

**Speech by Etain Doyle, Director of Telecommunications Regulation,**

**Wynn's Hotel, Thursday September 3 1998**

I am very pleased to see you here today and to have the opportunity to present to you a brief review of our activities in our first year which we will be placing on the website tomorrow.

It was a very busy and exciting year as we started the ODTR and began to dismantle the barriers to the development of competition, initially in the context of the derogation on voice telephony. Since May, we have been looking forward to full liberalisation in December next. We concentrated on prices charged by Telecom Eireann to service providers, which came down by 50% in our first year, and on laying the foundations for a leading edge regulatory framework for telecommunications into the next millennium. With converging technologies, this framework includes broadcasting transmission and radio as well as telephony.

The telecommunications sector is essential to the development of the Irish economy, and a critical support of the high tech services sector which contributes so much to our prosperity and high quality employment. In the year under review, Ireland moved very rapidly from a strategy of seeking to protect the status quo for as long as possible, to one of openly relishing the challenge of competition. We have moved to a clear focus on consumers, both business and residential, now and into the next decade. I am very pleased that the ODTR has played a part in this essential shift in focus.

Dealing with the current year, the regulatory framework for telecommunications liberalisation is the major task for the period to 1 December, and I am glad to say that we are on target for this. Our objective is to promote competition in the sector, developing licences which reflect consumer needs and market realities and, consistent with that, giving market players every freedom to develop their businesses and provide new and innovative services.

We will be developing our information service which I believe is very important given the complex yet far-reaching nature of the work we are engaged in. I am pleased to note the extensive coverage given in the media to this vital sector. As you are aware, we have produced 50 papers to date on all aspects of our activities. We will be issuing 3 more in coming days, one on Significant Market Power, following up on the consultation held over the summer, and a consultation paper on draft application procedures for telecoms licensing.

We will also issue draft licences for cable and MMDS for consultation. These are part of our overall strategy for TV transmission which was detailed in our July paper on the future of TV transmission in Ireland – the way forward. The need is simply stated – Irish consumers should have choice and access to leading edge technology which will provide a far greater range of services. However, the issues are complex. Having had a major study carried out, and the opportunity to review a very significant response to our consultation last May/June; we are on the right track. We are working as fast as we can to cover all the issues, including the question of deflectors. Perhaps

I should note in particular as the matter has been raised, that issues which fall to the ODTR in respect of the Cablelink licence, are being dealt with in good time to facilitate the Cablelink sale late this year.

We have also a substantial workload in respect of digital planning and preparing the licensing arrangements for DTT transmission. These will be on the same lines as licensing for cable and MMDS, so that all the services can operate on a level playing field, giving consumers effective choice. We are also monitoring pirate radio stations with a view to appropriate action. We regularly follow up on illegal advertising on these media.

Last week we issued a consultation paper on a very important new service – radio based telephony. Everyone in Ireland is now familiar with mobile phones and the service they can provide even in isolated areas. We are now asking for views on the issue of new licences for fixed radio telephony – telephony which is delivered over radio waves and then into office or home phones in the same way as calls carried on conventional cable or twisted pair.

This technology is cheaper and quicker to install than conventional means. It does not require the digging up of roads as it is carried on masts. I am very aware of the difficulties, but this technology is essential if we are to avoid a new and potentially very damaging split between urban and rural areas, between urban ‘Information Society haves’ and rural ‘Information Society have nots’. Companies need to be considerate of local communities, but communities need to be aware of the implications of choices to hold up the deployment of radio based technology. The availability of ever increasing telecommunications capacity is a vital element in attracting and retaining businesses which are significant users of telecommunications services. We could rapidly reach a stage where urban children all have the Internet at home, but very many of their rural counterparts will miss out.

As you are aware, we are engaged in a major review of the numbering plan to update it and ensure that there are sufficient numbers to meet demand going forward in the liberalised market. We have issued initial codes for service providers and expect to issue geographic numbers in the next month or so. These changes are made because they are essential to meet consumer needs and provide consumer choice. We are doing our best to ensure that they cause as little disruption to consumers as possible. As I indicated in June, we are setting up an ad hoc working group on numbering for liberalisation, including members representing consumer interests as well as the telecommunications industry, with whom we will discuss the future arrangements.

In my first public address last October, I said that I was looking forward to this challenging and exciting job. I am very pleased that the challenge and excitement have even exceeded my expectations. I am pleased to say that the ODTR has risen to the challenge and wish to conclude by expressing my thanks to all who have worked for it over the last demanding year.

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