



Commission for
Communications Regulation

Response to Consultation

Revised Numbering Conventions

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1 Introduction

The National Numbering Conventions is the basic rule book that describes how ComReg fulfils its legislated responsibilities to manage the national numbering resource effectively and efficiently. It also sets out the rights and obligations of the other main stakeholders in respect of numbers and codes.

The first version of the National Numbering Conventions, Document ODTR 00/10, was published in February 2000 and that was followed successively by three other versions leading to Version 4.0 as document ComReg 04/35 in March 2004. These in turn each extended coverage into a number of new areas. A draft Version 5, ComReg 05/32A was published on 19 April 2005 for public consultation, along with consultation document ComReg 05/32.

This report now describes the outcome of the latter consultation and the changes that are being made to the National Numbering Conventions document as a result. It should be noted that most respondents expressed their general satisfaction with the draft revision of the National Numbering Conventions and there were no issues on which difficulties were reported by a majority of respondents. Nevertheless, useful suggestions or observations were received on individual issues from most respondents and ComReg has acted on the majority of these. Some formatting and/or minor textual suggestions were also made and these have been adopted, where relevant, without comment herein.

Respondent	Category
ALTO	Network operators association
BT Ireland	Fixed net operator
Conduit	Directory Provider
<i>eircom</i>	Fixed net operator
MCI	Fixed net operator
O2	Mobile Operator
Richard Barry	Private interested party
Vodafone	Mobile Operator

2 Consultation Issues

2.1 General Points Raised

Various general points were raised that were unrelated to any specific section of the Numbering Conventions and these are discussed in this part of ComReg's consultation response document.

2.1.1 Proposal to Review the Numbering Scheme

Two respondents proposed a major strategic review of the national numbering scheme, suggesting that it has evolved relatively piece-meal over the last six years without being based on a coherent long term numbering strategy. They suggest that the scheme was designed for a PSTN age largely dominated by geographic numbers, while the telecommunications marketplace has altered significantly in the meantime and will undergo further major changes in the period ahead. The reason for the review would therefore be to prepare the scheme for the needs of industry over the next five years.

2.1.2 ComReg's Position on Review of the Scheme

The present numbering scheme is based on a major strategic review of numbering in Ireland "Numbering in Ireland for the 21st Century" published in July 1998. While almost 7 years has passed since then, it is probably true to say that the many changes which have taken place in the telecommunications scene in the interim have not in any way invalidated the conclusions of that review or the strategy resulting from it.

Only the recent strong emergence of on-line technologies (such as VoIP, broadband access mechanisms etc.) have now raised certain fundamental questions concerning numbering and addressing but the resulting current market turbulence means this is not an ideal time to attempt to set a new long-term strategy. ComReg has taken steps to deal with the immediate Irish numbering obligations resulting from VoIP and is active in the wider European scene with our international partners (including the European Commission and other NRAs) in determining suitable long-term approaches for the future. Any significant ComReg numbering changes resulting from these deliberations and/or from fixed/mobile convergence and Next Generation Networks would be discussed in detail with the NAP beforehand and when their implications are clearer, a new long-term strategy can be adopted.

Nevertheless ComReg is always open to exploring new numbering approaches within the context of the Numbering Advisory Panel (NAP), and insofar as these are improvements that don't block any avenues forward or prejudice the numbering resource, they can be adopted. Furthermore, ComReg would be anxious to ensure that proposed changes must clearly benefit the consumer; adjustments solely to suit industry which were disadvantageous to consumers (e.g. less transparency) would not be acceptable.

ComReg will ensure that the issue of strategic review is placed on a future NAP agenda so that a wider range of viewpoints can be obtained.

2.1.3 Review of the National Numbering Conventions (NNC)

A respondent proposed that rather than reviewing the Conventions completely whenever introducing new numbering types, ComReg could just consult and add an addendum to the existing document. This could be done more quickly thereby

ensuring the Conventions remain up to date. ComReg could still carry out periodic general updates to make major changes but on a less frequent basis.

2.1.4 ComReg's Position on Review of the NNC

ComReg's reviews are based on the target of 12-monthly review, as set out in Section 15, rather than on introduction of new number types. Minor decisions on numbering are made directly under ComReg's powers to administer the numbering resource, whereas discrete consultations may be undertaken in respect of major numbering decisions (such as for '076'). The review of the NNC is then used as a 'catch-up' exercise to bring the formal integrated statement of the rules up to date. ComReg appreciates that the (approximately) annual update is taxing for members of industry to cope with and also notes that the amount of change being consulted on has diminished with each update, as the NNC have matured. Therefore in keeping with the sentiment behind this respondent's suggestions ComReg will amend convention 15-1 to refer to an 18-month review cycle, instead of 12 months. As that convention is written in sufficiently general terms, it will still be possible for flexibility to be exercised concerning the actual review date, when necessary, despite the later target.

2.1.5 Technology Neutrality in Numbering

One respondent believed that designation of numbers for technology, rather than services may present a problem. It was noted as an example that ComReg 05/32a in its coverage of NDC 76 for IP services refers to numbering for VoIP and ENUM, which "seems counter to the developments at the ECC & NNA working group and general trends for technology neutral solutions".

2.1.6 ComReg's Position on Technology Neutrality

ComReg does not accept that its current approach to numbering vis-à-vis technology and services causes problems and indeed its general approach on designating a special code for VoIP purposes has been and is being widely copied elsewhere. In general – terminological issues aside - it is difficult or impossible in an open system to avoid designating number ranges for specific technologies which are in any case often tightly bound to specific services (VoIP, mobile,).

2.1.7 Definitions of PATS, ECN, ECS and non-PATS

Two respondents felt that confusion exists concerning the terms PATS, ECS and non-PATS and clear definitions and explanations in the Conventions (including implications) would help users. One respondent went further and felt that the Conventions document should be as self-contained as possible and hence reference to external documents, and specifically Regulations and ComReg 04/103 should be avoided. In addition, there was considered to be inconsistent use of the term "undertaking", especially in sections 5 and 8.

2.1.8 ComReg's Position on definitions of PATS, ECS etc.

ComReg acknowledges that the definitions of ECN, ECS and PATS are complex and they entail rights and obligations that are also difficult to absorb, so the desire for simplification in the Conventions is understood. However, these (in their unabbreviated form) are legal terms embodied in formal regulations and divergence in any way from them in a document that itself has a formal standing would bring danger of contradictions or incompleteness. ComReg agrees with the fall-back

position of one of the respondents and will include the full definitions as found in Irish regulations.

There is no specific definition of non-PATS ECS service but ComReg will add a note to the definitions section clarifying that as the PATS category also represents one sub-set of ECS, it is necessary to make a distinction that refers only to the remaining types of ECS.

ComReg accepts that the collective term “undertaking” as used in regulations causes some confusion as it doesn’t quite align with “operators” plus “service providers”. The conventions document attempts to use the most appropriate terms at any location.

ComReg will remove the need to refer out to ComReg 04/103 “VoIP Services in Ireland” and import the relevant requirements directly into the Numbering Conventions to simplify look-up for readers.

2.2 Responses affecting Specific Services

2.2.1 Directory Enquiries (DQ)

Two respondents submitted inputs on the issue of DQ. One argued that the current restrictions on use of DQ short codes to numbers/addresses should be relaxed. It proposed that these numbers should also be permitted for other directory services, such as travel information, cinema/concert ticketing information, reservations etc. The second submission proposed that in accordance with earlier decisions and based on the number of unused 118XX codes, the limit to two numbers per user should be relaxed to at least four.

2.2.2 ComReg’s Position on DQ

ComReg accepts that a market exists for general directory services but has always insisted that the use of a telecommunications short code for such non-telecoms purposes was inappropriate. Not only are Freefone, shared-cost and Premium Rated numbers suitable for this purpose (according to the charges being made) but they ensure that questionable content services do not appear behind DQ codes (as has occurred in other jurisdictions). Extending usage to such general purposes would also detract from the value and recognition factor of 118XX codes for DQ purposes. ComReg does not therefore propose to extend the designation of 118XX to cover additional generic directory services.

Concerning the number of codes available per user organisation, ComReg accepts that there is no longer a need to restrict the number of these to just two. On the other hand it is difficult to see (under the existing designation for the 118XX code) why any user would need more than a maximum of four codes and the limit will accordingly be reset in Convention 11.4.1-2 to that figure. If the outcome of subsequent discussions in the NAP is that wider uses of the directory code should be permitted (without prejudice to the conditions of use for other short code types) then the limit of four codes per organisation can be revisited.

2.2.3 Matters concerning 076 Numbers

One respondent proposed amending the last sentence of Section A6.3.7 (Designation of 076 range) from “Retail price point(s) for calls to 076 numbers

shall not exceed national call rate but it is anticipated that in practice retail rates will in all or almost all cases be less than this” to “The retail price charged by an undertaking for calls to 076 numbers shall not exceed the undertaking’s national call rate for calling geographic numbers. It is anticipated that, in practice, retail rates will in all or almost all cases be less than this.”

Another respondent queried whether it might be a trade barrier under GATT or EU Rules to restrict allocation of 076 number blocks to organisations based in Ireland (Section A6.3.7).

2.2.4 ComReg’s Position on Matters concerning 076 Numbers

ComReg agrees that the proposed wording amendment to Section A6.3.7 provides more certainty for undertakings interacting with 076 number ranges (and especially mobile undertakings), without altering obligations in any way. Accordingly the suggested text revision will be adopted.

When considering candidates for 076 numbers, it must be remembered that (like all numbers) these are a limited resource and their unrestricted distribution could result in heavy cost for operators and consumers alike. Accordingly, ComReg is obliged to manage the national numbering resource effectively and ensure its efficient use, under the Communications Regulation Act, 2002; measures to ensure this do not contradict GATT and EU rules. Controlling the categories of organisations that receive number blocks for distribution to end-users, as described in Section A6.3.7 is a key mechanism that allows ComReg to carry out this task effectively. ComReg accepts however that altering “undertakings based in Ireland” to “authorised undertakings” is more appropriate while still meeting those management needs.

2.2.5 Use of 190X codes for Sales

One respondent raised an issue in relation to the convention which states that 190X codes are not to be used for sales purposes. This respondent felt that such use should be acceptable and it could be confusing for customers who call the number for sales purposes to be redirected to another number. It was proposed that this matter could be discussed by industry and then the relevant numbering convention (A6.5.1) could be amended according to agreed viewpoints.

2.2.6 ComReg’s Position on use of 190X short codes

ComReg considers that the proposed usage of 190X for sales promotion falls outside the criteria listed in Section 6 of the Conventions for allocation of a short code. Furthermore, ComReg believes there are strong, and legitimate, objections to allowing use for sales purposes of customer support short codes of the type described in convention A.6.5.1 (i.e. 190X, 1471, 10, 114, 196 etc). There are a maximum of just ten 190X codes and if other short codes were made available for similar purposes (even if of more than four digits), this would consume a disproportionate amount of the numbering space. Consequently the customer support codes are restricted to network operators for network-oriented support functions and it could not be acceptable for ComReg to provide a competitive sales advantage to this category compared with other organisations whose sales needs are equally valid. Sales promotion in any case is a function that can be and is adequately served by other existing number types which should not be undermined by designating the use of short codes for the same purpose.

This issue was also raised at a separate industry meeting during the period of this consultation. Further to ComReg's position that 190X codes should not be used for sales, a statement of clarification on that rule was agreed with industry. The text of the convention (A6.5.1) has been amended to reflect that agreement.

2.2.7 Calling Line Identification (CLI)

Two respondents suggested that references to geographic and IP-based numbers in former Conventions 3.2.1-6 (now 3.2.1-5) and 11.1-18 should be extended to cover mobile numbers also.

2.2.8 ComReg's Position on CLI

ComReg agrees that inclusion of suitable references to mobile numbers is desirable and will implement this.

2.2.9 Number Portability (NP)

A respondent requested that new bullets be added to Section 1 (Scope of the Conventions) and Section 3.1 (Responsibilities of ComReg) to the effect that NP procedures should be taken account of in ComReg numbering decisions.

Another respondent considered that the note accompanying Convention 11.7-1 tends to weaken obligations concerning portability, when compared with the original requirements in ComReg 04/103. The respondent argued that failure to meet NP obligations should be redressed through normal industry processes.

A respondent proposed altering the footnote to Convention 11.7-5 to say that nomadic operation of fixed numbers does not invalidate NP.

2.2.10 ComReg's Position on NP

ComReg agrees to strengthen the wording of Sections 1 and 3.1 by referring to agreed NP procedures.

ComReg has reconsidered the wording of the note to Convention 11.7-1 and agrees that deletion of the words "so long as this commitment is respected", as proposed by a respondent, results in a better NP obligation, that is more in line with ComReg 04/103.

ComReg agrees that a statement should be added to the Conventions to the effect that nomadic operation when using fixed numbers is not deemed to be an impediment to NP. However this should be a new convention. The existing footnote to former Convention 11.7-5 (now 11.7-6) – which addresses a different issue (i.e. the status of VoIP as a service offered at a fixed location – and which has regulatory implications) remains valid, although ComReg will make minor wording improvements to it.

2.2.11 Allocation of Numbers to SPs

One respondent requested that ComReg expand Convention 8.1-3 which deals with rights to primary allocation of number blocks, by clarifying the circumstances in which non-network SPs receive such allocations.

This respondent also proposed that section 11.4.9, dealing with GNP and NGNP routing prefixes should also cover MNP.

2.2.12 ComReg's Position on Allocation of Numbers to SPs

ComReg considers that allocation of numbers through network operators and service providers is in principle only an administrative convenience, although in reality this brings certain incidental benefits (real or perceived) to those concerned. ComReg has no plans to change these broad principles though feels it should be free to do so in respect of any number range or circumstance where it is administratively the correct thing to do. Accordingly it would not be appropriate to amend the Conventions by describing circumstances in which it could occur.

For clarification however, ComReg advises that the circumstances in which it currently occurs are:

- Direct allocation of 189X Internet access numbers to SPs (individual numbers);
- Direct allocation of 5XXXX SMS codes to content SPs (individual numbers);
- Direct allocation of 076 number blocks to authorised IP-based SPs;
- Direct allocation of 118XX numbers to DQ SPs (individual numbers).

ComReg agrees that a new Convention should be added to Section 11.4.9 to cover mobile routing prefixes.

2.2.13 Premium Services (PRS and Premium SMS)

A respondent noted that Convention 11.2.8-5 which adds a prohibition on facilitating access to Irish Premium Rate Services from abroad (e.g. through VoIP), unless the SP is prepared to accept responsibility for bad debt would be difficult for SPs in the case of nomadic Irish users.

Another respondent objected to the addition of a note to Section A6.3.3 referring to trials.

A third proposed that in Convention 11.4.3-8 and Section A6.3.3 the designations "General age-restricted services" and "Age-restricted services of a sexual nature" should be used for 58XXX / 59XXX and 1598/1599 PRS, in lieu of the current term "Adult services"

2.2.14 ComReg's Position on PRS and Premium SMS

ComReg agrees with the observation about access to PRS by nomadic users and will add a note to Convention 11.2.8-5 to exclude this category from the scope of the Convention; users with an Irish contact address are not expected to become a problem simply because of nomadic operation.

ComReg agrees that the note in Section A6.3.3 advising of trials on 1598 and 1599 Premium Rate Numbers is unnecessary and will delete it.

ComReg accepts that it is advisable to distinguish between the two categories of adult SMS and PRS services, 58XXX/1598 and 59XXX/1599. However, ComReg is loath to depart from the term "adult" in favour of "age restricted", as the former term is well recognised and of long standing and the latter might imply additional restrictions by ComReg in an area (i.e. content) which ComReg does not generally regulate. The term "Adult services of a sexual nature" is as used in RegTel's code of practice for the cases where PIN protection is used and/or proposed. Therefore

ComReg will add the terms “General adult services” and “Adult services of a sexual nature” to Convention 11.4.3-8 and “Adult (General)” and “Adult (sexual nature)” to the table of Section A6.5.3. If necessary and if there is combined agreement with industry and RegTel, then at a later stage the Conventions may be further amended to introduce the term “age-restricted”. ComReg also notes that the figure of 25 codes in Section A6.5.3 should read 30 and has corrected this mistake.

2.2.15 General Conditions of Use for Numbers (Section 11.1)

A respondent noted that the cross-reference in Convention 3.2.1-3 for non-PATS ECS to Convention 11.1-18 is superfluous as Convention 11.1-18 is already applicable to non-PATS ECS. Furthermore, this respondent proposed that the introduction to Section 11.1 should be reworded to more explicitly state that the whole section applies, as appropriate, to both PATS and non-PATS ECS.

The respondent proposed that Convention 11.1-19 should be amended to say that services receiving numbers are given them for the purpose of originating calls and also proposed that the text “located at those numbers” should be reworded.

The respondent felt there were difficulties with the proposed amended words of Convention 11.2.1-6 regarding allocation of geographic numbers and offered revised wording as a replacement, including a minor extension to the associated note.

The respondent proposed a new convention 11.2.1-7 requiring that where a call is made from a geographic number then the CLI presented must relate to the MNA from which the call originates.

2.2.16 ComReg’s Position on General Conditions

ComReg agrees that draft new Convention 3.2.1-3 can be deleted as the scope of Convention 11.1-18 already adequately covers non-PATS ECS. ComReg also agrees that the introductory text to Section 11.1 can be simplified and made more explicit, following the decision in 2.1.7 above to directly include requirements from ComReg 04/103 rather than make external references.

ComReg considers that the IP-based services receiving 076 numbers primarily obtain them in order to receive calls and therefore the words of Convention 11.1-19 will not be changed in that respect. However, ComReg agrees that the term “sub-allocated” should replace “located at” in Convention 11.1-19.

ComReg has examined the arguments in favour of amending Convention 11.2.1-6, as well as the suggested replacement words and concluded that the main changes proposed to it would weaken the convention unduly, whereas the addition of the words “for example” to the associated note is worthwhile. Numbering in relation to IP-based services is still in its infancy and it would be difficult to undo allocation mistakes once they are made whereas exceptions may always be addressed quickly if more liberal approaches are justified. ComReg will therefore only amend the note.

ComReg agrees in principle with the observation that the CLI presented for a call from a geographic number should normally be from the MNA concerned, although this is not a straightforward matter where nomadic operation or gateways are involved. In any case, ComReg considers there is not a need for the proposed new Convention 11.2.1-7 as the combination of existing conventions 11.2.1-6 and 3.2.1-6 (now to become 3.2.1-5) achieves a slightly more targeted result.

3 Next Steps

The following steps should now take place:

- Publication of the updated National Numbering Conventions, with changes as described herein. The conventions take immediate effect;
- Reference to NAP by ComReg of issues referred to it within this document;
- Consideration by NAP, within its own timescales, of issues referred to it within this document.