

12.5.1 Handling of late data submission or critically incomplete data

Background

ICES launched the first official calls for data in 2012 in support of the single-stock and mixed-fisheries advice of demersal stocks in the North Sea ecoregion. Since then, data calls have been an integrated element in the advisory process and covers almost all of the fisheries-dependent data required. Fisheries-independent data (survey data) needed in the advisory process are in most cases not included in the data calls. For the expert groups/workshops for which no data call is issued, the transmission of data is done informally.

The main objectives of the data calls are to: (i) improve awareness of all data needed; (ii) obtain data in a standard format; (iii) ensure data are available in a timely manner; (iv) enhance accountability and transparency; (v) facilitate recurrent data delivery by standardizing the process; and (vi) document the data transmission from ICES Member Countries to ICES.

The deadline to submit data is usually three to two weeks before the start of the expert group/workshop meetings. There are many examples of the deadline not being met and data not being available prior to the meeting, or only a few days before. In a few cases some data have not been available until late in the meeting.

Late data transmission (or late revision) makes it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for the experts to do the agreed preparatory work. This means that the expert groups/workshops often use a substantial part of the meeting finalizing assessments or other work that should have been prepared before the meeting.

This puts extra pressure on the meeting and prevents a proper quality check of the input data used as basis for the advice.

The non-compliance with the deadlines is often excused with reference to workload, insufficient time to perform quality checking of the data, and the large number of stocks that are assessed simultaneously in spring; however, this is rather a case of allotting adequate resources to meet a predictable need.

The introduction of formalized data calls has enhanced accountability and transparency. Nevertheless, it seems that the preparation and submission of data needed for ICES advisory work is being given low priority in some ICES Member Countries, with insufficient resources being allocated to the data processing and transmission tasks.

It is possible that defining a deadline after which no new data are included in the work of the expert group/workshop will have a positive impact on when data are delivered. However, the quality and relevance of ICES fisheries advice rely on all relevant data being available. There is therefore a risk that the introduction of a general deadline, after which no new data or revision of data is accepted, will initially have a negative impact on the quality of the assessments and advice. ACOM has therefore agreed not to implement a fixed rule for when expert groups/workshop shall refuse new or revised data, but to implement a system that ensures a dialogue with the data provider to support the decision on whether to accept the data or not.

Guidelines

These guidelines cover all data types used in ICES advisory work, with the exception of data submitted to the database for survey data (DATRAS).

Late submission of data or critically incomplete data:

1. If data has not been submitted by the deadline the ICES Secretariat shall, in cooperation with the Chair of the expert group/workshop, evaluate the impact this delay may have on the work of the group and decide whether a later date of delivery of the data is acceptable.
2. If the Chair and the ICES Secretariat agree that a later date is acceptable, the Secretariat will inform the ICES Member Country on the final date for submission of data.
3. If the data has not been submitted by the final date referred to in point 2, the Secretariat will request the ACOM leadership to inform the Member Country that data has not been submitted in time to be included in the work of

the expert group/workshop. If the missing data affect the quality of the advice, this should be noted in the advice sheet, indicating the missing source (i.e. country or countries).

4. In principle ICES will not accept special requests that occur later in the year, requiring reassessment of work done earlier in the year but now with the complete annual data. The reason for this is that it means doing the work twice, first without and then with the complete data, which does not seem to be a rational procedure.

Update/revision of data already submitted:

1. If the update/revision is made before the deadline specified in the data call, the updated/revised data shall be used by the expert group/workshop.
2. If the update/revision is made after the deadline specified in the data call, the ICES Secretariat and the Chair shall decide whether the group will be able to use the updated/revised data.
3. If the conclusion of the consultations in point 2 is that the group will not be able to use the updated/revised data, the Secretariat will request the ACOM leadership to inform the Member Country that the update/revision of the data has arrived too late to allow the data to be used by the expert group/workshop. If the revised data are not used, the advice sheet will be issued with a footnote indicating that the specific data from the identified source are provisional.

Follow-up:

1. When a problematic data submission situation is encountered (late or incomplete submission), the ACOM member (to whom ICES addresses the data calls) should provide feedback to ICES on what is causing the problem. For EU countries DCF national correspondents should also be informed.
2. If such a situation is recurrent with certain data providers, this should be identified in advance (by expert groups and the Secretariat), initiating a dialogue with the ACOM member and data provider in an attempt to resolve the situation before it becomes critical once again.