



Office of the Director of
**Telecommunications
Regulation**

PRESS RELEASE

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REGULATOR LAUNCHES 100TH DOCUMENT – DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS TO PROTECT CONSUMER AND OPERATORS RIGHTS

Proposals to facilitate the effective resolution of telecommunications disputes were issued by the Director of Telecommunications Regulation, Etain Doyle, today. The new procedures address disputes between customers and service providers and also inter-operator disagreements. The proposals mark the 100th document issued by the Regulator since the establishment of her Office and her 24th consultation.

The Regulator believes very strongly that telecommunications licensees in a competitive environment must have excellent customer care programmes to ensure that their customers get the level of service they need, at the right time and the right price. The licences under which operators provide services include a condition requiring that a code of practice be established by all operators to cover this issue. However, as markets develop, there are issues which do cause difficulty, in particular for new market entrants and it is essential that these are dealt with quickly and effectively, with the weight of the Regulator's office behind them, as appropriate. It is proposed to formalise and make more transparent and efficient the role of the ODTR in such cases.

In the event of such referrals, the proposed mechanisms for the lodging and handling of disputes, including the level of information required to enable the Office consider the issues, and guiding timeframes for resolution, are detailed in the consultation document **ODTR 99/13**. In developing these proposals, the Regulator is also mindful of the role that less formal procedures may play in resolving disputes. In particular her Office would be prepared to help mediate between parties where it is felt that such a course of action would be more appropriate in reaching a more speedy resolution to a dispute.

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“Liberalisation was a very important milestone in the development of the Irish telecommunications market, but this one act will not in itself ensure that all users of telecommunications services reap the rewards it so clearly has the potential to deliver” said the Regulator. “Disputes in the market can hinder the development of competition, or delay the provision of innovative services and reductions in prices. The effective and timely resolution of disputes and the mechanisms to ensure this are a key priority for my Office.

“This consultation marks the 100th document issued by my Office, but more importantly is the the 24th time we have gone to public consultation, seeking the views of industry, consumers and other interested parties on policy and regulatory issues. The consultation process is central in developing a regime that is based on a keen understanding of the commercial realities of the market, consumer requirements and future prospects for its development. All comments are welcome and greatly facilitate the framing of decisions.”

The assigning of disputes to particular “case officers” who will be the sole contact point for the duration of the process is central to the procedures. It is also proposed that where a dispute is considered of a nature that may affect other parties or the market generally the Regulator may publish a summary of the dispute on the ODTR website and invite comments from interested parties. A report on the level and nature of disputes received and on the decisions made will be published regularly.

The document “**Dispute Resolution Procedures - A Consultation Paper**” - ODTR 99/13 can be viewed on the ODTR web-site (<http://www.odtr.ie>). The consultation period concludes on April 29th, 1999.

ENDS