



# Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

## DECISION

*Defence Act 1903*

s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

### **NAVY GAP YEAR – AVIATION SUPPORT TECHNICIAN**

(Matter 18 of 2024)

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT

MS A LESTER, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 17 MARCH 2025

MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from a listing application from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for a determination to be made under Section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903* (the Act). The listing application<sup>1</sup> seeks to establish the Navy Gap Year (NGY) – Aviation Support Technician (AST) program to provide an alternate entry pathway for eligible candidates into technical aviation roles.

[2] We considered the matter in a hearing at RAAF Base Townsville on 27 February 2025. Ms K Hagan appeared for the ADF and Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth. Chief Petty Officer T Voigt, Aviation Technician Employment Category Manager, provided a written affidavit in support of the ADF proposition.

### **Background**

[3] The NGY program provides approximately 100 candidates each year with an experiential style program where they conduct a broad range of Other Ranks roles in Navy, ashore and at sea. General entry requirements for all ADF Gap Year programs are that candidates be between 17 to 24 years of age and be at least 18 on completion of their recruit training.

[4] There is no continued service obligation at the end of the 12 month period and, throughout the experience, members are encouraged to consider the range of career options available in the Navy to persuade them to continue their service in the Permanent Navy.

## **Submissions**

### **ADF**

[5] The ADF proposes introducing a program for the NGY-AST which, it states, represents ‘*a new development in the progression of the NGY programs from general employment to specialist roles*’.<sup>2</sup> It seeks to capitalise on the success of similar Army and Air Force specialist Gap Year programs. The program will ‘*provide NGY-AST members with a foundational level of aircraft maintenance qualifications and skills and will enable their employment as an Aviation Technician Trade Assistant (AT-TA) at Fleet Air Arm Squadrons. NGY-AST members will undertake entry-level AT-TA duties under the supervision of fully qualified AT members*’.<sup>3</sup>

[6] The ADF specifically seeks to:

- a. establish the NGY-AST employment category to create an alternate pathway for Aviation Technician (AT) workgroups;
- b. utilise the existing Aero Skills common module and training capacity of the AT Training continuum as a specific Initial Employment Training (IET) continuum for NGY-AST members; and
- c. establish salary placement at Pay Grade 2 in the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS) following IET.<sup>4</sup>

### **Commonwealth**

[7] On 10 December 2024, the Commonwealth wrote to us stating it considered the ADF proposal to conduct this matter ‘on the papers’ did not meet the requirements outlined in our Practice Statement<sup>5</sup> (i.e. those matters that involve a simple change in nomenclature or category) and it ‘*would be best considered in a hearing with the presence of witnesses and evidence by affidavit*’.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Commonwealth did not support the ADF’s proposal at that time and sought consideration to proceed to a hearing.

[8] Further, the Commonwealth considered there to be a risk of the NGY-AST program ‘*drawing recruits away from the ab-initio recruitment pool*’ and expressed ‘*reservations as to whether there is a risk the proposed NGY-AST pathway may ‘cannibalise’ the recruitment pool for the existing Air Force and Army Gap Year AT pathways which will in turn impact other Service recruitment targets*’.<sup>7</sup>

[9] Having made its submission in the meantime, the Commonwealth acknowledged the ‘criticality of the AT workforce, its worsening recruitment position and seeking of parity between the Services’ and stated it has ‘reservations in relation to the effectiveness and value for money of the proposal’.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the Commonwealth questioned ‘whether the proposed NGY-AST will pull candidates from other Services gap-year offerings leading to shortfalls in other Service gap year programs’.<sup>9</sup>

## **Witness Evidence**

[10] In his written affidavit, Chief Petty Officer (CPO) T Voigt outlined that Navy has seen a ‘significant reduction’ in the recruitment of ATs ‘with 56.3% of recruitment targets for AT-Avionics sailors and just 22.5% of targets for ATVs.’ Adding to this, ‘at the other end of the career spectrum, separations from the ATA and ATV workgroups have been higher than the long term average’. Expanding on the impact of these figures, CPO Voigt explained this is ‘limiting the number of embarked aviation flights and preventing the training of sufficient Pilots, Aviation Warfare Officers and Aircrew to meet future requirements’.<sup>10</sup>

[11] CPO Voigt gave evidence that the Air Force program has been ‘successful’ with ‘133 members transferring since the program commenced’ and ‘approximately 46.8% of AST Gap Years transfer to full time service each year’.<sup>11</sup>

[12] CPO Voigt explained the expected benefits of the proposition as ‘establishing a specific NGY-AST stream presents an opportunity for benefits for both the organisation and future sailors.’<sup>12</sup> He outlined how the IET completed by NGY-AST members will ‘permit them to complete foundational technical and non-technical aviation tasks, providing them a more practical and meaningful experience’ which can in turn ‘reduce the workload of fully qualified AT workgroups and provide additional capability by freeing up fully qualified ATs for tasks that require a higher level of qualifications and experience’.<sup>13</sup>

[13] In short, CPO Voigt considers ‘Navy is confident that many of the NGY-AST sailors will be inspired to sign up for full AT training after experiencing the benefits of life in the Navy’.<sup>14</sup>

## **Consideration**

[14] In considering how to proceed with this matter with regard to the Commonwealth request for a hearing, coupled with the ADF view it could be considered on papers, we assessed: the pathway sought already exists in both Army and Air Force; the written affidavit submitted with the ADF proposal would adequately assist our deliberations; and further evidence could be sought from Army and Air Force addressing the impact on ab-initio recruitment.

[15] On 28 January 2025, we advised the ADF and Commonwealth that we would consider the matter in hearing and rely upon the written evidence. We also sought written information from Defence Force Recruiting (DFR) to allow us to address the Commonwealth concerns.<sup>15</sup>

[16] On 12 February 2025 we received information from Colonel T Stone, Director Military Recruiting, stating *‘it is not possible to provide a definitive answer that the ab-initio trade intakes will not be impacted by the introduction of NGY-AST. However, using the other Gap Year programs as an example, and noting NGY-AST creates a different incentive to join than (sic) the Navy to the ab-initio AT Trades, the likelihood of significant impact to the ab-initio trade intake is assessed as low’*.<sup>16</sup>

[17] We considered the evidence that Navy *‘expects that this alternate pathway will improve the recruitment of AT workforces and assist in the expansion and stability of these workforces’*.<sup>17</sup>

[18] We accept that, unlike Army and Air Force, Navy does not currently recruit Other Ranks Gap Year members into specific workgroups. We accept that currently NGY members do not undertake any IET as part of their Gap Year program and are remunerated under Trainee Salary for the duration of the year. Under this proposition, NGY-AST members will undertake IET alongside Air Force Gap Year members who are remunerated at pay grade 2 in GORPs on completion of IET. We considered the evidence that *‘consequently, the ADF submits that NGY-AST have a higher work value than their conventional NGY peers who do not complete IET’* which is the same value as their Air Force Gap Year counterparts.<sup>18</sup>

[19] We accept that Navy has seen a *‘significant reduction’* in the recruitment of AT sailors despite implementing a range of initiatives designed to improve attraction and recruiting<sup>19</sup>.

[20] In the hearing, we gave consideration to the Commonwealth concerns as to value for money and note the evidence that *‘these costs would be a real concern if Navy were meeting its current recruiting targets for these Aviation Technicians, however until Navy have sustained recruiting achievements against their targets, they don’t believe these costs to be of concern’*. We accept that *‘if ab initio recruitment improves, they would then reduce these Gap Year targets accordingly’*.<sup>20</sup>

[21] We accept that the NGY-AST is modelled after the current Air Force AST Gap Year program. We note that, under this program, after completing their initial military training, members undertake aircraft maintenance training by completing Aero Skills common module of 10 weeks at the Air Force School of Technical Training in Wagga Wagga, NSW. Upon completion they are posted to a unit to work alongside and support qualified ATs until the end of their Gap Year tenure. We accept the NGY-AST program will utilise this existing technical training provided by Air Force.

## **Conclusion**

[22] We accept the evidence from DFR that *‘it is not possible to provide a definitive answer that the ab-initio trade intakes will not be impacted by the introduction of NGY-AST’*<sup>21</sup> and, from Navy, that it *‘does not anticipate a significant reduction in the ab-initio AT pathway as a result of this proposition’* and *‘any potential loss rates are likely to be offset by potential capability gains to be realised from the program’*.<sup>22</sup>

[23] In closing, we agree the proposition aligns with the similar Gap Year program conducted by Air Force. We determine the same pay grade placement for NGY-AST to mirror Air Force Gap Year at pay grade 2.

[24] We accept NGY-AST sailors will be integrated in the Fleet Air Arm to deliver supervised technical support to qualified ATs which will provide additional capability. We consider this may assist in encouraging personnel to pursue one of the AT categories and remain in the Navy.

[25] We ask the ADF to report back to us on this program as part of the Annual Review in 2027.

[26] Determination 1 of 2025 gives effect to our decision from 17 March 2025.

MS B O'NEILL, PRESIDENT  
MS A. LESTER, MEMBER  
MAJGEN G FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

*Appearances:*

*Ms K Hagan for the ADF assisted by Squadron Leader L Hawkett*

*Mr K Wong for the Commonwealth assisted by Mr C Johnson*

*Witness:*

*Chief Petty Officer T Voigt, Aviation Technician Employment Category Manager, Navy Employment Category Development Branch.*

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<sup>1</sup> DMR BN91548272 *Listing Application – Navy Gap Year Aviation Support Technician dated 31 October 2025.*

<sup>2</sup> ADF Submission – Matter 18 of 2024 – Navy: Aviation Support Technician Gap Year Program dated 5 December 2024. (ADF1) page 4 paragraph 1.2.

<sup>3</sup> ADF1 page 5 paragraph 1.6.

<sup>4</sup> ADF1 page 6 paragraph 1.11.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dfrt.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/Practice%20statement%20%20March%202023.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth letter Matter 18 of 2024 – Navy Gap Year: Aviation Support Technician dated 10 December 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth Submission Matter 18 of 2024 – Navy: Aviation Support Technician Gap Year Program dated 13 February 2025 (CWLTH1) page 2 paragraph 5.

<sup>9</sup> CWLTH1 page 9 paragraph 44.

<sup>10</sup> ADF2 page 4 paragraphs 18 to 20.

<sup>11</sup> ADF2 page 7 paragraph 33.

<sup>12</sup> ADF2 page 8 paragraph 38.

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<sup>13</sup> ADF2 page 9 paragraph 39.

<sup>14</sup> ADF2 page 9 paragraph 40.

<sup>15</sup> K Blazey Email to L Hawkett of 28 January 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Director Military Recruiting letter – Assessment of ab-initio risk to Aviation Technician Recruitment Pool as a result of NGY-AST implementation (ADF3) dated 12 February 2025.

<sup>17</sup> ADF1 page 5 paragraph 1.5.

<sup>18</sup> ADF1 page 18 paragraph 5.14.

<sup>19</sup> ADF1 page 10 paragraph 4.2

<sup>20</sup> Transcript 27 February 2025 page 4 lines 17 to 23.

<sup>21</sup> ADF3.

<sup>22</sup> ADF1 page 14 paragraph 4.18.