

Dear Ofcom,

I would like to respond to this consultation by commenting on what I consider to be Ofcom's utter and complete failure in protecting the consumers' interests. This is not highlighted any better than by Ofcom's announcement on 19 April 2006 to further delay for almost another two years its proposal to cut the cost of 0870 calls.

In my opinion the whole 0845/0844/0870/0871 situation is a mess which Ofcom has allowed to happen. In the overwhelming majority of cases there is no justification for these overpriced and misleading numbers to be charged at a higher rate than a geographic number. Ofcom could not have received a clearer public response against 0870s etc following its consultation, "NTS - The Way Forward", and yet Ofcom decides to do too little, too slowly and ultimately too late. Ofcom have missed a huge opportunity to show its credentials in protecting the interests of the consumer. It is incredibly difficult NOT to conclude that Ofcom sides very heavily with the interests of business rather than the consumer, and I believe this perception is widespread. It seems Ofcom have presided over an excessively complicated telephone numbering system which simultaneously confuses the public on the one hand but on the other provides numerous opportunities for telecom companies to profit from this very confusion. How this arrangement can "further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters or further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition" is beyond me.

Even worse still, Ofcom is now developing an image of incompetence. It seemingly spurts out consultations with little or no regards for their sequence or co-ordination. The sequencing of two recent consultations ("NTS - The Way Forward" and the "Review of the UK Telephone Numbering") always seemed ridiculous, and consequently the proposals of the former have had to be shelved due to the inconsistency with those of the later 's. At least Ofcom admitted this in the latter's consultation document: "Ofcom recognises that there is an apparent inconsistency between this proposition, which establishes the new '03' range as the natural home for those services which do not require revenue sharing, and the proposals set out in the NTS consultation, which may lead to the end of revenue sharing on the 0870 range, and possibly also on 0845." Surely there ought to be much greater evidence of co-ordination and forward thinking between the excessive numbers of consultations.

I find it particularly ironic that given Ofcom is the Office of Communications it should be so poor at communicating itself. The consultation documents themselves seem unnecessarily long and complicated as are the response documents. The "Review of the UK Telephone Numbering" response document contains no fewer than 61 questions! Cynics might say that this only serves to deter a response and judging from the Ofcom's response web page, there's evidence to support this! I know Ofcom provides summary documents but I do not feel that this provides anything like an adequate solution.

Sadly I am not at all optimistic about Ofcom's future plans in protecting consumer interests and regrettably I fear that this response has already been ignored.

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