



An Coimisiún um
Rialáil Cumarsáide
Commission for
Communications Regulat

Nuisance Communications

Formation of the Nuisance Communications Industry Taskforce

Information Notice

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An Coimisiún um Rialáil Cumarsáide
Commission for Communications Regulation

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Nuisance communications, for the purposes of this Information Notice, means unwanted, unsolicited communications generally directed at large groups of the population. Nuisance communications often have the intent to mislead the receiver, so that they unknowingly provide sensitive personal information. This in turn can enable the criminal to perpetrate fraud.
- 1.2 Irish society and its economy have become ever more reliant on telecommunications technology. It is deeply integrated into all areas of the economy and society, however, this constant in our lives comes with its own threats and vulnerabilities. Fraud, which is perpetrated by using electronic communications networks and services, and particularly nuisance communications, has become a low-risk form of crime. The reduced cost and increased availability of means has seen fraud in the form of nuisance communications rise substantially in Ireland. Our daily use of electronic communications networks and services is exploited by criminals, who use social engineering type attacks – for example vishing, smishing and CLI spoofing, with the intention of illegally acquiring personal consumer information, ultimately to abet financial fraud.
- 1.3 At its heart, this fraud is the abuse of telecommunications products (mainly telephones and mobile phones) or services with the intention of illegally acquiring money from a communication service provider or its customers. Criminals prey on our daily use of electronic devices and continuously seek out new ways to exploit vulnerabilities and access information. The reduced cost and increased availability of enabling-equipment means this type of fraud is on the rise.
- 1.4 Consumers are being inconvenienced, confused, and threatened by the volume of nuisance communications. There is a clear and present danger that consumers can be manipulated into providing sensitive personal information, such as Personal Public Service numbers and banking information. This is also having systemic effects, for example the Commission for Communications Regulation (“ComReg”) is aware of anecdotal cases of businesses needing to advise customers that their calls may come from unknown numbers, to ensure they will be answered. This implies that nuisance communications are leading to missed appointments and lost business. In short, trust is being lost in electronic communications services, and this is impacting consumers and the economy at large.
- 1.5 Given the increasing frequency of nuisance communications and the damaging effects on public confidence in the integrity and trustworthiness of electronic communications, ComReg is convening an industry taskforce to address the matter, with the full support of the Department of the Environment, Climate Change, and Communications.

2 Nuisance Communications Industry Taskforce

- 2.1 To address nuisance communications, ComReg is establishing a taskforce – the Nuisance Communications Industry Taskforce (“NCIT”), to bring together representatives of the electronic communications industry.
- 2.2 ComReg is issuing letters of invitation to several electronic communications providers but is also pleased to extend this invitation to other members of the electronic communications industry. Membership of NCIT is limited to persons employed by organisations who have and operate within the State under a General Authorisation¹ and carry voice calls and/or SMS messages. Attendees should be persons:
- who are network specialists within their organisation, with specialist knowledge of:
 - the operation of electronic communications networks and services,
 - mitigation measures/interventions to mitigate nuisance communications on electronic communications networks and services.
 - who agree to attend on behalf of their organisation to constructively contribute and actively participate in the activities of the NCIT;
 - who have authority to agree to common positions, where necessary.
- 2.3 The NCIT will meet monthly and will be chaired by an independent chairperson and secretariat, reporting to ComReg.
- 2.4 The draft terms of reference of the NCIT are set out at Annex 1 to this document.

¹ Under Section 4 (1) of the European Communities (Electronic Communications Networks and Services) (Authorisation) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 335 of 2011), any person intending to provide an electronic communications network or service shall, before doing so, notify the Regulator of his intention to provide such a service.

3 Next Steps

- 3.1 ComReg is inviting members of the electronic communications industry, as set out in paragraph 2.2 above, to indicate the members of their organisation that will represent them at the NCIT.
- 3.2 In responding to this invitation, the electronic communications industry organisations should submit:
- the names of the individuals to represent them at the NCIT;
 - what competence, knowledge and experience they can bring to the activities of the NCIT;
 - their job functions/title; and
 - their contact email addresses.
- 3.3 This should be submitted to marketframeworkconsult@comreg.ie by **12:00 hours (Irish time) on Friday 14th January 2022**.
- 3.4 The first meeting of the NCIT is expected to be held circa late January 2022.
- 3.5 ComReg will issue details of the meeting of NCIT – including access details, in due course, to the participants nominated by the electronic communications industry organisations.

Annex 1: Draft Terms of Reference of NCIT

Objectives

A 1.1 The objective of the Nuisance Communications Industry Taskforce (“NCIT”) is to bring together representatives of the electronic communications industry to:

- Discuss potential interventions to be applied to networks to minimise/mitigate nuisance communications;
- Develop an intervention implementation roadmap to ensure that the interventions are implemented by the appropriate network and/or service providers as quickly as possible in line with the expected timelines of the deliverable of the taskforce;
- Develop an effective means for industry to collaborate and share information over the long term should nuisance communications evolve, or should a network/networks come under a sustained nuisance communications attack; and
- Report on the progress of the taskforce, as agreed in the terms of reference.

Terms of Reference

A 1.2 The Terms of Reference for the NCIT are:

- To identify and recommend practical interventions that can be taken in the short, medium and long-term to combat nuisance communications by operators, in line with the objectives of the taskforce, setting out an intervention strategy and plan for same;
- To prepare two progress reports: one after six months of operation and one after 12 months. At six months, a report should include:
 - an update on interventions under development or already in-place, and
 - a set of recommendations and actions to combat nuisance communications on a long-term and durable basis.

As part of the report at 12 months, this should include a review of whether the taskforce could continue beyond the initial 12 months and if so an intervention strategy and plan for same. The report should

also provide an update on interventions under development, and an update and effectiveness of interventions already in-place;

These reports may, at the discretion of ComReg, be published or shared with relevant interested parties such as the Minister for State with responsibility for Communications and Circular Economy. As such an appropriately redacted version of each report should also be produced alongside the non-redacted version; and

- By the third meeting of the taskforce, provide a copy of its agreed implementation roadmap to ComReg. This should clearly set out the intervention strategy and plan that the industry has agreed to tackle the problem of nuisance communications.

A 1.3 The work of the Taskforce will assist ComReg in its own work on combatting nuisance communications.