



Media Release- 19th December 2002

ComReg Lays Down Groundwork for new Regulatory Regime

ComReg today invited views from the public and industry on universal service in the Irish telecommunications sector and on the future regulation of the radio frequency spectrum. Public Consultation on these issues is required in preparing for the new EU Directives which will govern the way electronic communications will be governed in the future.

The principle of universal service means that every person in Ireland should know the conditions upon which they can reasonably expect to have access to a basic set of telecommunications services. These include access to:

- a telephone line capable of providing functional internet access;
- a comprehensive telephone directory and directory enquiry service; and
- a sufficient number of public payphones to meet the reasonable needs of consumers.

In providing access to telephony services, universal service also ensures that consumers with special needs can benefit from the service, that the services are affordable, that consumers have facilities that enable them to exercise control over their telephony costs and that the quality of service provided is continuously monitored.

The existing requirement to provide these services is currently placed on eircom in accordance with the obligations as set out in the Voice Telephony and Universal Service Regulations 1999. In this regard, eircom must, insofar as they consider it reasonable, provide the above services to consumers. The new EU Directives are more specific about setting universal service requirements and ComReg is responsible for designating organisations that are responsible for their provision. Given the importance of this issue to consumers, ComReg is therefore anxious to have views as to how the provision of universal service should be defined. Submissions are required by 11 February 2003.

Radio Frequency Spectrum – 02/115

From July 2003, new EU Directives will govern how spectrum is licensed. These Directives lay down the rights and obligations governing the use of spectrum by individuals and the rules to be applied by Regulatory Authority's in issuing rights of use

for all the main types of radio licences, including mobile, MMDS, radio links, and business radio. The new Directives' approach is based on spectrum rather than on equipment which forms the basis of the Irish licensing to date. Views are invited on how ComReg should apply the new Regulatory Framework to radio licences. Submissions are required by 14 February 2002.

From licences to Authorisations – Response to Consultation 02/114

ComReg also today specified the conditions which will in future apply to communications networks and services. Currently networks and services are subject to individual licensing for telephony, mobile phones, broadcasting and cable television. Under the new Framework it will no longer be necessary to obtain a licence before commencing operations except in some cases where the use of radio frequencies (such as mobile phones) is involved.

The Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources is currently consulting on the text of the legislation transposing the Directives. Working in parallel in order to meet the deadline of July 2003, ComReg's consultations and reports deal with how it intends to implement the Irish legislation. The final form of ComReg's implementing measures will be framed within the final national, and EU legislation.