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Consumers Should Exercise their Rights in Competitive Markets – Comreg Quarterly Report

Recent research commissioned by ComReg indicates that consumers have been slow to take full advantage of the range of service providers now operating in the telecoms and broadcasting markets. The Surveys, conducted by MRBI for ComReg's latest quarterly Report, show that despite growth in competitive activity in the market place, consumers have a low level of awareness of their rights and entitlements.

Chairperson **Etain Doyle** said that it is encouraging to see an increasingly competitive environment reflected by the fact that many consumers reported an increase in the number of operators contacting them offering new products and services. Nevertheless, there seems to be a relatively low level of consumer awareness in terms of issues such as pricing and complaint procedures. "Competition is there to provide choice— consumers should know that they can vote with their feet and move to another operator if the price or service or both is better somewhere else."

In order to create greater consumer awareness ComReg has been actively addressing these issues through the publication of information leaflets, Codes of Conducts and other consumer initiatives. All licensed operators – fixed, mobile and television distribution – are required to publish their Codes of Conduct and to make them available to customers on request. The Codes detail an operator's minimum level of service to customers and also outline their complaint handling procedures. Recent information leaflets issued by ComReg address important consumer issues – how to control mobile costs while abroad, and informing consumers both about the choices available and how they can go about changing their fixed telephone provider should they wish to do so. These leaflets are available from ComReg, Post Offices, Airports, Citizen Advice Bureaus and from the Government's Oasis website.

The main findings of the March 2003 quarterly Report which reflects activity in the market from September 2002 – December 2002 show that:

- *Mobile penetration has reached 79% - an increase of 2% since the previous quarter
- *72 text messages sent per month per subscriber - up from 65 since Dec 02
- *Internet usage is up 4% on the year and now stands at 40%
- *Four out of every ten Internet users having bought online in the past 3 months
- *ISDN continues to increase - up 30% in 12 months and DSL orders are still low in absolute terms, but up 74% in the last quarter.
- *9% increase in consumers moving from eircom to other operators (CPS)
- *20% OLO market share – this figure has remained stable between 20-21% for the last 2 years
- *Overall revenues now stand at €3.44bn – up 5% since last year but reflects a decrease of 2% since last December. Competitive pricing in the telecoms market may be a contributory factor.

The Quarterly Report and Surveys are available on www.comreg.ie

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