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# Review and improvement of Data and Documents release process

SIOFA Secretariat

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| Abstract | |

In 2024, the Scientific Committee identified that the process for releasing non-public information to third parties may be improved and tasked the Secretariat to propose options to achieve this. The steps in the request process have been recalled in this paper and several options for improvement are proposed by the Secretariat. The SC is invited to review these options, develop new options and advise the Secretariat or the MoP for implementing them.

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[1] Restricted documents may contain confidential information. Please do not distribute restricted documents in any form without the explicit permission of the SIOFA Secretariat and the data owner(s)/provider(s).
[2] Documents available only to members invited to closed sessions.

| Recommendations (for proposals and working papers only) |
| --- |
| • The Scientific Committee to review the improvement options proposed by the Secretariat<br>• The Scientific Committee to retain some options and to develop new options<br>• The Scientific Committee to recommend the MoP to implement some options (when relevant)<br>• The Scientific Committee to task CCPs or the Secretariat to directly implement other options (when possible) |

# Review and improvement of Data and Documents release process
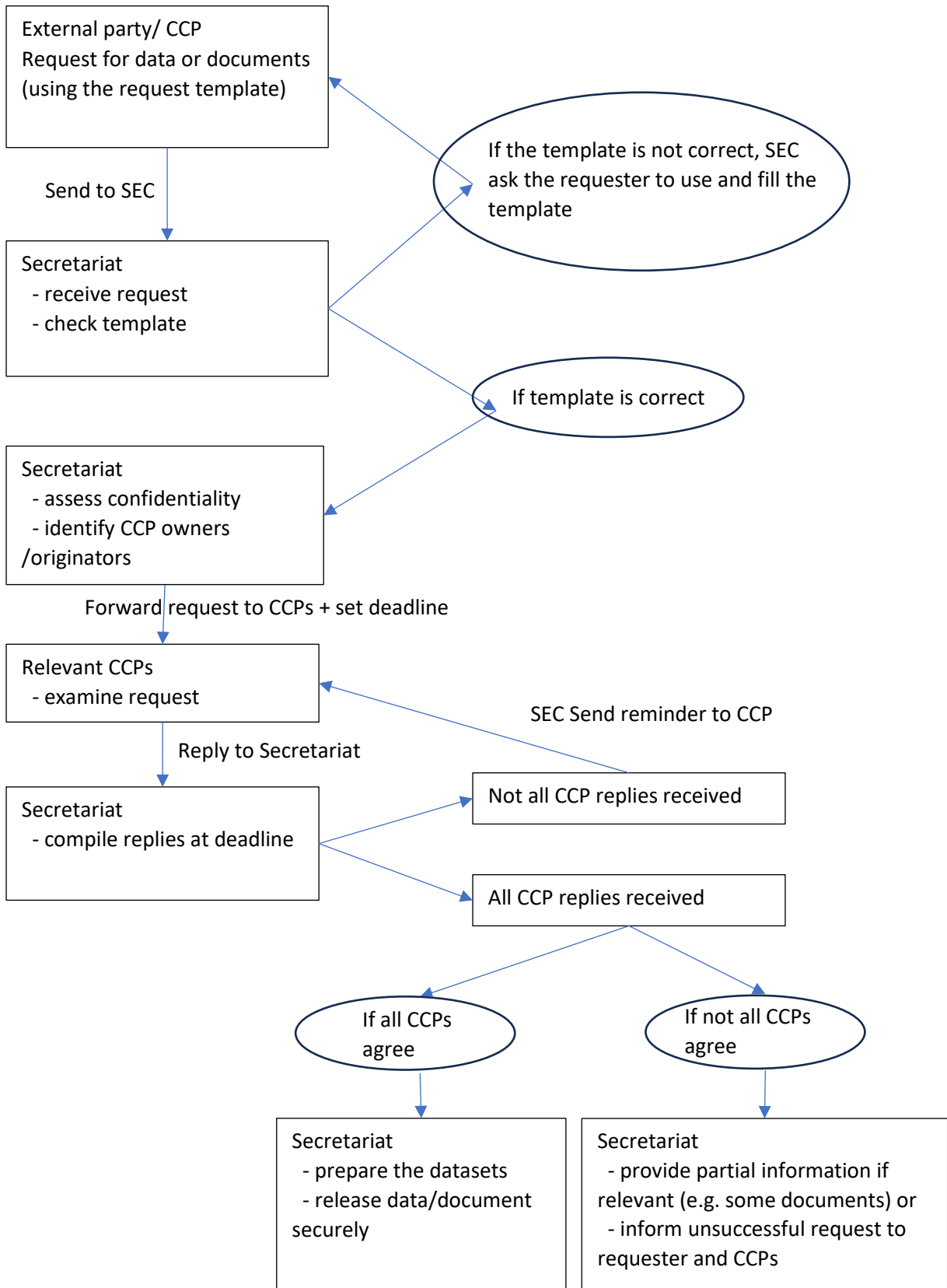
## Introduction

In 2024 and following the Secretariat's presentation of the data release summary report (SC-09-INFO-06) the SC9 tasked the Secretariat to review and propose options for improving the data and documents release process (ref SC9 report, para 128). The main issue identified is that in some case the time between a request and its release is too long.

Currently non-public data is considered confidential, and restricted document are only provided to CCP members. CMM 03 allows that, for specific studies, finer resolution data (i.e. confidential) can be released to external parties.

Any non-public data or document release follows a procedure that basically requires the data owner/originator to formally agree that the data or the document is used and released to a specific party for undertaking a study.

Even when the study has been proposed by the SC and endorsed by the MoP, any non-public data or documents that are needed for that study still require to be authorized by the relevant CCPs before being released to the person that implement the work.

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This process is illustrated below

External party/ CCP
Request for data or documents
(using the request template)

Send to SEC

Secretariat
 - receive request
 - check template

If the template is not correct, SEC ask the requester to use and fill the template

If template is correct

Secretariat
 - assess confidentiality
 - identify CCP owners /originators

Forward request to CCPs + set deadline

Relevant CCPs
 - examine request

SEC Send reminder to CCP

Reply to Secretariat

Secretariat
 - compile replies at deadline

Not all CCP replies received

All CCP replies received

If all CCPs agree

If not all CCPs agree

Secretariat
 - prepare the datasets
 - release data/document securely

Secretariat
 - provide partial information if relevant (e.g. some documents) or
 - inform unsuccessful request to requester and CCPs

## Methods & Results

The steps in the above process have been scrutinized and potential issues identified.

1. **Communication to CCPs**

Currently the Secretariat send release requests to CCP science people (HoD and Alternates) and MoP people (HoD and alternates). This may cause a lack of self-involvement in some CCPs if either too many staff of the same CCP received requests or if the roles are not well set within each CCP, ie who has the authority to agree to a data or a document release?

2. **Template for documents**

In 2024 it has been identified by the Secretariat that the template for data and documents release is designed for structured data request. It is not well adapted for documents requests or other requests such as source codes.

3. **Deadline for response by CCPs**

The current deadline set to CCP for providing a reply about the data release request is set to 3 weeks (21 days). This was proposed by the SC when developing the standard procedure. It cannot hardly be shorter since CCPs need some time to examine the request, and it also allow to consider on-leave time of CCP staff.

4. **Deadline for response by the Secretariat**

Currently only one staff oversees the processing data or documents release requests at the SIOFA Secretariat (the Data Officer), if that officer is on leave when a request is sent to the Secretariat, then usually the request start to be processed only once the staff is back from leave.

5. **Confidentiality threshold**

When more the data is confidential, and when more documents are restricted, then the more likely data or documents release requests fall into non-public status and thus require the use of the above procedure for releasing data or documents.

## Discussion

A few proposals are listed below, hopefully some of them can be endorsed to improve the efficiency of data or documents release requests.

1. **Improve request processing time**
- Having a unique and well identified person responsible of replying about request for data or documents in each CCP may improve CCP involvement for replying. If the person is not available (identified by an automatic email reply), an alternate should be named to address the request.
- Decreasing the period for replying to request (from 3 weeks to 2 weeks for example).
- At the SIOFA Secretariat, another staff should be able to manage the data request flow when the Data Officer is offline, it would help to reduce the processing time of the requests. Note that the actual structured data release (datasets from SIOFA databases), due to its specificity, would still be provided by the staff in charge of the databases (currently the Data Officer).

**2. Allow more flexibility regarding confidential data or restricted papers**

- If less documents would be classified as restricted, then less request release for these documents would be necessary. Mostly it would require the Scientific Committee or the Secretariat to examine restricted papers and see if more of them could made public. A confidentiality status revision after that a certain period has passed would also be a possibility in order to allow public access to older restricted papers.

- A revision of the structured data confidentiality definition (for catch and effort data, observer data) that would lead to a less restrictive definition would help in some cases. Note that the foreseen revision of CMM 03 (Data Confidentiality) (MoP11 report, para 193) will possibly allow a wider scope of aggregated data to be in the public domain (e.g. yearly total catch of a species). Public domain data requests do not require that a non-public data release procedure is initiated before it is released to a requester.

**3. Better template for information requests**

- Using a unique request template will bring clarity to both requesters and CCPs. I would improve the preparation of the request by 3$^{rd}$ parties and improve the consideration of the requests by the CCPs. The template shall accomodate for non-public data, restricted papers and other unstructured information requests.

**4. Advance release request for projects, works and studies that have been adopted by the MoP?**

For works that have been adopted by the MoP, and when the data or papers required to complete these works can be identified in advance, then an advance release agreement could be prepared by the advisory panel to the attention of the data owners, for collecting their agreement to release the identified items that will be released to the 3$^{rd}$ party. This would allow to release the necessary information (data and/or documents) immediately after a consultant is recruited or a chosen CCP scientist is ready to undertake the work.

## Conclusions

Several options are possible to enhance the requests processing. Some would be easy to implement, like amending the request procedure template. Some other would requires CCPs (and the MoP) to agree to the changes.