



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903
s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE: NETWORK TECHNICIAN EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY

(Matter 6 of 2019)

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT

MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 11 NOVEMBER 2019

RADM J. GOLDRICK AO CSC RAN RTD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from a listing application¹ made by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) under section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903* to introduce a new employment category to be known as Network Technician. The proposed category will be a network and cyberspace² systems technical specialist acting in support of the Cyberspace Warfare Analyst (CWA) and Cyberspace Warfare Officer (CWO) categories as previously determined in Matter 3 of 2019 – *Joint Cyberspace Warfare Employment Categories*.³

[2] We were briefed on this matter on 11 July 2019 in Canberra. We subsequently conducted an inspection at 1 Combat Communications Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland on 23 September 2019 followed by a hearing on 24 September 2019 in the same location. Mr J Philips SC appeared for the ADF and Mr J O'Reilly for the Commonwealth. Warrant Officers B Wright, Personnel Branch - Air Force and L Walker CSC, 81 Wing, appeared as witnesses along with Sergeant C Bennett, Chief Information Officer Group, and Corporal L Burns of 462 Squadron.

BACKGROUND

[3] The roles, duties and responsibilities of the Network Technician category are presently performed by members of the Communications and Information Systems Controller (CISCON) and Communication Electronic Technician (CETECH) employment categories. Owing to the rapid evolution of technology the members of these categories have had to continually adapt and expand their roles to support evolving Air Force systems and platforms.

[4] A Cyberspace Support and Enabling Technical Workforce Project conducted by Air Force in 2016 found that many of the tasks performed by members in the CETECH and CISCON categories overlap and are, in some instances, duplicated. Both categories are now operating outside the original roles and responsibilities as established by this Tribunal when determining their initial placement into the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) in 2008.

SUBMISSIONS

ADF

[5] The ADF submits that Air Force currently requires its CETECH and CISCON members to *“develop and maintain skills and complete work that has not been identified as part of their employment category to meet the capability requirements of their systems and platforms”*.⁴

[6] The ADF states that attempts to meet these requirements by requiring CETECH and CISCON members to increase their skills and knowledge (often external to ADF training) has resulted in a set of undesirable challenges and workforce behaviours such as:

- a. an inability to identify and recruit talented members likely to excel in the cyber network environment as no single employment category specialises in this field;
- b. difficulty in developing and maintaining a sufficiently skilled workforce to meet Air Force’s cyber network capability requirements as members post in and out of specialised and non-specialised positions;
- c. difficulty for members to plan their own careers as a formal pathway does not currently exist; and
- d. members being required to develop skills outside of their primary employment category.⁵

[7] The submission specifically proposes to:

- a. establish a new Air Force employment category named Network Technician in GORPS with six skill grades ranging from pay grade 3 to pay grade 7; and
- b. disestablish the CISCON employment category for the Permanent Air Force, retaining the category in the Reserves for the immediate future.⁶

COMMONWEALTH

[8] The Commonwealth submission supports the ADF proposal.⁷

WITNESS EVIDENCE

Warrant Officer Wright

[9] Warrant Officer (WOFF) Wright expanded on the evolving roles performed by CISCONs and CETECHs that are now a part of the capability requirements and which were non-existent when the categories were established - as well as the overlap between the two. He stated *“there are now CISCONs and CETECHs sitting beside each other doing the same job, but getting paid quite differently. As the equipment has changed the workforce has required more IT skills, rather than the technical maintenance skills”*.⁸

[10] WOFF Wright also outlined that *“it is not practical for Air Force to continue delivering capability using two different employment categories for a number of reasons. Primarily, the Air Force needs a workforce that is highly trained in networking skills and has regulatory awareness so as to effectively operate and maintain the platform and mission networks of a modern Air Force”*.⁹

[11] In hearing WOFF Wright detailed that *“with each new platform that we have acquired comes a whole different ball game of how we do business. So it’s been a natural evolution. And the NETECH is actually just as much about a new employment category as it is about formalising the status quo of how Air Force has had to adapt to doing business differently as we [ac]quired new aircraft and weapons systems”*.¹⁰

Warrant Officer Walker

[12] WOFF Walker gave evidence in regard to the training requirements and the frequency in which members of both CISCON and CETECH categories undertake training on a personal level to complete *“industry courses and certifications that are directly aligned to this role and to the Network Technician career in general”*. WOFF Walker outlined that *“if it wasn’t for the additional training I would not be able to execute my responsibilities in a competent and effective manner”*.¹¹

[13] He expanded on this stating that *“the core CISCON training continuum does not cater for the variety and technical complexity of the role as the training in Air Force for this does not yet exist. The job has evolved to meet a capability need and the training regime hasn’t yet caught up”*.¹²

Sergeant Bennett

[14] Sergeant (SGT) Bennett gave written evidence on the complexities of his role and the training qualifications required, as well as those he has completed personally for professional development. In the hearing he gave a detailed description of roles and unit organisation in support of Air Force objectives including deployment readiness; humanitarian aid; short notice to move operations; and maintenance requirements.

[15] In the hearing SGT Bennett expanded further on the evolution of the categories and explained that, in the past, “*you knew who was a CETECH and you knew who was a CISCON*” and that it was “*very clear*” whereas “*nowadays you don’t really notice a difference and sometime you have to ask people if they’re a CETECH or a CISCON*”.¹³

Corporal Burns

[16] Corporal (CPL) Burns gave written evidence that the “*introduction of the Network Technician employment category appears to formalise the changes that the CISCON workforce already experienced*” and that “*at the moment, many of the CISCONs are doing the work of a Network Technician but not getting any additional remuneration for the increased work we do*”.¹⁴

[17] In the hearing CPL Burns also expanded on the externally provided courses that are “*not a pre-requisite*” but that have proven “*very useful for all the work I have done previously in terms of the administration and maintenance and then as it goes into more of the security related training that’s very much related to what I’m doing now*”.¹⁵

CONSIDERATION

[18] We considered the evidence that Air Force is presently required to sustain a dedicated cyber networks/systems capability without a specified career and training structure. We accept that, despite this, it currently maintains the capability by using an informal workforce of CETECH and CISCON members who possess an interest and differing levels of expertise in communications and systems. We accept that “*CISCONs and CETECHs do the exact same courses together so now we can just rely on either person to do either job*”.¹⁶

[19] We gave consideration to the impact on members of their desire to undertake external training in order to benefit themselves, add value to their role, and enhance their career prospects and who “*possess an interest and differing levels of expertise in communications systems and ICT related disciplines*” resulting in “*a workforce that is somewhat disjointed and lacks defined specialisation*” and where “*training is ad-hoc and on an as needed basis*”.¹⁷ We accept that bringing all the functions together will mean that training can be provided in a consistent and regulated manner.

[20] We considered the evidence that the new category will be primarily responsible for “*planning, architecture, operation, maintenance, management and assurance and governance of end-to-end networked systems and capabilities in accordance with relevant instructions, accreditation and governance frameworks*”.¹⁸

[21] We considered the evidence that the category will range in rank from Aircraftman/Aircraftwoman through to Warrant Officer in both the Permanent Air Force and the Reserves and consist initially of approximately 610 members. We accept that the CISCON category will remain in the Reserve Force for the immediate future.

[22] We accept that all CETECH and CISCON personnel will be invited to transfer to the Network Technician. We note that applications will be considered by Personnel Branch – Air Force and, if successful, the appropriate skill grade and rank will be determined and articulated to the member in a letter of offer. We accept that Air Force requests a five year

transition period to allow time to sufficiently train members and seek commensurate salary non-reduction provisions.

CONCLUSION

[23] We accept that the Network Technician will be “*a network and cyberspace systems technical specialist category that will contribute to Air Force and Joint capability through the provision and secure management of assured networks to enable air power projection*”.¹⁹

[24] We accept that the Network Technician training will build upon the contemporary initial employment training and that Air Force is “*working with the Defence Force School of Signals to leverage these training packages for introduction into Network Technician initial employment training*”.²⁰ We are encouraged by the evidence that mature-state training for the category will “*identify an appropriately resourced, structured and sustainable learning regime to ensure the Network Technician category maintains the required knowledge and skills in a rapidly evolving capability medium*”.²¹

[25] We agree that the establishment of the category means that Air Force will have:

- a. an ability to identify and recruit talent talented members likely to excel in the cyber network environment;
- b. an ability to develop and maintain a sufficiently and consistently skilled workforce to meet Air Force’s cyber network capability requirements as members post in and out of specialised and non-specialised positions;
- c. provided members certainty in order to plan their careers; and
- d. removed the impost on members having to develop skills outside of their prime employment category.²²

[26] We note the evidence that, without the employment category having yet been formally established, the additional contribution to capability achieved by a Warrant Officer Networks cannot be measured at this time. Therefore, we agree with the proposal that Air Force return to the Tribunal within two years of implementation to provide evidence of the work value of the Warrant Officer Networks. Noting that, we also ask the ADF to return to us at that time to report back on the progress of the non-reduction provisions.

[27] Determination 10 of 2019 will give effect to this decision with effect from 25 June 2020.

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT
MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER
RADM J. GOLDRICK AO CSC RAN RTD, MEMBER

Appearances:

Mr J Phillips assisted by Mr P Blady *for the ADF.*

Mr J O'Reilly *for the Commonwealth.*

Witnesses:

Warrant Officer B R Wright, *Cyberspace Support and Enabling Technical Workforce Project, Personnel Branch – Air Force.*

Warrant Officer L J Walker CSC, *F-35 Information Assurance Manager, 81 Wing.*

Sergeant C J Bennett, *Network Engineering Support, Directorate of Strategic Communications Sustainment, Chief Information Officer Group.*

Corporal L W Burns, *Cyber Vulnerability Investigation Team, 462 Squadron.*

¹ ADF letter DMR/OUT/2019/19 Listing Application – *Air Force Network Technician Employment Category* dated 21 June 2019.

² For the purposes of this matter 'cyberspace' is regarded as all of the ADF computer networks and digital systems that connect to those networks.

³ https://www.dfrt.gov.au/sites/default/files/decision_-_joint_cyberspace_warfare.pdf

⁴ ADF Submission *Royal Australian Air Force Network Technician Employment Category* Matter 6 of 2019 undated. (ADF1) page 13 paragraph 4.8.

⁵ ADF 1 page 13 paragraph 4.7.

⁶ ADF 1 page 3 paragraph 1.9

⁷ Commonwealth submission Matter 6 of 2019 *Royal Australian Air Force Network technician Employment category* dated 17 September 2019.

⁸ Affidavit Warrant Officer B. R. Wright dated 10 September 2019 (ADF 2) page 4 paragraph 19.

⁹ ADF 2 page 5 paragraph 21.

¹⁰ Transcript 24 September 2019 page 4 lines 32-40.

¹¹ Affidavit of Warrant Officer L. J. Walker CSC dated 17 September 2019 (ADF3) page 5 paragraph 21.

¹² ADF 3 page 5 paragraph 19.

¹³ Transcript page 11 lines 35-44.

¹⁴ Affidavit of Corporal L. W. Burns (ADF 7) dated September 2019 page 5 paragraphs 22 and 23.

¹⁵ Transcript page 19 lines 11-14.

¹⁶ Transcript page 12 line 13.

¹⁷ ADF 1 page 13 paragraph 4.6.

¹⁸ ADF 1 page 15 paragraph 5.1.

¹⁹ ADF 1 page 15 paragraph 5.2.

²⁰ ADF 1 page 24 paragraph 6.4.

²¹ ADF 1 page 29 paragraph 6.25.

²² ADF 1 page 18 paragraph 5.10.