



## Media Release – 22 April 2010

### **ComReg consults on the provision of universal service for telephone services in Ireland**

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) today published a Consultation Paper entitled 'The Provision of Telephony Services under Universal Service Obligations' (ComReg 10/35).

Eircom is currently designated as the Universal Service Provider until 30 June 2010. As the end of the current designation is approaching, it is now appropriate to address this issue. The principle underpinning universal service is that every person is entitled to have access to a basic set of telecommunications services, including:

- provision of a telephone access for voice calls
- provision of directory services
- provision of public payphones to meet the reasonable needs of consumers

Universal service has been provided for in Ireland under EU and national legislation since 2003. It ensures the provision of telecommunication services at an affordable price, not only in areas where the market caters for, but also in those very rural areas where it might not otherwise be provided. It also provides a mechanism to ensure that consumers with disabilities have access to these services on a basis similar to that enjoyed by other consumers.

The European Directive governing Universal Service was amended and notified in the Official Journal on 18 December 2009. ComReg notes that the resulting Amending Directive must be transposed into Irish law by 24 May 2011. Furthermore, on 3 March 2010, the European Commission issued a public consultation which may result in changes in the scope of universal service.

The Amending Directive also paves the way for consumers with disabilities to be able to access and choose from the range of electronic communication services available to all consumers. ComReg will continue to host its Forum on Electronic Communications Services for People with Disabilities as part of its consumer welfare remit.

In the interim, in this consultation, ComReg's approach to universal service scope and designation is in accordance with existing EU legislation. ComReg notes that broadband is not currently included in the definition of universal service in the current legislation and, accordingly, this consultation refers only to narrowband connections.

Commissioner Mike Byrne said: *"ComReg is very mindful that new European legislation affecting universal service will come into effect in Ireland in May 2011 and also to the potential changes to universal service that may follow from updated legislation. However, as the current designation period is coming to an end in June of this year, ComReg now wishes to consult with consumers, industry and other interested parties to inform its approach to the provision of universal service under existing legislation for a proposed designation period of two years from July of this year. On behalf of ComReg, I would encourage all interested parties to respond to this consultation."*

This consultation process is open from today until 21 May 2010, during which time ComReg welcomes written submissions on the proposals. All views submitted will be considered by ComReg before a final decision is made.

**ENDS**

**Issued By**

**Tom Butler**

**Public Affairs Manager, ComReg**

**Ph: 01 804 9639 Mobile: 087 2536358**

**tom.butler@comreg.ie**