

Conclusion on the Release Management Policy Consultation



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1 Introduction and Context

Section H8.9 of the Smart Energy Code (SEC) requires DCC to produce a Release Management Policy (RMP) that plans, schedules and controls has in place for the building, testing and deployment of releases of IT updates, procedures and processes in respect of the DCC Internal Systems and/or the Parse and Correlate Software.

There have been two previous versions of this Policy. DCC continually strives to improve its service offerings and has accordingly produced a third version of the policy which was the subject of the consultation. The changes in content of this version of the Policy aim to:

- Better align the Policy to the obligations placed on the DCC by the SEC;
- Provide SEC Parties with increased visibility of DCC's release management processes; and
- Enhance the ability of DCC to deliver defect fixes and Service improvements to Service users quickly and cost effectively.

DCC consulted on the Release Management policy from 9 October to 17:00 to 19 November 2019. This document is DCC's response to the comments that were received from industry, and it provides clarification and sets out amendments that have been made to the RMP as a result of these comments. DCC is of the opinion that none of the changes are material and is of the opinion that the RMP remains fit for purpose

2 DCC Response to Comments Received

DCC received seven responses to the consultation, which provided a variety of feedback which DCC will address in this consultation response. One of the responses was from a DCC service provider, DCC is considering these responses as part of an internal review process.

DCC posed seven questions which are set out below along with comments and the DCC response to the comments.

2.1 General Comments

A number of respondents provided general comments in relation to the RMP which did not specifically relate to the questions asked. These comments and DCC's response to them are set out below.

Comment: A number of responses were directed towards Communication Hub firmware releases and the manner in which this testing takes place.

Response: While Communication Hub Firmware upgrades are not the specific remit of this consultation, we have nevertheless added a section relating to Communications Hub firmware into the document in order to provide clarification for Users.

Comment: A respondent noted the interaction between the DCC RMP and the SEC RMP and that the changes are managed between BEIS and DCC.

Response: DCC carried out a review of the SEC RMP prior to publication of this consultation to ensure that the content of the proposed DCC RMP aligned with the content of the SEC RMP. Having finalised the content of the DCC RMP, after consideration of the comments that

DCC received, DCC has carried out a further review of the content of the SEC RMP and the DCC RMP and we are satisfied that the two policies align.

Comment: A respondent indicated that it would have been useful to have a redlined version of this version of the RMP so that it could be compared to the previous version.

Response: We note the comment that has been raised here, and DCC agrees that in general a new version of a document should highlight the changes that are proposed from the previous version. This version of the RMP has considerable changes from the previous version, to the point that we consider that such a marked-up version would have resulted in confusion rather than the clarity that we seek. Moving forward we will engaged with customers prior to the issuing of consultations to take their views on the most user-friendly means to assess change.

2.2 Question 1

Q1

Do you agree that the revised Release Management Policy aligns with the regulatory requirements of the SEC? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: A respondent indicated that it would be beneficial for the RMP to include details of the process of prioritisation and the engagement with stakeholders.

Response: The prioritisation process that is set out in the RMP is performed by DCC internal stakeholders according to the criteria described in the document which are designed to ensure that Users are considered first and foremost.

Comment: A respondent raised concerns about the timings of releases, notably the interaction with the SEC Nov 19 release and additions to the SMETS1 EPCL.

Response: We acknowledge the concerns that have been raised. DCC will look to mitigate these actions and avoid such clashes for future releases, where reasonably possible.

Comment: A respondent indicated that it considered that DCC should provide a specific period in which it will provide notice of the change freeze period.

Response: DCC is of the view that it is not appropriate to provide exact timings on the change freeze period and notifications in the RMP as there are factors that might influence the ability to adhere to any such periods and this could accordingly result in DCC breaching the timings that are set out in the RMP. DCC will strive to provide advanced warning of the change freeze period. For example, the communication relating to the 2019 Christmas change freeze period was sent out on 8 October 2019.

Comment: A respondent considered that certain regulatory aspects had not been included in the RMP such as the periods of notice set out in Section H8.10(d).

Response: Releases are deployed as part of Planned Maintenance. The periods of notice relating to Planned Maintenance are set out in Section H8.4 of the SEC, and we are accordingly not including any further details on timing in the RMP as this would simply be replicating regulatory obligations with which DCC is already required to comply.

Comment: A respondent indicated that previous versions of the DCC Release Management Policy included sections on the frequency and scheduling of releases, as well as details around the naming conventions and the process for stakeholder engagement.

Response: The frequency of releases are notified to Users in line with SEC obligations and we consider that providing further restrictions in the RMP would limit our ability to react to priorities.

The RMP provides that maintenance releases happen in most months and that there are up to 2 SEC releases per year. The release and change area is very dynamic and we do not feel it appropriate to be prescriptive about the timings and frequency of maintenance releases in this document.

Release names are detailed in the release notes which accompany every release and we are accordingly of the opinion that specifying their format in this document is not required.

2.3 Question 2

Q2

Is this context useful and do you have any comments on the Environments that are available to DCC? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: A respondent sought a response from DCC on arrangements, and the manner in which SEC Parties and the testing community would be engaged if new environments were introduced to the DCC System.

Response: The RMP has been updated in response to this comment.

Comment: A respondent raised a concern about the timings to align the Environments and the ability to test in the A and B streams.

Response: We note the concerns that have been raised here relate to major programme releases and as such are not addressed in this document as programme considerations are addressed by engagement with stakeholders and should not be limited by the content of the RMP.

Comment: A respondent suggest that the RMP should be updated to state that the 'A stream' will never be more than seven days out of alignment with production, unless there is a governed process to agree otherwise.

Response: DCC strives to keep UIT-A no more than 7 days out of alignment with the production environment. As stated in the RMP, at times emergency or expedited releases are required and sometimes these may bypass UIT on their way to Production. As also stated in the RMP, we would endeavour to align the A-stream as soon as possible but this may not always be achievable or even desirable within 7 days. We would not want the RMP to include content which could place inadvertent hurdles on our ability to deploy releases to resolve urgent User-impacting issues.

2.4 Question 3

Q3

Do you agree that the Policy provides sufficient information with respect to the planning and implementation of Releases by DCC? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: A respondent sought further details on the process and forums to discuss the impact of changes and indicated that DCC should consider the timings of the implementation of changes.

Response: This is a high level policy document, which should not provide detailed process flows, however, we have provided more details in the RMP document.

The SEC sets out the times during which DCC can undertake Planned Maintenance. The RMP references these and DCC will continue to adhere to the obligations as set out in the SEC. We further would like to note that the time that maintenance is performed is kept under constant review by DCC.

Comments: A number of comments related to Communication Hub Firmware which has been dealt with under General comments above.

2.5 Question 4

Q4

Do you agree that the Policy provide sufficient information with respect to the uplift of SEC releases and other major programs by DCC? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: A respondent sought clarity on the manner in which SEC parties are engaged on the uplift of SEC releases.

Response: This is addressed in the SEC Release Management Policy and accordingly does not fall under the ambit of the DCC release management policy.

Comment: A respondent raised concerns about delays to releases and the impact on users.

Response: We note and understand the concerns that have been raised relating to changes of release dates. These changes are due to extraneous circumstances that are outside of the scope of the RMP. It would not be viable to incorporate obligations which could hamper the dates for important releases. The intention of the RMP is to cover the manner in which releases are managed and it includes details of release management where there are changes to dates. DCC is of the opinion that the RMP does this in an appropriate manner.

Comment: A respondent sought details around the timings and frequency of SEC releases.

Response: This is addressed in the SEC Release Management Policy.

2.6 Question 5

Q5

Do you agree that the Policy provide sufficient information with respect to the release communications provided by DCC? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: One of the Respondents sought further details on the impact of change.

Response: Timescales and Service impact are described in the communications that are sent out in terms of Section H8.4 which are referenced in the Policy. We do not feel it that it is appropriate to re-state the details of this clause in this document.

Comment: Other comments relate to the Communications Hub Firmware process and major programme releases which is covered in the SEC Release Management Policy.

2.7 Question 6

Q6

Do you have any general comments on the Release Management Policy? Please provide a rationale for your views.

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: A respondent sought to have a demonstration of the consideration of the customer.

Response: DCC strives to minimise disruption to Users while meeting its SEC obligations. If DCC were to schedule maintenance around the requirements of Users, DCC would have to run a number of consultations which would increase the workload on Users. DCC is further of the view that scheduling maintenance around Users would be problematic as it is unlikely to be possible to schedule maintenance at times that would suit all Users and there is therefore a potential for such a process to favour certain Users over others.

Comment: A respondent reiterated that DCC needs to keep SEC Parties fully apprised of and involved in governance and oversight of releases.

Response: We note this concern. We wish to draw the attention of the respondent to the content of the SEC Release Management Policy.

Comment: A respondent indicated that it could be beneficial to reference the SEC Release Management policy within the RMP.

Response: The RMP makes reference of the SEC and SEC Release Management Policy, however the content of these documents are not within the ability of DCC to control and alignment would therefore require amendment and consultation each time an amendment was made to external documents. DCC is of the view that this would not be efficient and references to relevant documents are appropriate.

2.8 Question 7

Q7

Do you agree that it would be beneficial to have sight of the Elective Communications Services Release Process?

The comments received to the above question and DCC response is set out below:

Comment: Respondents were of the view that they would like to have sight of the Elective Communications Services Release Process and provide some views on its potential content.

Response: We note the comments that were received and will consider these in the development of the Elective Communications Services Release Process.

3 Next Steps

As a result of the consideration of the comments that were received to the RMP, DCC has made minor changes to the RMP. DCC is satisfied that the RMP remains fit for purpose and will publish the RMP on the DCC website.