structure to a mustering having a broader range of responsibilities which concurrently requires a different training regime” and that the new structure will recognise the changed circumstances of the mustering and reflect “the skills now required and exercised, the devolution of responsibility to lower levels, the introduction of sophisticated firefighting equipment, the changed training regime, with relevant competency assessment linked with civilian accreditation, and the introduction of a competency based sustainable career path to support the ongoing development and management of the mustering”.

With regard to the proposed translation arrangements the Commonwealth noted that some members will translate directly to the new structure while others will require additional training or competency level assessment to meet the requirements of the new structure.

### **Returned and Services League of Australia**

The Returned and Services League of Australia supported the new structure and Pay Groups sought by the ADF.

### **CONSIDERATION**

The ADF has proposed the introduction of a new structure and Pay Groups for the RAAF Firefighter mustering.

The characteristics of the proposed Firefighter structure are:

- “a. a five tiered skill grade structure replacing the existing single grade structure,
- b. remuneration levels tied to gained competencies and skill grade attainment;
- c. a significantly enhanced training program; and
- d. greater employment capability and increased responsibility level.”

It was submitted that the new structure “will provide a logical process for the development of RAAF Fire Service personnel at each level within the mustering and provide appropriate remuneration to reflect the work value and skill development within that structure.”

Warrant Officer Dickson submitted that the training and skills of the RAAF Firefighter are similar to the Army Emergency Response category and that similar Pay Groups are therefore necessary to avoid anomalous treatment of the trades.

Having regard to the submissions and evidence we have decided to introduce the structure and associated Pay Groups proposed by the ADF and agreed by the Commonwealth and RSL. In doing so we note that the ADF proposal will provide an improved structure that will benefit both the RAAF and the individual members of the Firefighter mustering. As submitted by the ADF, “the proposed structure will provide a skill-related career path that, for the first time, will provide an incentive for on-going skill development within the mustering; it will link remuneration with skill and competency levels thus ensuring appropriate remuneration levels; and, will better link training levels with employment needs”.

We also consider that the new structure for the RAAF Firefighters will remove an anomaly with regard to the Pay Groups applying to the Army Emergency Response trade.

In accordance with the submissions of the parties the new structure and Pay Groups will apply on and from 11 April 2002.

**APPEARANCES:** R Kenzie QC, Defence Force Advocate, with Lieutenant Commander  
A Bradshaw, for the Australian Defence Force

A O'Brien with M Frawley for the Commonwealth

J Dainer for the Returned and Services League of Australia

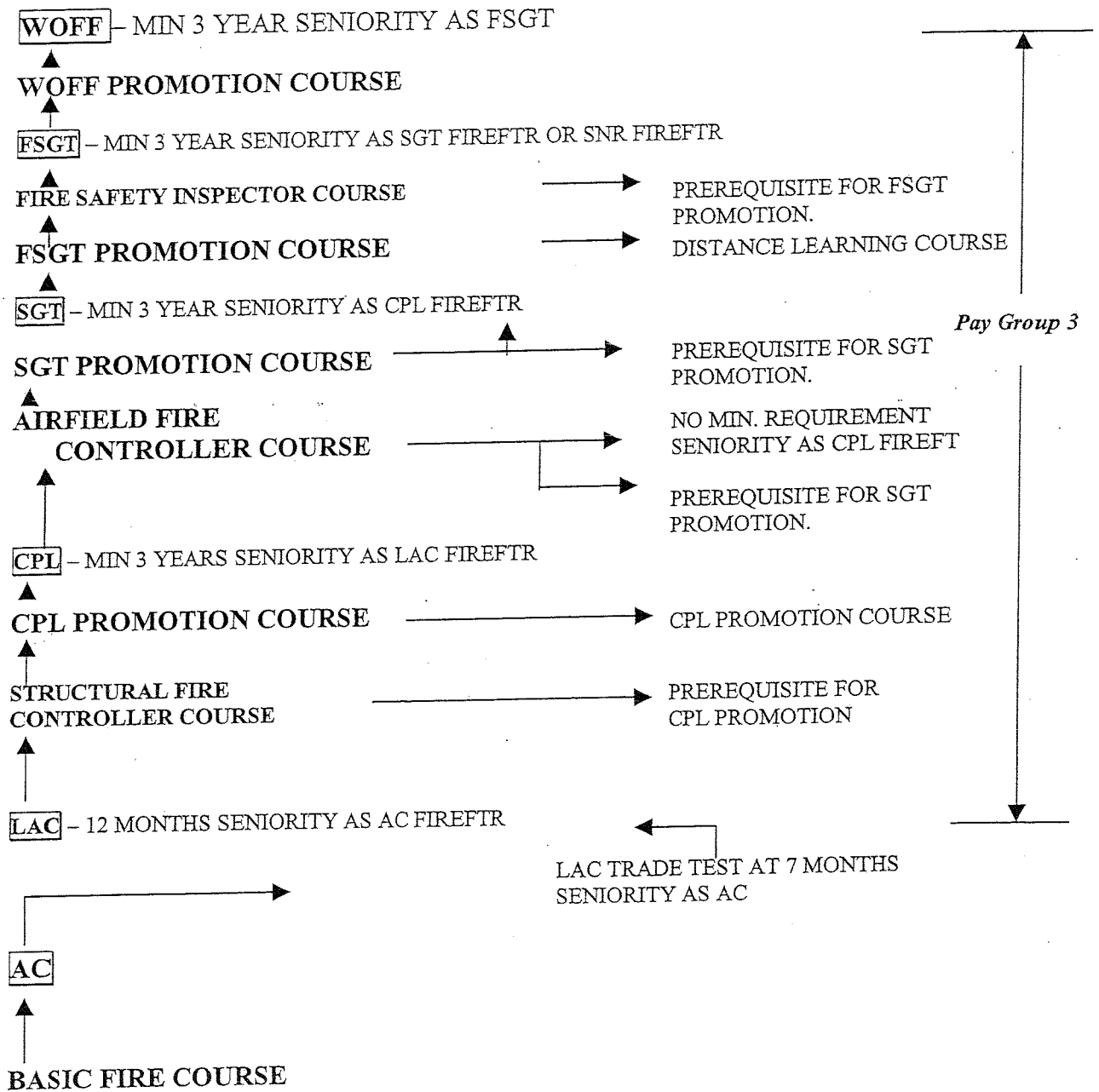
**DATE AND PLACE OF HEARING:**

19 March 2002            Canberra

**INSPECTION:**

15 February 2002        RAAF Amberley

**FIREFIGHTER Career and Pay Structure - 2001**



## PROPOSED RAAF FIREFIGHTER TRADE STRUCTURE

