

IFRS 17 close-cycle compression: where the days actually go

For CFOs and finance transformation leads. 4-minute read.

The problem

Most South African life insurers still run a fifteen-working-day IFRS 17 close. Boards want nine. The instinct is to push the actuarial team harder. That is the wrong lever. Instrumented closes consistently show that roughly a third of the calendar is wait time between functions, not productive work inside any one of them. Compress the handovers first.

Where the fifteen days actually go

- Days 1–3: data cut, policy and claims extracts, treaty reconciliations, opening balance roll-forward. Realistic compression target: half a day, almost entirely by retiring the manual policy-file fixes nobody has owned in two years.
- Days 4–7: model runs, CSM roll-forward, locked-in discount rates, risk adjustment, reinsurance held. Realistic compression target: one day, by parallelising product families and running variance-explanation automatically rather than after.
- Days 8–10: actuarial-to-finance reconciliation, finance overlays, expense allocations, tax overlay. Realistic compression target: two days. This is where the largest gains sit and where they are most often missed.
- Days 11–13: management pack, board pack, variance commentary, disclosures. Realistic compression target: one day, by treating the pack as a versioned artefact regenerated from data rather than reassembled in PowerPoint.
- Days 14–15: sign-off, late adjustments, last-minute reruns. Realistic compression target: half a day. The shape of this stage tells you whether the preceding work was governed; if it is short and dull, the close is healthy.

What good looks like

- A nine-working-day close that the chief actuary, finance director and IT lead are all willing to sign without overtime.
- Variance commentary generated from the same lineage as the numbers, with the auditor receiving the pack and the trail together.
- A close calendar instrumented well enough that next quarter's compression target is chosen from data, not negotiation.