What Is Consensus?

Lessons learned from past policy proposals
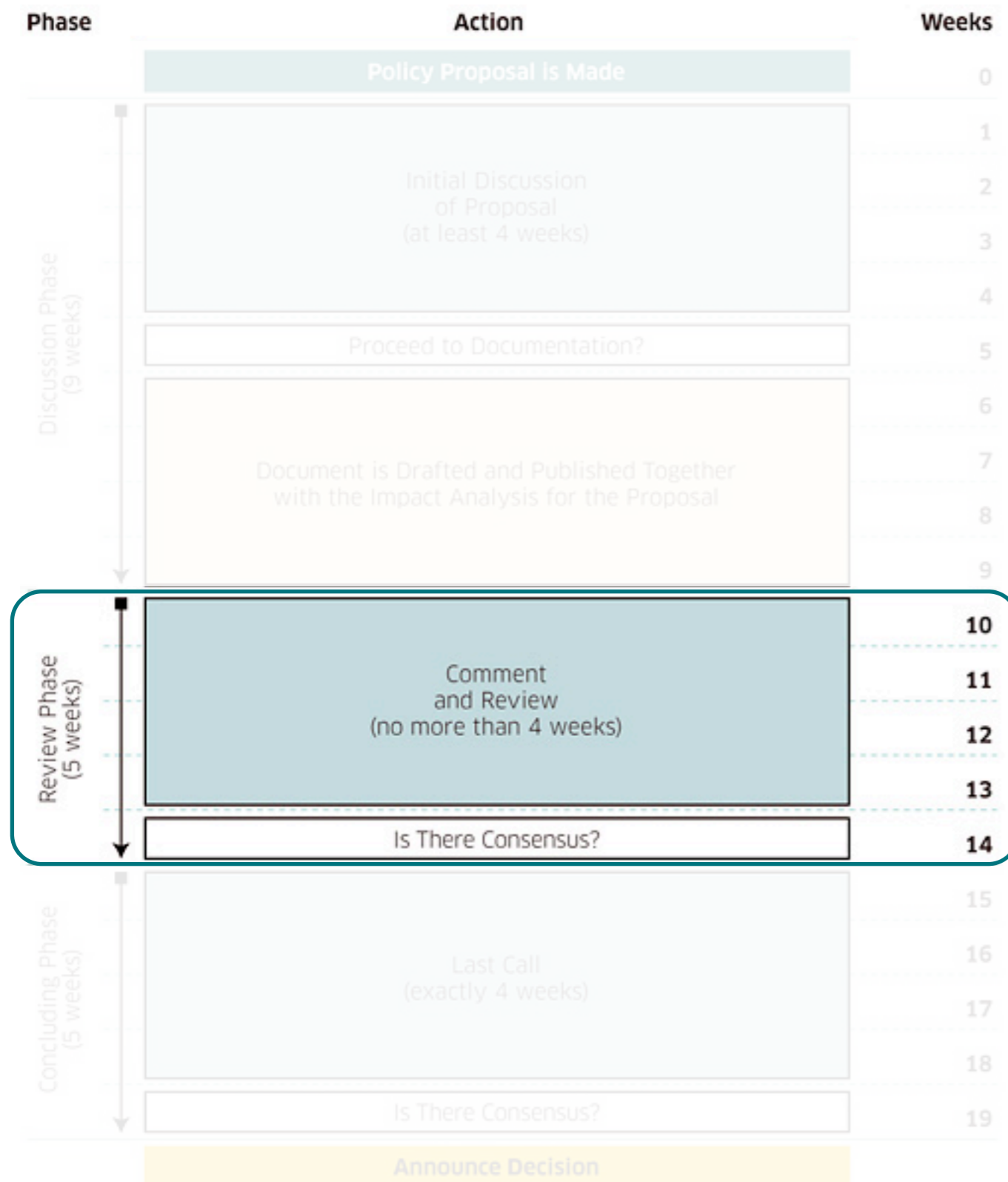
Sander Steffann, 2012-04-18

The Policy Development Process
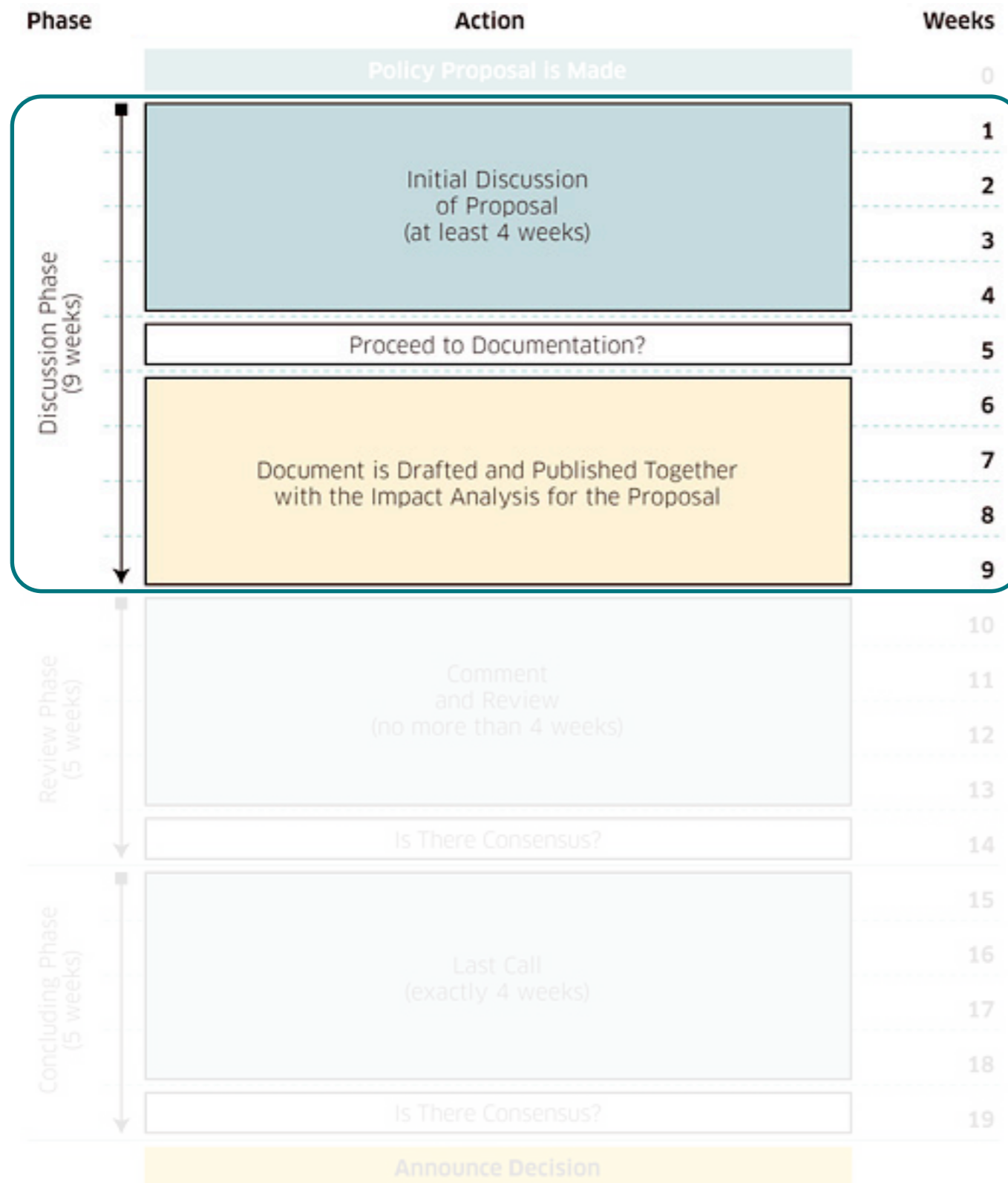
- Discussion phase
  - Initial discussion
  - If there seems to be support for the idea:
    - Draft documents
    - RIPE NCC writes impact analysis
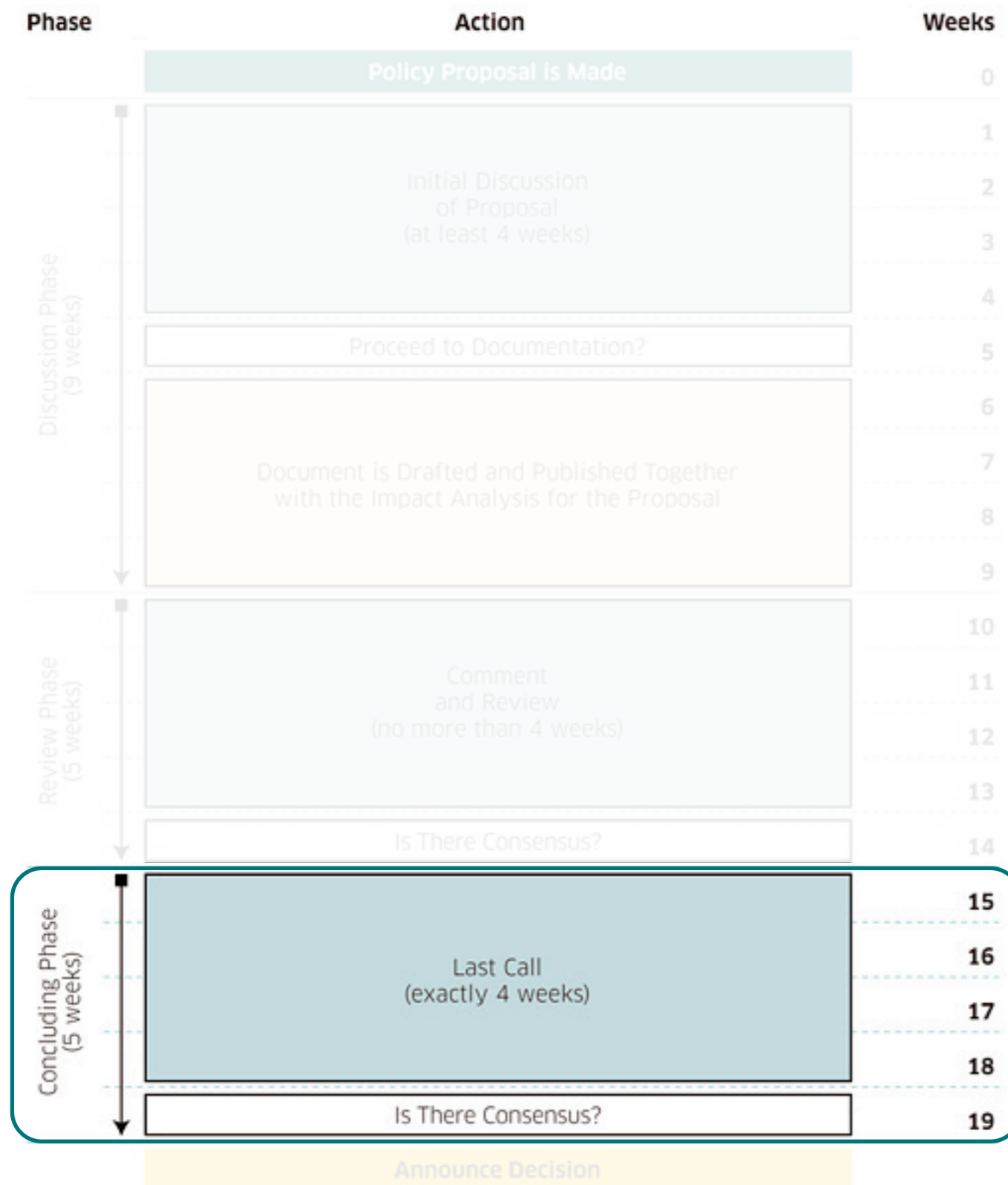   - Go to Review phase

The Policy Development Process

Phase	Action	Weeks
	Policy Proposal is Made	0
Discussion Phase (9 weeks)	Initial Discussion of Proposal (at least 4 weeks)	1 2 3 4
	Proceed to Documentation?	5
	Document is Drafted and Published Together with the Impact Analysis for the Proposal	6 7 8 9
Review Phase (5 weeks)	Comment and Review (no more than 4 weeks)	10 11 12 13
	Is There Consensus?	14
Concluding Phase (5 weeks)	Last Call (exactly 4 weeks)	15 16 17 18
	Is There Consensus?	19
	Announce Decision	

- Review phase
  - Finalise wording
  - Determine if there is consensus
    - People need to speak up
  - If there is consensus:
    - Go to Concluding Phase, a.k.a Last Call

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The Policy Development Process

Phase	Action	Weeks
	Policy Proposal is Made	0
Discussion Phase (9 weeks)		1
	Initial Discussion of Proposal (at least 4 weeks)	2
		3
		4
	Proceed to Documentation?	5
		6
	Document is Drafted and Published Together with the Impact Analysis for the Proposal	7
		8
		9
Review Phase (5 weeks)		10
	Comment and Review (no more than 4 weeks)	11
		12
		13
	Is There Consensus?	14
Concluding Phase (5 weeks)	Last Call (exactly 4 weeks)	15
		16
		17
		18
	Is There Consensus?	19
	Announce Decision	

- Concluding phase (a.k.a. Last Call)
  - Last opportunity to comment on and/or oppose the proposal
  - Consensus?
    - Silence is ok
  - If there is consensus:
    - Accept new policy

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The rules

- "In all phases of the RIPE PDP, suggestions for changes to the proposal and objections regarding the proposal must be justified with supporting arguments."

Two points where we need consensus

- Consensus at the end of the Review Phase
  - Silence is **not ok**: if there is no support for a policy then we shouldn't accept it

- Consensus at the end of the Concluding Phase
  - Silence is **ok**: if there is support for the policy (as seen in the Review Phase) and nobody objects then we should accept it

- Seems simple so far...

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How we determine consensus

- The simple decisions:

    - Explicit support in the Review Phase

    - No remaining unanswered questions

    - Any objections have been withdraw, or the justification for the objections has been shown the be invalid

When it becomes difficult

- Objections based on non-technical arguments

- How to determine if objections based on possible future impact are justified?

    - Arguments?

    - Counter arguments?

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How do we deal with this

- If possible we try to make sure that every concern or objection is handled
  - Alter the proposal to deal with it, or
  - See that (fact based) counter arguments are provided
- But we can't block the PDP when there is strong support for a proposal but someone doesn't accept a solution or counter argument to his/her concerns or objections
- Consensus ≠ Unanimity

How do we deal with this

- When consensus is not unanimous then we (your working group chairs) will have to make a judgement
  - Is there support for the proposal?
  - Is there a solution that will get unanimous support?
  - Is the opposition justified with supporting arguments?
  - Is there much support for the opposing arguments?
- We publish our reasoning

What if we are wrong?

- Discuss that on the mailing list!

- The collective of RIPE Working Group Chairs checks if we follow the process correctly

- The PDP has an appeals process

Questions?