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Australian Government
Defence

Ministerial Brief for Action

MS26-000308

FOR: Deputy Prime Minister

INFO: s22

CC: s22

ORDER FOR THE PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS NO. 393 – SENATOR FATIMA PAYMAN – ADF SENIOR OFFICER CUTS

Key Issues:

On 5 March 2026, the Senate passed a motion Order for the Production of Documents (OPD) Number 393 from Senator Fatima Payman, requesting documents created since 1 July 2025 in relation to plans to cut back the number of senior officers in the ADF (Attachment A). Following a search across Defence, a Question Time Briefs relating to star rank/senior officer numbers were found to be in scope of the request (Attachments C). s22

Recommendation:

Decision

That you:

1. s22
- 2.
- 3.

Media Considerations:

The number of Star-rank officers in the ADF has previously generated significant media coverage. Therefore, this issue is expected to generate media interest. s22

Signature:

The Hon Richard Marles MP
May 2026

Minister comments:

Cleared by: Lieutenant General Natasha Fox AO CSC
Chief of Personnel
Defence People Group
s47E(c)
1 May 2026

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OFFICIAL**Primary Contact Officer:**

Major General Craig Dobson AM CSC
 Head Military Workforce Design
 Vice Chief of the Defence Force Group
 s47E(c)

Secondary Contact Officer:

Air Commodore Anthony Hindmarsh AM CSC
 Senior Officer Review Project Team
 Vice Chief of the Defence Force Group
 s47E(c)

Sensitivity: Yes.

1. Growth in ADF Star-rank numbers over the last 20 years has attracted media attention.
2. Defence initiated the Senior Officer Structural Review (Meredith Review) in 2023, and the Biennial Review of Star Ranks (BRSR) in 2025, to reduce the number of ADF senior officers.

Financial Impacts: No.

Systems/legislation/deregulation: No.

Consultation: No.

Attachments:

Attachment A Senate motion for the Order for Production of Documents Number 393 – 5 March 2026.

Attachment B

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Attachment C

Question Time Briefs – Star Rank Senior Officer Review QB25-000081.

Attachment D

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Background:

3. Order for Production of Documents Number 393 requests:

... copies of all ministerial submissions, records of conversation, letters, briefing notes, meeting agendas, file notes, meeting invitations, meeting notes, meeting minutes, emails and instant/electronic messages, created since 1 July 2025, between the Minister for Defence and/or his office and the Department of Defence in relation to plans to cut back the number of senior officers in the ADF.

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Star-ranks positions

5. The growth in Star-rank positions since 2018 has been in response to the rapidly changing strategic circumstances; expansion of Defence domains from the traditional maritime, land and air warfighting domains to include cyber and space domains; and changing requirements in the Defence People System. In July 2023, Defence completed the Senior Officer Structural Review to assess the appropriateness and sustainability of the ADF Star-rank officer structure against the overall size of the ADF. The review identified this growth in Star-rank positions as unsustainable.
6. The intent of the BRSR was to redress the growth in Star ranks through the ongoing evaluation of Star-rank positions, functions and organisational structures. The BRSR ensures Defence maintains downward pressure on demand for Star-rank positions, and confirms positions are directly aligned with strategic priorities.
7. Since 2023, ADF Star-rank officer positions have reduced by 22, from 248 positions to 226 positions, in February 2026.
8. The BRSR provides options to right-size ADF Star-rank positions relative to the more junior workforce. Any change to position status considers the tenure of the incumbent tenure to ensure there is no detriment to the individual affected. BRSR documents fall outside the scope of the OPD.

Documents in scope

9. One Question Time Brief relating to Star Rank/Senior Officer Numbers were found to be in scope of the request (Attachment C).
10. Each version, as provided to the Minister's Office, are considered to be in scope, resulting in four total documents. Versions provided to the Office, up to and including 5 March 2026, when the OPD motion was agreed have been included.

11. s22 [REDACTED]
12. s22 [REDACTED]

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QUESTION BRIEF (QB)

TOPIC OF THE DAY: Star Rank/Senior Officer Review

KEY MESSAGES

- The number of ADF Star Rank officers has grown over time to meet the demands of Australia's evolving strategic circumstances.
- Since 2023, ADF Star Rank officer positions have reduced by 22, from 248 positions to 226 positions, in May 2026.
- ADF Star Rank officer positions are subject to ongoing review under the direct oversight of the Chief of the Defence Force. The review has set a pathway to ensure ADF Star Rank officer positions are sustainable as part of the ADF organisation design.

MEDIA

<u>Date</u>	<u>Outlet</u>	<u>Reporting</u>
		<i>Nil relevant media reported in the past seven days.</i>

Lead Division

Contact: Lieutenant General Natasha Fox
Division: Chief of Personnel
Date first prepared: 1 March 2026
Originating Source: DEPT

Phone: s22
Action Officer: s47E(c)
Date last Updated: 06 May 2026

Contributing Division

Contact: Major General Craig Dobson
Division: Military Workforce Design Division
Date first prepared: 1 March 2026

Phone: s22
Action Officer: s47E(c)
Date last Updated: 06 May 2026

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QUESTION BRIEF (QB)

TOPIC OF THE DAY: Star Rank / Senior Officer Numbers

KEY MESSAGES

Star Ranks

- ADF Star Rank officer positions are subject to ongoing review under the direct oversight of the Chief of the Defence Force. The review has set a pathway to ensure ADF Star Rank officer positions are sustainable as part of the ADF organisation design.
- While the number of ADF Star Rank officers has grown over time to meet the demands of Australia's evolving strategic circumstances, since 2023, ADF Star Rank officer positions have reduced by 22, from 248 positions to 226 positions, in May 2026.
- Senior officer promotions are generally made into existing, approved positions as part of ADF workforce management that do not increase the overall number of Star Rank roles.
- Head Capability Development has been established as part of broader Defence capability reform, and is being offset within existing structures so it does not increase overall Star Rank numbers.

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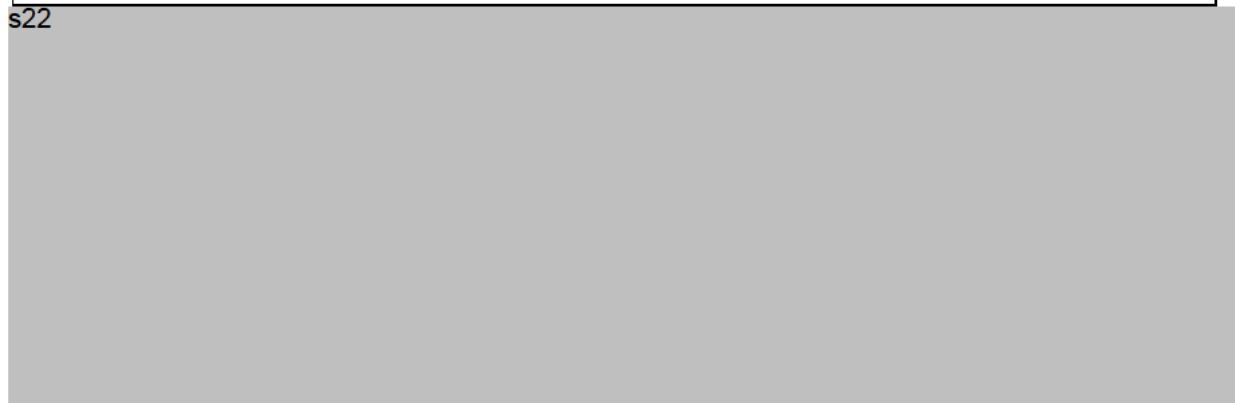
QUESTION BRIEF (QB)

TOPIC OF THE DAY: Star Rank / Senior Officer Numbers

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Date First Prepared: 4 June 2026
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