ESA Contract Report

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Contract Report to the European Space Agency

Quarter 1 2025: Operations Service Report

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Abbreviations

BUFR ..... Binary Universal Form for the Representation of meteorological data
CCU ..... Central Computer Unit
CESBIO ..... Centre d'Etudes Spatiales de la Biosphère
DPGS ..... Data Processing Ground Segment
ECFS ..... ECMWF's File Storage system
ECMWF ..... European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts
ESA ..... European Space Agency
ESAC ..... European Space Astronomy Centre
ESL ..... Expert Support Laboratory
FTP ..... File Transfer Protocol
MIRAS ..... Microwave Imaging Radiometer using Aperture Synthesis
NetCDF ..... Network Common Data Form
NRT ..... Near Real Time
NWP ..... Numerical Weather Prediction
SAPP ..... Scalable Acquisition and Pre-Processing system
SEKF ..... Simplified Extended Kalman Filter
SMOS ..... Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity

1. Introduction

This document summarises the production and dissemination status of the European Space Agency (ESA) Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity (SMOS) neural network (NN) nominal soil moisture product for the first quarter of 2025. The NN nominal product is produced at the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) and it processes raw SMOS BUFR files within 30 minutes of their arrival via the Scalable Acquisition and Pre-Processing system (SAPP). The SMOS BUFR files should be available to ECMWF less than 165 minutes from the initial observation time and the NN product NetCDF files should be delivered to ESA less than 240 minutes from the initial observation time in the corresponding source BUFR file. Statistics of the production and timeliness of the delivered product are presented, reasons for the lack of completeness and/or failure to meet the timeliness deadline are given and corrective actions (if possible) are described in this report.

2. Quarterly statistics of completeness and timeliness of the SMOS NN product

Figure 1 shows the time series of daily file completeness and timeliness as defined by files that are delivered to ESA within 240 minutes of the initial observation time in the corresponding input BUFR file. The percentages are calculated by dividing the total time covered in the output files by the 24 hours in any single day. For example, for a single day if there are 30 BUFR files covering 48 minutes of data each and 1 file is not produced and 1 file is delivered late then the completeness percentage is 96.67% and the timeliness percentage is 93.33%. The time series covers the first quarter of 2025, 1st January to 31st March 2025. The data shows that for quarter 1 the completeness is above 99% and the average timeliness is above 95% for all months. A more detailed explanation of the periods where completeness drops below 95% and timeliness drops below 80% can be found in section 3.

Table 1 shows the monthly and entire quarter mean statistics of completeness and timeliness. The completeness is 99.9%, 99.3% and 99.4% for January, February and March, respectively. Thus, the resulting entire quarter averages is 99.6%. The timeliness is 98.0%, 95.7% and 98.0% for January, February and March, respectively, resulting to entire quarter average of 97.3%.

Month	Completeness	Timeliness
January	99.9%	98.0%
February	99.3%	95.7%
March	99.4%	98.0%
Quarter	**99.6%**	**97.3%**

Table 1: Monthly mean statistics of completeness and timeliness of SMOS NN nominal soil moisture product delivery

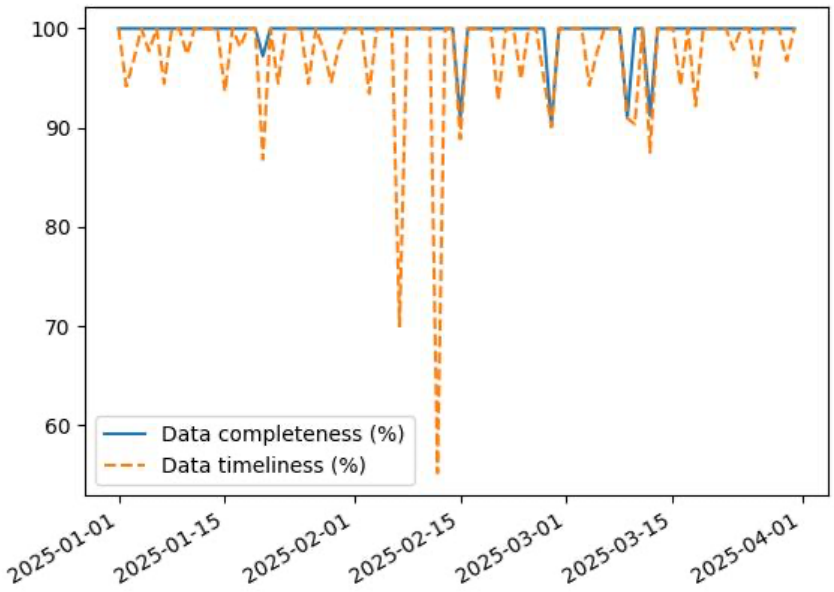

Figure 1: Daily SMOS NN nominal soil moisture production completeness and delivery timeliness percentages (see text for how these are calculated) for the first quarter of 2025: 1st January to 31st March 2025

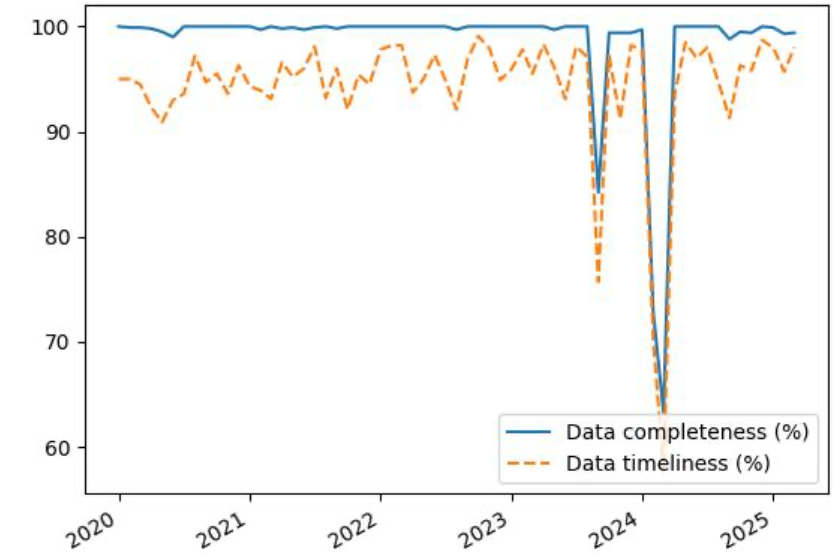

Figure 2: Monthly SMOS NN nominal soil moisture production completeness and delivery timeliness percentages (see text for how these are calculated) for the period January 2020 to March 2025

Figure 2 shows the monthly statistics of completeness and timeliness since January 2020. After September 2023 the level of completeness slightly dropped compared to previous years but for the latest nine months it is 100% or very close to it. The drop is a result from a change how the completeness is calculated. The calculation after the change takes into account the missing BUFR files. Previously if the time covered in the NetCDF files matched the time covered in the BUFR files, regardless of how much of the day was covered by the BUFR files, then the completeness would be 100%. With the new behaviour the statistics are sensitive to any missing BUFR files and this behaviour is a more accurate representation of completeness. In February and March 2024 both the completeness and timeliness dropped significantly due to SMOS being in the safe hold mode. The data became available for users again on 12th of March and the statistics have returned to the normal levels in April 2024. The notable drop in the completeness and timeliness in September 2023 was caused by the on-board GPS anomaly. Table 2 summarises the ECMWF related events affecting the production completeness and delivery timeliness for the period of January 2020 to March 2025. During quarter 1 of 2025 there were two ECMWF related events: an extended server outage on 7th February which resulted in a 6 hour delay, and a major network outage at ECMWF on 12th February which resulted in a 9 hour delay in the processing and delivery of some NetCDF files.

Documented in Quarterly report	**Drop in production completeness**	**Drop in delivery timeliness**
Q4 2020, 27.10.2020		4 hour delay in the processing at ECMWF due to ECMWF network outage.
Q1 2021, 5.2.2021	Completeness 93.3% due to single BUFR file for full SMOS orbit not being processed due to anomaly on the server where the processor runs.	
Q2 2021, 28.4.2021 and 22.6.2021	Completeness 94.3% and 92.7%, both instances caused by an anomaly on the server where the processor runs.	
Q3 2021, 13.9.2021	Completeness 93.5% due to an anomaly on the server where the processor runs.	
Q3 2022, 15.8.2022	Completeness 92.1% due to over 36 hour delay to the	

	delivery of the BUFR files. The SMOS NN processor has a feature that allows it to catch up on older files but only goes back one previous day.	
Q2 2023, 30.5.2023 and 27.6.2023	Completeness 91.3%. This was caused by the number of observations exceeding a hard-coded limit of 200000 within the processor. On the 27.6.2023 ECMWF implemented cycle 48r1. This resulted in an inconsistent version of the processor being run from 09:00 on the 27th June until 13:00 on the 28th June. On the 28.6.2023 the processor was corrected and most of the missing files were produced and disseminated. One of the dissemination triggers was not reset after the 48r1 related failures so 7 files covering ~12 hours were not disseminated. These files have been transferred manually by FTP to retain a full archive.	
Q4 2023, 21.11.2023		The SMOS NN processor working directory was temporarily moved to a new location but some auxiliary files which the processor depends upon were not accessible. The issue was fixed on 22.11.2023 and the missing files were reprocessed and disseminated.

Q1 2025, 07.02.2025		6 hour delay in the processing at ECMWF due to a server outage.
Q1 2025, 12.02.2025		9 hour delay in the processing at ECMWF due to a major network outage.

Table 2: Summary of ECMWF related events affecting the production completeness and delivery timeliness for the period of January 2020 to March 2025

3. Operational anomalies in this quarter

Figure 1 shows that there are four days where the completeness dropped below 95% during quarter 1 of 2025. Namely 15th February, 27th February, 9th March and 12th March. In all four cases the reason has been that not all BUFR files have been delivered. On each of these days one BUFR file covering an entire orbit was not delivered.

There were two days in quarter 1 of 2025 where the timeliness dropped below 80% as seen in Fig. 1, namely 7th and 12th February. On 7th the timeliness was 70.0% and on 12th it was 55.2%. As mentioned in section 2, these were both related to outages at ECMWF. On the 7th February this was a server outage resulting in a 6 hour delay and on 12th February this was a major network outage resulting in a 9 hour delay.

4. Comparisons between the ESA nominal and ECMWF assimilation neural network products

In this section the retrieved soil moisture from both the nominal neural network product delivered to ESA and the assimilation neural network product used at ECMWF will be compared. The month chosen for the comparison is February 2025 as this is the middle month of the quarter.

Due to Northern hemisphere winter, there is very little data available north of 60°N as seen in Fig. 3. Figure 3 also shows that data is missing over large areas of China, Myanmar and the Middle East for the ECMWF assimilation product due to extensive radio frequency interference (RFI) in the SMOS brightness temperatures over those regions. To a large extent, these areas are not missing for the ESA nominal product due to a different use of RFI flags in the training of the nominal and assimilation products, with the exception of Myanmar where the RFI is very strong.

Figure 3 also shows that the two products continue to have significant differences, with the ECMWF assimilation soil moisture product generally moister than the ESA nominal product in February 2025. The maps show that the differences are largest in the tropics (over South America, central Africa and the maritime continent in particular) and the Northern mid latitudes (Eastern USA and Western Europe). The products are in better agreement over the extra-tropical Southern hemisphere as well as in arid regions. The differences are due to the different datasets which the two neural networks are trained on.

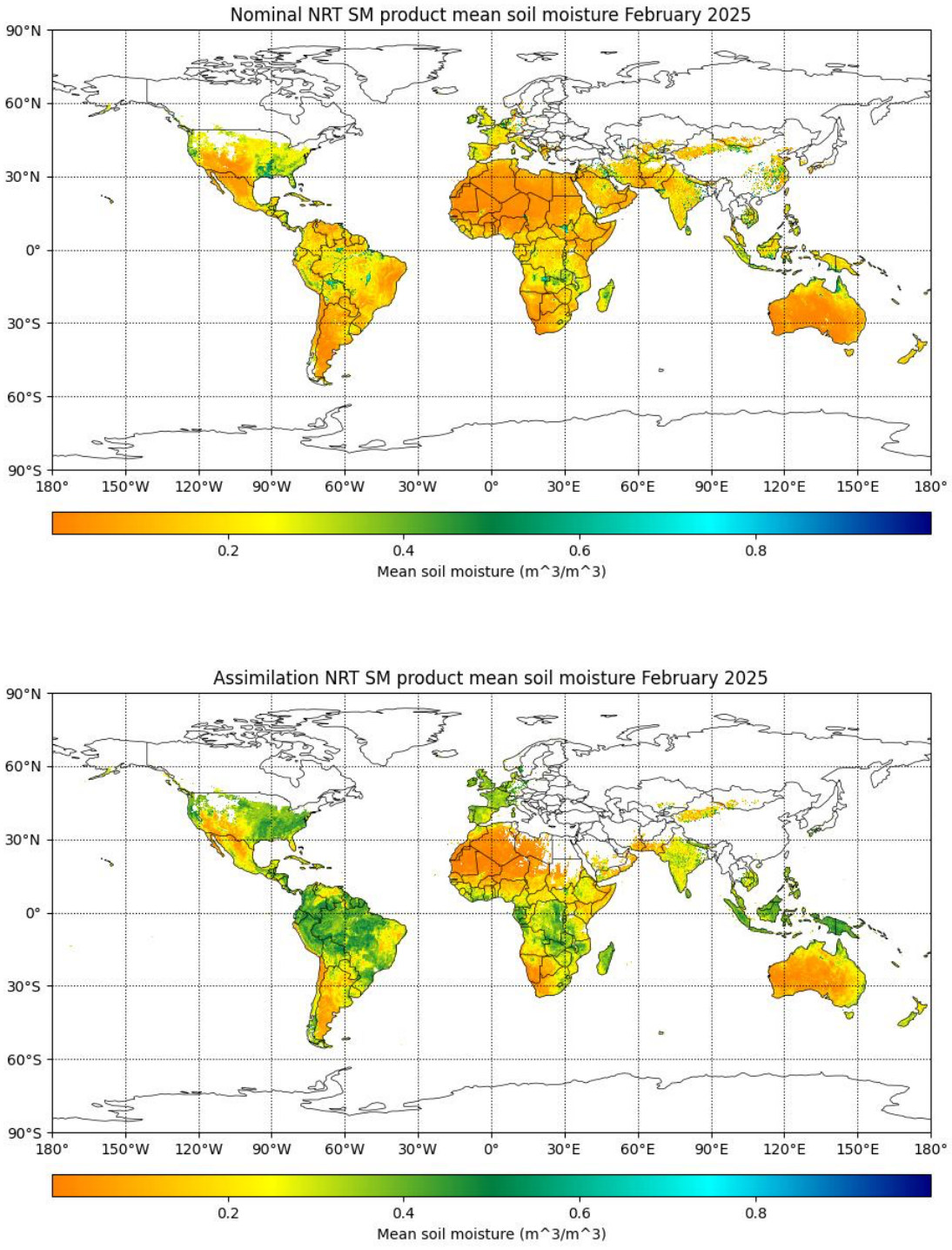

Figure 3: Mean retrieved soil moisture (m^3/m^3) for February 2025 for the nominal NRT product (upper) and assimilation NRT product (lower)

The nominal ESA product is trained on historical values of SMOS level 2 soil moisture whereas the ECMWF assimilation product is trained on the ECMWF model soil moisture. These datasets have

different characteristics and represent different soil depths which lead to the differences in Fig. 3. The SMOS level 2 soil moisture represents the top most 2-3cm of soil whereas the ECMWF model soil moisture represents the top most 7cm of soil.

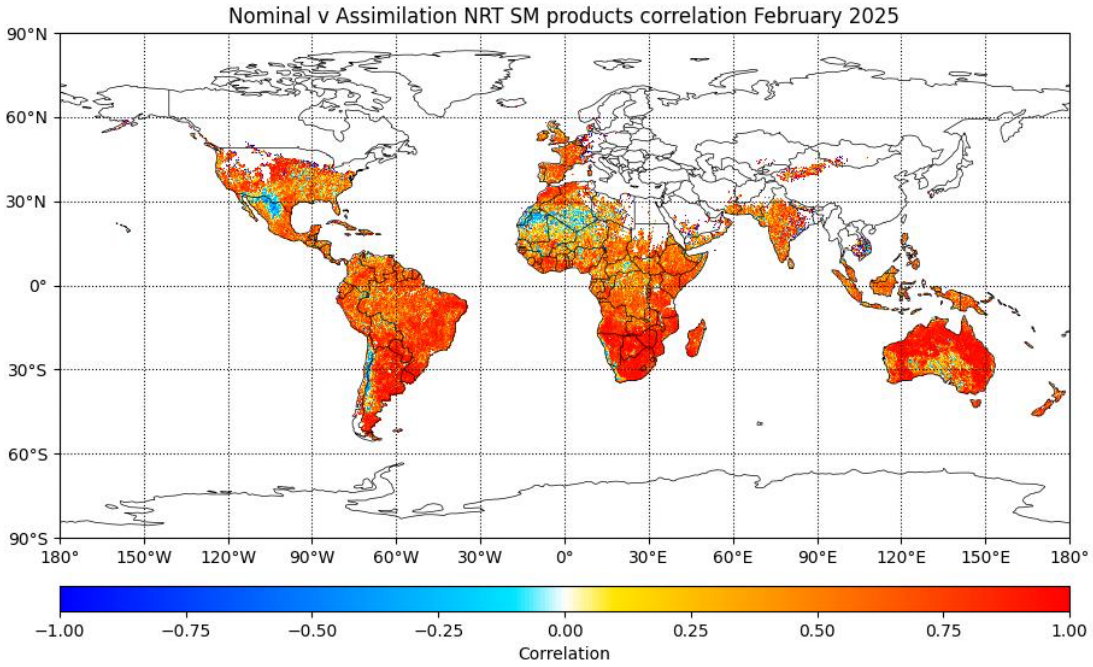

Figure 4: Correlation between the ESA nominal neural network product and the ECMWF assimilation neural network product in February 2025

Figure 4 shows that the two products have the strongest correlations in South America, Southern Africa and Australia. There are moderate correlations in the remainder of the Northern mid-latitudes and tropics with the weakest (and sometimes negative) correlations over arid regions such as the Sahara desert and the Andes.