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ComReg tackles high cost of mobile calls to 1850, 1890 and 0818 phone numbers

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) has today published its response to consultation on the latest version of the National Numbering Conventions – the rule book for the use of telephone numbers. Among the major items addressed is the high cost to consumers of calling 1890 and 0818 numbers from mobile phones, which has been the subject of consumer complaints in recent years.

ComReg has now set a new ceiling that restricts the maximum cost for calling an ordinary landline number. ComReg has also set similar ceilings for calling 1850, 076 and 0700 numbers.

Mobile operators (MNOs) are the beneficiaries of payments for 1850 and 1890 calls from both the calling and the called party, under a shared-cost concept. ComReg has argued strongly that the MNOs should now adjust their call charges to levels below the new ceilings in order to recognise the significant contributions from the called party. This would not only address the long-standing complaints of individual consumers (as discussed in the consultation) but would also be a suitable response to the concerns of those Irish companies whose contributions need to be better recognised. The called party is typically a company or organisation based in Ireland or a public body.

ComReg has established maximum charges for mobile calls made to these numbers under its numbering powers, in the interests of consumer protection. It cannot tackle the costs to called parties, as they are not “consumers” within the meaning of the relevant legislation. However, it has emphasised strongly that those bodies should negotiate better deals with the operators hosting their numbers. They should also encourage those same operators to negotiate much more effectively with the mobile operators who are receiving payments from them for initiating calls.

Apart from those significant steps, ComReg has carried out a series of more specific changes to the Numbering Conventions, as part of its routine updating.

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Note to Editors

1850 and 1890 numbers are used as information lines (1890 229 668 for ComReg) and are designated as shared cost numbers, whereby the call recipient pays a contribution towards the cost of each call, thereby facilitating a reduction of cost to the caller and so encouraging more calls.

ComReg has concluded that while this works for some mobile operators and/or on some tariff packages, the concept is inadequately observed in many other cases. The new ceilings represent a firm step towards improving this situation. While ComReg would wish to go further, this would exceed its powers. However, there is no doubt that firm commercial negotiations by the 1850/1890 number holders could achieve results in getting a better deal for callers and/or called parties.

0818 numbers (designated as Universal Access Numbers), used by many large companies and charities that also have significant numbers of international callers, allowing calls to be routed to various company offices. Criticism of mobile call charges to these numbers has also been a feature of recent years, so ComReg has set similar ceilings to these charges (i.e. the maximum charge is the cost of calling a normal landline number).

076 numbers (designated for IP-based nomadic and VoIP telephone calls) have similarly had ceilings set that limit the maximum cost to that of calling an ordinary land line.

0700 numbers (designated as personal numbers, allowing calls to follow a user around, e.g. to different locations at different times of day; now a dated concept with the advent of mobiles) will also have the same ceiling be set. However, it is likely that ComReg will recover this number range which is now largely out of use.