



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

STATEMENT

Defence Act 1903

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE: ROTARY WING AVIATION REPORT BACK

(Matter 17 of 2024)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 4 DECEMBER 2024

[1] This statement arises from the requirement, set by this Tribunal, for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to report back on the progress of the Officer Aviation Pay Structure (OAPS) which was determined in Matter 6 of 2018 – ADF Rotary Wing Aviation Officers.¹ That matter established new pathways and competency streams within the OAPS for Navy and Army Rotary Wing aviation officers. A prior report back was considered by this Tribunal in Matter 19 of 2021² and this statement should be read in conjunction with those previous decisions.

[2] Matter 6 of 2018 required Navy to provide an interim report back at the 2-year mark with a final report back after 8 years. Army was required to provide an interim report back at the 2-year mark and a final report back after 5 years. This statement details the final Army report. We were briefed on this report back by Lieutenant Colonel C Kassulke, Army Aviation Officer Employment Category Review Team, Army Aviation Training Centre, in Brisbane on 23 October 2024.

[3] Army reports that, while the implementation of OAPS continues to progress ‘*satisfactorily*’, some of the intended effects on workforce behaviours have not eventuated. In particular it reports ‘*Pilot separations have become unacceptably high and, together with low numbers of Pilot graduations, have led to shortfalls in the trained workforce affecting workforce sustainability*’. We note that, consequently, pilots are now considered a critical employment category.³

[4] We accept that since 2021, the aviation capability ‘*has experienced significant workforce changes, organisational adjustments and key Government capabilities that establish aviation as a functional command in Army*’ which have directed the ‘*upgrade or replacement of every major combat system in aviation between 2025 and 2028*’.⁴ We recognise that, since the last report back, there exists a very different operating and economic environment from that in which OAPS was developed. We appreciate this makes the assessment of the success, or otherwise, of OAPS challenging particularly with regard to retention and recruitment behaviours as well as proposed aircraft acquisitions.

[5] Army now highlights an environment of ‘*workforce disposition and attitudes, underperforming aircraft, destabilised initial training and suboptimal organisational command and control arrangements*’ which ‘*have all imposed long-term risk on Army Aviation that has required positive and determined decision-making to arrest*’.⁵ These include the establishment of Army Aviation Command, the concentration of the aviation workforce in Townsville, replacement aircraft, flying hour and flying training limitations, and operational demand as well as, sadly, two serious accidents in 2023 – all of which have served to compound issues.

[6] Overall, the Army considers ‘*satisfactory progress*’ in 7 of the key performance indicators (KPI) set in 2018 and which are now ‘*established*’, with 4 ‘*problematic*’ representing a ‘*high workforce risk*’ due to ‘*factors other than RW OAPS influence*’.⁶

[7] We summarise:

- KPI 1 – the number of Rotary Wing Pilots (RWP) graduating annually equals the 5-year average separation rate. **Problematic.** An average of 13 RWP are graduating annually and an average 5-year separation/loss of 25.2 is resulting in a shortfall of 12 to 13 graduates per year.⁷
- KPI 2 – steady state inflow through the Australian Defence Force Academy/Royal Military College Duntroon is established to meet annual capability need of 24 RWP entering the trained force. **Established.** A lack of operational aircraft is a limiting factor on graduating the required number of RWP until new systems mature over the next 4 years.⁸

- KPI 3 – the annual employment category status report assesses the workforce as ‘healthy’. **Problematic.** The pilot workforce is critical and a number of environmental factors are affecting workforce disposition and attitudes. The majority of the RWP workforce were satisfied with OAPS remuneration and their decisions to remain serving, or not, were related to other environmental factors.⁹
- KPI 4 – Workforce regulation through Personnel Capability Management (PCMB) oversight has improved flying experience. **Established.** While there are some shortfalls with flying experience due to modernisation of the aircraft fleet, PCMB processes are robust and mature providing oversight of the employment category.¹⁰
- KPI 5 – RWPs are held for an average of 9 years in the baseline workforce pilot training throughput delays. **Established.** Due to the delays in pilot training throughput on operational aircraft fleets, Lieutenants have been unable to complete their Regimental Officer Basic Course within a 1-2 year timeframe. Pilot training delays will continue until new operational aircraft training introduction is complete.¹¹
- KPI 6 - Troop Commanders have a minimum of level of 5 years flying experience on appointment. **Established.** The current pilot training system is under stress and does not allow a Lieutenant to complete 2 years flying experience on operational types. Although there is a satisfactory number of candidates for Sub Unit Command and Unit Command positions each year, there is an emerging trend of very few junior Captains nominating *‘due primarily to recognition of pay on appointment’*. We sought further advice on this emergent issue, and accept Army is developing a remunerative proposal to address this unintended outcome shortly.¹²
- KPI 7 – There are sufficient Specialist candidates with a minimum level of 5 years flying experience. **Established.** The median annual flying hours per Specialist is 198 hours which is assessed as healthy. There are sufficient candidates successfully reviewed and confirmed pending course panelling.¹³
- KPI 8 – Reduced Deficiency Reports related to flying experience. **Problematic.** A number of capability preparedness reports have been accepted due to under performance and availability of aircraft. Consequently, median flying hours have trended down. Commercial helicopters have been leased until training systems for new aircraft are established.¹⁴
- KPI 9 – a minimum of 7 Qualified Flight Instructors (QFI) enter into the Specialist Pathway annually to fill 90% of qualified positions in Joint and Army training establishments and regimental specialist positions. **Established.** The number of QFI is adequate to meet current demand, and their flying hours experience is healthy. The number of QFI will need to increase commensurate with introduction of new aircraft types. The current pool will allow for the commencement of this growth but require careful management.¹⁵

- KPI 10 – Army Aviation Command. Problematic. The remuneration structure continues to incentivise talented aviation officers to apply for command positions. The OAPS pathway has successfully incentivised senior Captains and Majors to strive for Sub Unit Command and Unit Command appointment. A sufficient number of candidates have been available for selection.¹⁶ (KPI 6 also refers)
- KPI 11 – Recruitment, selection and attraction. Established. Sustainable numbers of candidates are being provided to Army for pilot training.¹⁷

[8] We acknowledge the combination of legacy systems, new aircraft types, posting locations, and the associated disruption of such wholesale change has affected workforce sustainability. Additionally, while not directly related to this report back, we note the advice that Maintenance Technicians, Aeronautical Engineers, Aviation Operations Specialist and Aircrew Operator categories are all also currently considered as ‘critical’ or ‘at risk’ categories.¹⁸ Army now considers the aviation officer workforce ‘*one of the ADF’s most vulnerable*’, placing risk on ‘*achieving a stable and well-postured workforce to meet future aviation capability needs*’.¹⁹

[9] This ceases the reporting requirements for Army in regard to RWP. These conclude as we anticipate addressing this workforce commencing with a planned inspection to Army Aviation Command in Townsville in February 2025.

[10] Navy will provide a final report back on its RWP OAPS progression in 2027.

MS B O’NEILL, PRESIDENT
MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

¹ <https://www.dfrt.gov.au/matters/adf-rotary-wing-aviation-officers>

² <https://www.dfrt.gov.au/matters/adf-rotary-wing-aviation-officers-report-back>

³ ADF Rotary Wing Aviation Officers Army 5-year Report Back dated 17 October 2024 page 6 paragraph 2.2.

⁴ Ibid page 6 paragraph 2.3.

⁵ Ibid page 13 paragraph 2.4.

⁶ Ibid page 29 paragraph 3.5.

⁷ Ibid pages 14 to 17 paragraphs 2.10 to 2.13.

⁸ Ibid pages 17 and 18 paragraph 2.14.

⁹ Ibid pages 18 and 19 paragraphs 2.15 to 2.19.

¹⁰ Ibid pages 19 and 20 paragraphs 2.20 and 2.21.

¹¹ Ibid page 20 paragraphs 2.22 to 2.24.

¹² Ibid page 21 paragraphs 2.25 and 2.26.

¹³ Ibid page 21 paragraph 2.27.

¹⁴ Ibid page 21 paragraph 2.28.

¹⁵ Ibid page 22 paragraph 2.29.

¹⁶ Ibid pages 22 to 24 paragraphs 2.30 to 2.37.

¹⁷ Ibid page 24 paragraph 2.38.

¹⁸ Ibid page 14 paragraph 2.5.

¹⁹ Ibid page 14 paragraph 2.8.