



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

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

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE: CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES (Matter 9 of 2021)

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT

MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 15 NOVEMBER 2021

MAJGEN G. FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from a listing application¹ for a determination to be made under Section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903*. The listing application seeks to restructure the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers Construction Engineer categories and reassess the pay grade placements for supervisory and managerial ranks, in both the Royal Australian Engineers and the Royal Australian Air Force Engineers.

[2] We considered this matter in a hearing on 28 October 2021, where Mr J. Phillips SC appeared for the ADF and Mr H. Miller for the Commonwealth. An inspection relevant to this matter was conducted on 24 September 2019 at 6th Engineer Support Regiment, RAAF Base Amberley, in conjunction with Matter 8 of 2019 – *Army: Construction Engineer employments streams*.²

Background

[3] Construction engineering involves the designing, planning, construction and management of infrastructure such as roads, aerodromes, buildings and facilities. The Army and Air Force have dedicated construction engineering workforces comprising carpenters, electricians, plumbers, plant operators, drafting technicians and surveyors; the Navy has no comparable workforce.

Submissions

ADF

- [4] The ADF proposes to:
- a. restructure the skill grade placements for Construction Engineer trades for Permanent Force and Reserves in the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS);
 - b. reassess the pay grade placements for supervisor and manager skill grades, as well as Operator Plant Grade 1, as a result of the restructure; and
 - c. rename selected employment categories and skill grades.³
- [5] The key elements of the proposed restructure specific to Army are:
- a. embedding the Total Workforce System;⁴
 - b. removal of 'Reserve only' skill grades;
 - c. expanding the avenues of entry for the 'Operator Plant' and 'Draughtsman' employment categories;
 - d. renaming the 'Draughtsman' category to 'Drafting Technician';
 - e. amalgamating the respective 'vertical', 'horizontal' and 'information' trades at Supervisor Construction (Sergeant);⁵
 - f. amalgamating the Supervisor Construction (Sergeant) skill grades into a single skill grade, 'Supervisor Works' at Warrant Officer Class 2;
 - g. rationalisation of training content;
 - h. decreasing the pay placement of the first skill grade in the Operator Plant category by one pay grade due to the removal of the requirement for previous Combat Engineer experience;
 - i. increasing the pay placements at the supervisory and managerial skill grades by one pay grade respectively at Sergeant, Warrant Officer Class 2 and Warrant Officer Class 1 Tier A due to increased complexities in the roles and responsibilities; and
 - j. renaming a range of skill grades;⁶

[6] Air Force acknowledges that, although the ADF submission is not primarily about its base trade employment categories, it is “*taking the opportunity to make minor amendment to the Airfield Engineering trades’ training continuum*”.⁷ Accordingly, the proposed changes in Air Force are:

- a. removing the skill grade advancement requirement for heavy vehicle licences to be held by Carpenters, Electricians and Plumbers; and
- b. increasing the pay placements of the supervisory and managerial skill grades by one pay grade respectively at Sergeant, Flight Sergeant and Warrant Officer Tier A due to increased complexities in their roles and responsibilities.⁸

Commonwealth

[7] The Commonwealth supports the proposal and “*accepts the evidence provided by the ADF to demonstrate considerable change in the operational environment of both Army and Air Force’s construction engineering employment categories*”.⁹

[8] It notes the “*level of technical complexity, responsibility, management, training, equipment and operating environment have all increased at the supervisor and manager levels*” and “*supports the proposed renaming of selected employment categories and skill grades related to this restructure*”.¹⁰

Consideration

[9] In our decision issued in Matter 8 of 2019¹¹, we noted that the ADF intended to provide us with a further submission for this workforce. We accept this submission now meets that intent.

[10] In regard to the Army aspects of this submission, we considered the overarching effect of workforce transition being directed by Chief of Army’s ‘*Army in Motion*’ strategic guidance documents. We also made reference to *SAPPER Plan 2028 - ‘A strategy for Army’s Military Engineer Capability’* - which provides targeted and specific guidance about the transformation of the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers.

[11] We accept the main difference between the Army and Air Force workforces is “*that airfield engineering trades specialise in aerodromes and are required to operate within a highly regulated environment, with additional responsibilities associated with relevant aerodrome safety and legislative requirements, whereas Army construction trades focus on warfighting operations, domestic and international host nation capacity building and reconstruction operations*”.¹²

[12] We considered the evidence as submitted in regard to the changing operational environment for construction engineers, and accept the ADF faces increases in:

- a. project size, budget and complexity to support ADF strategic requirements, both domestically and internationally;

- b. project complexity due to supervision of more indigenous partnerships and management of national contractors to meet construction standards and delivery requirements;
- c. stakeholder engagement and expectation management with clients, host nation governments, strategic delegates, building and service authorities; and
- d. remuneration gaps with civilian industry.¹³

[13] We accept the evidence that “*construction supervisors and managers in Army’s Corps of Royal Australian Engineers and Air Force’s Airfield Engineers attain nationally accredited project management qualifications to align with Engineers Australia and the Australian Institute of Project Management*”.¹⁴ For example, in Air Force, the complexity of construction tasking coupled with procurement and contracting management, has resulted in the requirement to complete “*Diploma level qualifications in both Project Management and in Construction Management*”.¹⁵

[14] With that in mind, we had regard to the evidence that “*the competition from civil industry for highly skilled ADF construction engineers, who have nationally accredited project management qualifications, is increasing as these soldiers and airmen maintain qualification parity with civilian counterparts*”.¹⁶ We accept this competition is influencing retention and is potentially reducing the number of people seeking to join the workforce through mid-career specialist entry to the ADF.

[15] Finally, we accept the evidence from the Air Force “*that heavy vehicle licences are no longer a required trade capability for Carpenters, Plumbers and Electricians*”¹⁷ and agree to the removal of these licences as a requirement for skill grade advancement in these trades.

Conclusion

[16] In summary, we agree with the entirety of the key elements of the submission, as proposed for both Army and Air Force, and outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 of this decision.

[17] We agree that the restructure of the Army’s Construction Engineer employment category has created no significant change in work value for the lower rank levels and skill grades in Army and accept that, for Operator Plant Grade 1, it has resulted in a lesser work value and reduction in pay grade.

[18] We agree that, for Air Force, the proposed changes will recognise the increased capability provided by the Works Supervisor employment category and allow some elements of training to be rationalised.

[19] Determination 20 of 2021 will give effect to our decision from 20 January 2022.

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT
MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER
MAJGEN G. FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

Appearances:

Mr J Phillips SC for the ADF assisted by Mr P Blady

Mr H Miller for the Commonwealth assisted by Mr N Doukas

¹ DMR/OUT/2021/013 Listing Application – *ADF Construction Engineer Employment Categories* dated 13 July 2021.

² <https://www.dfrt.gov.au/matters/army-construction-engineer-employment-streams>

³ ADF Submission *ADF Construction Engineer employment categories – Matter 9 of 2021* undated (ADF1) page 5 paragraph 1.11.

⁴ ADF1 page 51 paragraph 4.16 Deputy Chief of Army Directive 10/20 ‘*Embedding the Total Workforce System within Army*’ ensures the ‘One Army’ philosophy enables workforce generation across the full Service Spectrum (SERCATs) to deliver land force preparedness and capability outcome for Defence.

⁵ ADF1 page 14 paragraph 3.1 Vertical works: buildings and engineering services infrastructure; Horizontal works: roads, ports and airfields; Services/information works: design, plan and construct.

⁶ ADF1 page 57 paragraph 4.41 and 4.42 – e.g. ‘Foreman’ to ‘Section Commander Construction’.

⁷ ADF1 page 7 paragraph 1.16.

⁸ ADF1 page 91 paragraph 5.97.

⁹ Commonwealth submission *ADF Construction Engineer Employment Categories Matter 9 of 2021* dated October 2021 (CWLTH1) page 6 paragraphs 26 and 27.

¹⁰ CWLTH 1 pages 6 and 7 paragraphs 30 and 32

¹¹ https://www.dfrt.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/decision_-_army_construction_engineer_employment_categories.pdf

¹² ADF1 page 3 paragraph 1.9.

¹³ ADF1 page 47 paragraph 4.5.

¹⁴ ADF1 page 46 paragraph 4.2.

¹⁵ ADF1 page 67 paragraph 4.77.

¹⁶ ADF1 page 46 paragraph 4.1.

¹⁷ CWLTH1 page 7 paragraph 39.