



Telephone Numbering: Safeguarding the future of numbers

Initial INWG response to Ofcom Consultation

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INWG is the Intelligent Number Working Group representing citizens, consumers, users and providers of Intelligent Numbering services focused on promoting the environment for making ever better service and information delivery available to all.

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Executive Summary

25 May 2006

INWG is pleased to continue its interaction with Ofcom and welcomes the opportunity to continue its work in this important field by its involvement with this critical Strategic Consultation.

INWG, representing as it does citizens, consumers, users and providers of electronic communications networks and services, sees this Consultation as probably the most important of the five irrevocably interlinked Consultations recently undertaken by Ofcom.

The reason we say so, is that this consultation sets out that the strategic principles that will guide Ofcom in its ongoing regulation of numbers and will do so for the “foreseeable”¹ future. In its response to NTS: A way forward, INWG addressed the clear fact that the upcoming Telephone Numbering Review would in all likelihood change the landscape in which NTS: A way forward was conducted, and that the best approach then was to underscore protection measures for the citizen-consumer, whilst at the same time avoiding any cul-de-sacs that might be impacted by the Numbering Review.

INWG is pleased that most of its arguments found favour with Ofcom, and believes that Ofcom has indeed provided citizen-consumer protection provisions in NTS: A way forward, whilst avoiding NTS cul-de-sacs specifically by extending the current 0870 and 0871 frameworks to a time where the new 03 number range would be available to assist restructuring.

Given this significant opportunity, INWG believes that Ofcom can now truly undertake a Strategic review, unhampered by tactical decisions that could restrict the outcome of such a valuable process.

INWG is motivated by wider as well as narrower concerns and fully supports Ofcom in its Principal Duty². INWG believes that it is in the vested interest of all sectors of UK and wider society that the greatest mass of users of communications services – the citizen-consumer - should be enabled to clearly, easily and trustworthily understand the methods by which they electronically interact with individuals or organizations, and the costs to them of such interactions.

From a Strategic point of view regarding numbering, INWG feels that this clarity and reliability can only come from consistency of approach, which in turn depends on consistency of Strategic and Tactical Guiding Principles.

¹ Telephone Numbering – Safeguarding the future of numbers 1.31, 5.48 et al

² Communications Act 2003, 3.1 a) and b)

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From its reading of Telephone Numbering, INWG believes that significant and further, detailed work is required in this area. Whilst excellent new proposals are put forward, there are inherent contradictions therein contained, mainly based on the constraints of legacy technology, legacy facts on the ground and legacy thinking, that constrict forward thinking and planning.

An example of this retrospective constriction is the use of the words “telephone numbers” which appear 82 times in the consultation document, while at the same time referring to VoIP 34 times, a transport method, and regarding which, Ofcom very early in the review states that “fundamentally³” changes the landscape, and sweeps away society’s understanding of communications numbering in its widest extent.

The start point, therefore, in any Strategic Numbering review surely must be an understanding of what the foreseeable future brings, and the first step should be an updated understanding of what “numbers” are in this new and changing age. Once clarified, that leads to how numbering issues should be addressed – and not, we suggest, in the “language of obsolescent terms, technology and ideas”.

INWG feels that this challenge is significant in and of itself, and a rush towards a premature set of understandings or Guiding Principles, required for the solution of short-term tactical issues, is likely to prove counter-productive at a strategic level.

INWG is delighted to see that the import of this view is partially adopted by Ofcom throughout this Consultation paper, regarding current concerns and their resolution in relationship to a strategic framework that anticipates evolving technology and consumer trends. However, INWG feels from the paper produced that little or no work may have been undertaken with a view to clarifying the meaning and essence of numbers in communications terms. This concern is highlighted by the name of this Consultation – Telephone Numbering.

History informs us that communication is only possible when one person is able to connect to another. The only reason for telephone numbering as we know it was developed, was to assist in making that connection. By definition any contact enabler, be it a telephone number, IP address or any other method yet to be invented, has the same intrinsic value of purpose. It is important that society understands this, for without this understanding, the new communication world will remain opaque. The advent of the new technologies, VoIP, New Generation Networks (NGN’s) to name but a few, has challenged our traditional understanding of purpose of digital numbers in communications.

INWG believes that though E.1634 numbers continue, New Voice Services (which are wider than just VoIP), Enum and DNS resolution now force us to recognise that Ofcom

³ Telephone Numbering – Safeguarding the future of numbers 1.11
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should lead the way and fully adopt a renaming of this Consultation, Communications Numbering, as this is the correct basis on which to build this Strategic Review.

Indeed, without this foundation step, it is difficult to understand how a set of Guiding Principles and Strategic Policies can be constructed.

Caller Location Identification

One of the most critical issues facing society, through the advent of new technologies, is the loss of one of the most embedded securities that it relies on, currently provided through geographic caller line identity – knowing whom they have been called by and from where they have been called.

Although INWG recognises that the landscape has already begun to change, the fears already expressed to it across many sectors are related to this loss. Examples include the loss of the Telephone Preference Service which many consumers use to avoid unwanted calls; the loss of protection against malicious, abusive or dangerous calls, maybe even of a criminal intent; the ability for Emergency Services to respond – all of which will be caused by the loss of Caller Location Identification. This could be a charter for untraceable hoax and malicious callers across all sectors of society, especially for those not even based within the UK.

INWG recognises the difficulty of achieving Location Identification by the new understanding of communication numbering and, therefore, proposes a technological solution based on GPS identification devices. These would have the multiple benefits of not relying on the individual caller registering his location before he makes each call as well as removing this requirement from an individual in case of need when he may be incapable of so doing.

Number Charging Schemes

INWG is alarmed by the suggestions contained in Telephone Numbering that Ofcom could appear to be setting itself up as a financial market maker, potentially looking to make a return far in excess of the administrative costs that it bears in relation to its regulatory duties. INWG can see no justification for such an approach, far less a consumer benefit. Indeed INWG, from its initial analysis of some of these proposals, sees that the inevitable consequence of some of these proposals is consumer detriment, an outcome specifically anti-vires of Ofcom.

A potential detriment that INWG has identified is associated particularly with “value charging” for number ranges, especially when Ofcom states in 5.119 that it may consider putting a value onto the allocation of numbers based on their rarity, attractiveness e.g. golden number content, or other factors that would allow it to ascribe financial values.

The impact of this, in the first instance, is to create restriction in the choice of number ranges available for those operators wishing to deliver services, and, undeniably in the second instance, to the consumer who in wishing to adopt one of these numbers will ultimately have to pay not only the premium associated with that individual number but also its share of the costs associated with unused numbers in ranges already allocated.

This is an untenable position.

Questions 24-61

The great majority of questions 24-61 are either technical or addressable only by INWG's ECP community and, as such, INWG finds it improper to address these issues as it fears this may be taken as an endorsement of the total INWG community. Interested parties from within INWG have responded elsewhere. As we have said earlier, INWG intends to engage with Ofcom on the wider societal impacts of these questions directly with Ofcom.

In Conclusion

INWG welcomes the significant body of work undertaken by Ofcom in preparing this Consultation and looks forward to working closely with Ofcom in achieving its objectives.

Question 1: What are your views on the strategic principles that Ofcom proposes to apply to its numbering policy decisions?

INWG supports the four strategic principles laid out in 3.15, as far as they go, but for reasons elaborated on above, feel that there is a missing fifth strategic principle that needs to be adopted.

The missing principle is that which states that the basis of use of voice communication or telephony calling must be an enforceably included location identifier of the calling party. Further, that Originating Communication Providers, be they legacy, VoIP, New Generation, or as yet unthought of, must not supply voice services to their customers without ensuring that a reliable location identifier is provided to the call receiver in every case.

INWG has received concerns from across societal sectors that the impact of non-traceability of calls will compromise the ability of Public and Emergency Services to respond to incidents, or to identify hoaxes; will increase individuals' fear of being targeted by malicious calls; will increase individuals' heightened fear of scams, and will increase the likelihood of predatory behaviour which may in essence be of a criminal nature.

Commercial concerns fear impact on their ability to understand their customer base, and so reduce their ability to provide products and services to citizen-consumers in an effective manner. This alone may result in the loss of services available to citizen-consumers altogether, to their potential considerable detriment, and that of the organisations, both Public Service and commercial, servicing those citizen-consumers.

Ofcom may take the view that the major concern above is covered in the four principles stated in 3.15, but INWG reads in the rest of the paper that no measures are conceived of to address this issue, and so feels that a fifth principle needs to be adopted.

INWG recognises the difficulty of trying to achieve the objective of location identification by numbering, in the new and upcoming services, and therefore proposes a different technical solution in its answer to Question 7.

As may be clear, INWG, in line with Ofcom, is committed to trying to ensure that citizens and consumers are not unnecessarily or unwittingly, subject to abuse.

Question 2: What do you think are consumers' key current views on numbering, how do you think those views will change, and how should Ofcom's current decisions take those changes into account?

INWG has found similar concerns to those reported in 3.16 to 3.24. INWG believes that Ofcom has the strategic opportunity to create a clear and unambiguous price point paradigm that can be applicable to any Service Category outside 01 and 02 in which there are variable price points.

It is clear that consumers only understand to a certain extent, geographic numbers and the costs associated with dialing them – albeit this understanding is not so deep, witness Ofcom's continual efforts to improve this understanding, both through price comparators and recent amendments to GC14.

Deeper confusion reigns, Ofcom informs us, regarding the other number ranges. INWG's view is that this confusion will continue unless Ofcom were to adopt a clear set of price point indicators, such as those already proposed by it for the 08 range.

INWG supports this approach, and further proposes that the price point indication proposed at 3-digit level (Service Class) within that range be widened to all numbering ranges, where practicable.

At the 2-digit (Service Category) level, this could be expressed as a maximum charge within that category, and in the 08 range, each 3-digit Service Class, as it were, could represent 1p increments, whereas in other ranges, say the proposed 06 range, the incremental level could be 5p, or 25p or whatever level is appropriate to that service category.

In this way, simple information can be presented to the citizen consumer regarding the maximum price range of each Service Category, and its associated Service Classes.

However, the opportunity to clear citizen-consumer confusion, and bring the understanding which Ofcom itself promotes as the greatest aid to citizen-consumer self-aid against scams and abuse, is compromised, maybe fatally, by Ofcom's lack of desire or ability to protect citizen-consumers from the charges levied by Mobile Network Operators who now generate more than 50% by value of all calls originated in the UK.

It must be stressed that if this mainly MNO-created uncertainty pertains to calling geographic numbers, how much more complex is it for Ofcom to achieve citizen-consumer clarity in all the other ranges?

Thus, with the addition of the often impenetrable, multiple and changing tariffs of the mobile operators, especially in the Pay As You Go (PAYG) environment, it is likely that this lack of clarity will continue, and there is a danger that Ofcom may not be able to fulfill its Principal Duty to the desired extent.

As already indicated to Ofcom in the NTS: A way forward consultation, there is citizen-consumer anger directed at Ofcom and the MNOs, expressed as:

“4.2 Regarding the citizen-consumer, what was most surprising, and unexpected, was the vehemence and anger expressed against the Mobile Operators for “ripping off” its users. **More crucially**, in certain cases was the incandescent anger **directed at Ofcom** for refusing to protect users and “conniving with the Mobile companies to rip us off”.⁴”

It is interesting to note that these concerns have not been identified in the Ofcom research, as it is important for Ofcom to understand how certain citizen-consumers who have not been spoken to directly by Ofcom, feel about this subject.

Question 3: What do you think are the main ways in which technological developments will change the focus of numbering policy decisions, and how should Ofcom’s current decisions take these developments into account?

As discussed in our introduction, INWG believes that the present and ever rapidly appearing technological developments challenge not only current and legacy numbering decisions, they also create a new, almost philosophical, environment in which strategic policies must be framed, and more importantly, the way in which associated regulatory duties must be carried out.

INWG is of the opinion that it is not possible now to understand all the implications of what these changes will bring, and commends to Ofcom an approach that will be more concerned with avoiding technological and regulatory cul-de-sacs, rather than attempting to be either prescriptive or proscriptive – unless so demanded by concerns for inviolable citizen and consumer interest.

Our response to Question 1 includes just such an issue, and is linked to elements of 3.25.

It is clear that new technologies may bring important benefits, not least in reducing pressures on number inventory, enabling the easier entry to the market of innovative service providers, and providing additional products and services to consumers is to be welcomed.

⁴ INWG Pre-Determination Response to NTS: A Way Forward
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However, uncritical regulatory adoption and acceptance of such technologies, many, as Ofcom states, without the benefit of the checks and balances of the current system, and many indeed potentially outwith the regulatory reach of Ofcom is sited offshore, is a likely recipe for significant abuse and detriment, even where unintentional.

INWG makes further comment under Question 7.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's assessment of the current challenges to the Numbering Plan, in terms of a) number availability, b) transparency, or c) consumer abuses?

INWG recognizes the research undertaken in the production of this section, and in general agrees with the assessment of the number inventory, with the identification of the positive benefit of conservation measures, that in turn will be overtaken, it is believed, by the deployment of NGNs and other technological developments.

Promoted or forced increased utilisation of a fixed resource will bring true benefits, but may be dependent on the availability of decoding blocks in legacy systems, should the timescales not prove as projected. The aim of smaller number block allocation must be striven for.

Transparency issues predominate, and INWG totally disagrees with Ofcom's statement of the issue. Ofcom informs that transparency, by its own definition meaning "the key appropriate information.....that consumers need to make informed choices", transparency is limited to, in the main, regarding the cost of calls to 08 and 09 numbers.

Whilst INWG understands that this, in essence, is the Ofcom view, it is clear that in the way that Ofcom seeks to address this matter, neither transparency or its benefits can result.

INWG refers to its answer to Question 2, but continues that where Ofcom is unable or unwilling to regulate the total market to protect citizen and consumer interest, or indeed intends to restrict regulation to a sector less than 50% by value of the market, the use of the Numbering Plan as Information and Pricing descriptor, as promoted through this Telephone Number review, and with its many undoubted excellent proposals, is doomed to failure.

There is no doubt of the good intentions Ofcom espouses in the area of transparency - which must be widened to include all numbering ranges and not restricted to 08 or 09 as we state in Q2 above - but transparency must be total, and not be partial.

INWG comments further under Q7 to Q11 inclusive.

Regarding “consumer abuse” it is fascinating to see that Ofcom yet again seems to feel that this mainly remains in the province of 07, 08, 09.

It appears that all these views regarding abuse are centered on outbound calling, whereas voice communications is a two-way interaction, and the abuses perpetrated on a called party are often more significant, than those suffered by calling parties.

Ofcom in this consultation appear entirely silent on this matter, and INWG members’ concerns are heightened by this silence extending to making no proposals regarding Calling Party identity in this review. Currently, number migration and portability increase this challenge.

INWG refers again to its comments under Q1.

Question 5: Do you agree that the extension of conservation measures is the best approach to take before the impact of NGNs eases the pressure on geographic number demand?

INWG agrees that in the current technical environment, “conservation measures” allied to the well thought out application of some of the further proposals, including some of those regarding “market tools” should achieve the objective – and may be required to promote innovation.

Question 6: Do you agree that the use of overlay codes is the best backstop approach in the event that extended conservation measures are not sufficient to meet demand for geographic numbers?

INWG appreciates that a backstop position is required, and that this option is better than a number famine. Citizen-consumer confusion is the likeliest outcome, however, unless such overlay codes are deployed countrywide – consistency of approach brings easier comprehension.

INWG, therefore, trusts that these measures will never be adopted lightly.

Question 7: Do you agree that Ofcom should continue to respect the geographic identity of numbers until consumer understanding of the impact of technology change evolves further, and what do you consider is the best way to develop that consumer understanding?

INWG believes that for the foreseeable future geographic identity of called party numbers should be preserved, but for reasons outlined in Q1 et al above, the geographic identity of the Calling Party is indispensable, now and in the future.

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The risks of abuse and danger from unidentifiable and untraceable callers are ever more likely in an environment without such identification, a matter of National as well as private interest.

In a sense, the geographic location of the called party is less important in a physical sense, but has implications for call charge transparency, which INWG promotes. With the current and future technological advances and convergences – VoIP, fixed–mobile, etc – a “called” number has importance rather as a personal identifier that can be used to initiate contact.

Citizen-consumer response within INWG has been that there is more importance associated to the personal identification associated with a number “but this has been my number for 40 years and that’s how everyone gets in touch with me”, rather than its physical location. INWG feels that the move to a more useful Personal Numbering environment, even for those not adopting VoIP as a front line strategy, may provide benefits over time.

INWG, recognising the difficulty of identifying location through numbering in the new and emerging communication services, strongly proposes that the development of location identification technologies be examined. In particular, INWG proposes the use of “GPS chips” that are becoming small enough to be embedded in every voice originating device. The benefit of this approach is that it does not rely on the individual to take any active measure to identify his location yet, at the same time, it enables the called party to have the confidence that they know where the person is calling from, and further that in the case of emergency, the relevant authorities will be able to trace the location.

After discussion, certain members also wish to ensure that such location information will not be used to consumer detriment by unregulated use for location based advertising and SPIT, a position INWG fully supports.

INWG is particularly keen to take these matters forward with Ofcom in due course.

Question 8: Do you agree with Ofcom’s proposal to open a new ‘03’ number range for non-geographic, non-revenue sharing services?
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INWG fully supports this.

Indeed, INWG and many of its respondents provides Ofcom with a not to be missed opportunity to promote coherence and transparency in the Numbering Plan.

INWG comments here will refer also to Q9 and Q10.

NTS: A Way Forward consultation was published September 2005, five months before this present consultation was published. Proposals and solutions put forward could not take into account existence of a countrywide, non-geographic and non revenue sharing range.

As a result, solutions were put forward that could only address the historical landscape and as a direct consequence, the proposals preferred and, included in the statement of 19 April 2006, necessarily were contrary to the espoused aim of citizen-consumer clarity.

There is an unmissable opportunity for Ofcom to serve the interests of citizen consumers and all sectors of society by removing an Ofcom identified inconsistency, and preserving the coherence and clarity of a strategic set of numbering principles. This objective can be achieved by exclusively promoting the 03 range as the sole non-geographic, non-revenue sharing range, thereby promoting clarity within that range and at the same time enabling total consistency and integrity of principle and clarity by allowing a fundamental restructuring of the 08 number range.

The 03 range is unusual in that it is about to be adopted for the first time and is therefore untrammelled by historical baggage. Consideration of the philosophy behind its introduction is worth of review.

It is clear from Ofcom's related consultations, as well as the statements contained herein, that Ofcom is of the view that there is confusion regarding the 07, 08 and 09 number ranges and that as those ranges are the extant non-geographic number ranges, Service Providers were restricted to utilising ranges that inherently in the citizen consumer mind were associated with revenue sharing. Public services in the health, security and local and national government areas have been therefore forced to utilise these number ranges as access points to their resilient and multi sited response mechanisms. These parties have therefore been concerned by the negative impact they appear to have suffered from through either real or perceived consumer views and have therefore been restricted in the services that they can easily offer to their users.

The introduction of the 03 range at a stroke removes this detriment from organisations wishing to provide better and more resilient network routed services to their users and as all efforts will be made by Ofcom, Network Operators and Service Providers to establish the geographic-linked pricing and the absence of any revenue share of the range, the public citizen-consumer will be able ex ante to trust this number range – a key pillar of Ofcom's strategy.

At the same time, this allows a fundamental restructuring of the 08 range which will be addressed further under Q10.

Question 9: How should the ‘03’ range be structured, in terms of tariffs and services?

As Ofcom has defined the 03 range as a “countrywide” number range, it would seem counterproductive to pollute this otherwise pristine range by applying historical policies rather than those which we trust Ofcom are looking to adopt for the future.

Ofcom states that 080 numbers are trusted by consumers as being free to the caller (though this is a contention that members of the public do not share, particularly where calls are originated from mobiles). There seems therefore little logic in denoting 030 for calls to essential public services where these are currently provided on 0800 numbers. However, the definition of such a range for non essential public services has a validity. What is less clear however is a differentiation in price points within this range. The majority of OCPs have dropped the charging distinction between local and national rates to geographic numbers and the heralded arrival of New Generation Services will reinforce this.

INWG therefore feels that there may be an argument to say, after further discussion and deliberation, that Service Classes (3-digit) may be appropriate here to aid service transparency, but finds that there is no argument for any price point differentiation.

Question 10: How should the ‘08’ range be structured, in terms of tariffs and services?

Following on from the arguments deployed in Questions 8 and 9 above, INWG promotes a root and branch restructuring of the 08 number range to embed citizen-consumer clarity, confidence and trust in this very important Service Category.

The statement on NTS: A Way Forward of 19 April 2006 requires changes to be made to the current NTS regulatory framework that would require, in any event, changes to the numbers that Service Providers utilise and the commercial environment in which they so do. This fact renders any argument against the following points redundant.

INWG, promoting citizen-consumers, public policy, commerce and network operator interests, is inextricably bound to the concepts of fairness, clarity and the removal of confusion. Ofcom is similarly moved. As INWG has stated above, the easiest message to disseminate within the public mind is one that is clear, simple and consistent. INWG therefore proposes that the 08 Service Category be subdivided into Service Classes, each of which would have its own, clearly labeled, maximum price points. Thus:

Service Class	Maximum Charge to Caller	Service Class	Maximum Charge to Caller
080	Free	085	5p per minute
081	1p per minute	086	6p per minute
082	2p per minute	087	7p per minute
083	3p per minute	088	8p per minute
084	4p per minute	089	9p per minute

As the PRS number range regulated by ICSTIS, has a starting point of 10 pence, adoption of the INWG proposal not only brings clarity to the 08 range but creates a natural separate between “chargeable services” and 09 premium rate services. Allied to the concerns already expressed by INWG and adopted by Ofcom in the statement of 19 April 2006 regarding the conflation of 08 numbers within a PRS environment, this will reinforce Ofcom’s desire to see seperacy between these Service Categories.

INWG recognizes that in the interests of citizen-consumer protection the maximum charges for all calls to the 08 Service Category must be consistent across all OCPs.

INWG understands that there will be certain changes imposed on the operators, and service and content providers associated with these changes, but feel that the introductory timescales will be such that these changes will be fair less damaging and confusing to both service providers and their users.

The main numbers that will be out of synch in this environment are 0844 and 0845. Currently the maximum charge for an 0844 number is 5p per minute but price points exist at 1, 2, 3 and 4 pence. 0845 is typically charged at around 4p per minute but as Ofcom has already identified, use of this range is mainly for dial up internet access which it expects to finish almost in the next two years (witness the statement that 0845 regulatory framework will be reconsidered in 2 years’ time) and that the expectation that most public service and other service providers who wish to operate in a non revenue share environment will migrate to 03, then the impact of this will be, as Ofcom states, “less significant over time”⁵.

Additionally the 0871 Service Class will be impacted in that the current pricing environment allows for a range of maximum charges. These are 6,7,8,9 and 10 pence. In INWG’s proposal, 0871 would become part of the 087 price point and so there would be initial readjustment for users still wishing to maximize revenue share.

⁵ Telephone Numbering – Safeguarding the Future of Numbers, 5.44
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The overwhelmingly important benefit that this approach will deliver is that the exhaustion of numbers within this range will be completely removed as each Service Class will then have 1 billion numbers at each price point, a total of 10 billion numbers for the 08 “chargeable services” range.

The very strategic nature of this consultation inevitably leads to divergence of opinion in such a broad constituency as that of INWG. This is even true within the four major sectors. Within the ECP or Operator Group, there is a strong feeling by certain members that traditional telephone numbering is losing its meaning and therefore attempting to control pricing through a Numbering Policy may be obsolescent in the face of marching technological change. Further, they wish to rely on other methodologies such as price labelling to aid pricing transparency.

INWG’s view is that pricing transparency is essential for consumer confidence, a view promoted to Ofcom on numerous occasions including NTS: a way forward.

Should price labelling be Ofcom’s preferred approach, INWG believes that for this to work pricing pre-announcement needs to be made for every call, as prices within this sector can vary from day to day.

INWG eagerly awaits its ongoing discussions with Ofcom on this point.

Question 11: Which broad approach should Ofcom take to structuring the ‘09’ range, and if a re-structured ‘09’ range is preferred how would you arrange the different types of ‘09’ services (e.g., according to price per minute, price per call, inclusion of adult content)?

INWG refers to its comments above regarding consistency and clarity.

INWG has had significant consumer feedback on this issue. It is clear that consumers are confused by the current pricing regime and would welcome an easily understood and consistent pricing regime. This has led to the development of the suggested tables below, that should in no way be read as actual pricing proposals. They are for illustration purposes only.

INWG recognises that decisions not made in a strategic context have led Ofcom to allocate number ranges in an apparently unstructured way that have made the connection between a number range and a price point almost impossible. Ofcom however had to respond to Service Provider requests for numbers that proliferated over a very short period of time.

Resolution of this lack of clarity is no less important to ongoing Ofcom strategy than resolution of all the other number ranges. It appears a characteristic of the vast majority of PRS numbers that they are not associated with long term service provision. It

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therefore appears to INWG that a similar exercise applied to the 09 range would have less short term impact than might be initially feared and that a structured maximum price point environment, as described in Question 10 and others above, would bring long term and continuing benefit to both service providers and users of their services.

In the special case of 09 numbers, there is the additional consideration of calls charged either per minute or by just making the call itself. This situation does not lend itself to the simplicity of the rest of the ranges but could be handled in the following manner. The first five Service Classes of the Service Category would be reserved for charges per call, the second five for charges per minute. The 4-digit separators within each Service Class will allow for 99 million numbers at each price point within a Service Class, thereby delivering 1 billion numbers per Service Class. The future structure would look as follows:

Example charged by call (prices for illustration purposes only)

Service Class	Maximum Charge Band to Caller
090	50p per call
091	100p per call
092	150p per call
093	200p per call
094	250p per call

Example 3-digit pricing (prices for illustration purposes only)

3-digit pricing	Maximum Charge Band to Caller	3-digit pricing	Maximum Charge Band Caller
0900	5p per call	0905	30p per call
0901	10p per call	0906	35p per call
0902	15p per call	0907	40p per call
0903	20p per call	0908	45p per call
0904	25p per call	0909	50p per call

Example charged per minute (prices for illustration purposes only)

Service Class	Maximum Charge to Caller
095	50p per minute
096	100p per minute
097	150p per minute
098	200p per minute
099	250p per minute

Example 3-digit pricing (prices for illustration purposes only)

3-digit pricing	Maximum Charge Band to Caller	3-digit pricing	Maximum Charge Band Caller
0950	50p per minute	0955	75p per minute
0951	55p per minute	0956	80p per minute
0952	60p per minute	0957	85p per minute
0953	65p per minute	0958	90p per minute
0954	70p per minute	0959	95p per minute

INWG is less clear that service descriptors, such as adult services, are useful here as prediction of future content and services is unclear. Price transparency for consumer protection however is sine qua non. Currently call barring is operated in the main at Service Category level. INWG looks forward to further discussion with Ofcom on the capabilities of NGNs to provide a more specific approach to call barring that may further the debate on this strategic matter.

Question 12: Should any specific PRS service categories be identified or segregated in order that parents can block access by their children (e.g. sexually explicit content, gambling)? Is there merit in having a general ‘adults only’ classification, including a range of services to which access might be restricted on the grounds of content, or might consumers wish to apply different rules for different types of content?

INWG refers to its answer at Q11 above.

Question 13: Are there any practical means by which the Numbering Plan could provide improved mobile tariff transparency?

In line with its comments regarding a cohesive and coherent strategy regarding numbering and pricing transparency, INWG believes that the same approach should be taken to all numbering, including that associated with mobiles. Ofcom has already imposed a price cap on calls to mobiles and INWG looks forward to the day that this cap will be reduced ever downward in line with the MNOs’ reducing costs of production.

However, in line with Ofcom’s comments in 5.9, INWG believes that a radical reassessment of both calls to mobiles and from mobiles needs to be undertaken to make strategic sense of any national numbering plan. INWG recognizes the significant complexities within this area and looks forward to ongoing discussions with Ofcom in this area in order to further its citizen consumer interests; a requirement underpinned by the intensely negative attitude shown by consumers to MNO charging policies and Ofcom’s apparent acceptance of those, as illustrated by the comment quoted in the response to Question 2.

Question 14: Do you agree that personal numbers should have a tariff ceiling (or recorded message) to restore trust in those numbers? If so, what level, and should that ceiling include the cost of recorded messages?

INWG believes that all numbering should have in built pricing transparency and that being the case, Personal Numbers should be treated in the same manner.

INWG understands the benefits that can be provided to individuals through connectability through a single personal number and feels therefore that providing there is pricing transparency, a range of price points should be created to cover the costs of connectivity to whatever device the Personal Number owner may be using at any given time.

Following on from consultation within the membership, INWG sees merit in a maximum cap for calls to Personal Numbers, and some of the membership believes that this could be set at 10 pence per minute above the maximum cost of connecting to a mobile phone.

Question 15: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposals to move personal numbers (with the same consumer protection provisions) to the '06' range and to pursue the direct allocation of numbers to end users as proposed at some point in the future?

This question is a conflation of two totally separate issues and INWG would have found it more useful had they be separated into two distinct questions. Given the current structure of the question, INWG addresses the first part as follows:

As a broad forum, INWG includes a variety of views and from our feedback pricing transparency and confidence is a more important issue than that of a number range change.

INWG agrees that Personal Numbers require the same consumer protections provisions as currently are in place and as may be updated. However, INWG is not clear that the adoption of the currently unused 06 number range is the most appropriate home for this facility. Ofcom's research has shown that there is very little take up of these Personal Numbers in its current environment, whether due to consumer confusion or lack of attraction in the new technological world. Without an established current demand and with no projections demonstrating future take up, it seems illogical to INWG to tie up potentially a 100 billion number block for a service with no proven demand. This appears an ironic suggestion in a document concerned with number scarcity.

INWG recognises that new services will inevitably appear over time that may be associated with Personal Numbering to the benefit of users. As many of these services may be delivered over new technologies such as VoIP, INWG suggests that a more appropriate home may be within the 05 range, which already services VoIP numbering as well as other ranges of Corporate Numbering delivering similar service types.

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The pricing transparency policy that INWG has promoted throughout this response can happily apply here.

Whilst INWG understands Ofcom's proposal that for strategic reasons Personal Numbers should be migrated from the 07 range which will then fully adopt the meaning ascribed to it by the majority of the public - i.e. the mobile phone number range, certain members feel strongly that, given a coherent, transparent pricing policy that would protect citizen consumer interest, there is no requirement to separate Personal Numbers from the 07 range in the first place.

INWG has been asked to make the point that many thousands of citizen consumers already possess 070 Personal Numbers which have no cost implication to themselves as all charges are levied against the caller and that such users will then face the danger of costs and possible loss of contacts through an enforced number change.

Should it be concluded that Personal Numbers be located on a different number range, INWG's points above refer.

Addressing the second element of the question, INWG has sympathy with the view that individual citizens should benefit from the undoubted advantages of Personal Numbering.

What INWG is less clear on is the role of Ofcom in acting as distributor for these numbers, particularly in light of the revenue raising aspects of Ofcom's proposals regarding number charging schemes.

From the further information contained in Annex 3, it appears to INWG that the matter regarding direct allocation of Personal Numbers to the individual by Ofcom, has not been thought through and the implications of such a Personal Number-holding individual seeking an electronic communications provider to host his service, without the benefit of knowledge, experience and critical mass within the communications market, are not addressed. This approach does not appear with a strategic overview.

Question 16: Do you have any comments on the use of the 05 number range?

INWG sees that the current use of the 05 range lends itself to future expansion for numbering of New Services provision, be that in the individual or organizational field.

The definitions contained in Figure 5.5 suggest that the 05 range is reserved for future use and to general perception suggests that it is currently unused, notwithstanding the uses demonstrated above. It therefore supports the logic of utilising this range for services already extant as well as extension into Personal Numbering and other new developments. Service Classes at the 2-digit level would be sufficient to provide up to 10 different service types as well as accommodating 3-digit price points within class.

Should INWG's view of Personal Numbering and the 05 range not be taken and hence Personal Numbering is allocated the 06 range, INWG states that it is of critical importance that full consideration is given to the strategic structuring of the 06 range so as not to predicate future confusion. INWG can see no value in the suggestion that the first 06 subclass to be issued would be 065, mid point within the range, that by its essence will taint all further development of the range.

Question 17: Do you agree that Ofcom's overall proposals for a future Numbering Plan are coherent and comprehensive, and do you have any comments on the timescales in which the changes should be implemented?

Clearly by its answers above, INWG does not believe that the proposals for a future Numbering Plan are coherent and comprehensive, though INWG harbours no doubts that this is Ofcom's clear intention. INWG, uniquely representing sectors across society, trusts that the views expressed in its answers will assist in this endeavor.

INWG reiterates the importance of clear, concise and coherent numbering strategies, that by definition have to straddle multiple and evolving technologies, become ever more important to the citizen consumer in making informed decisions through consumer information, as Ofcom themselves state in 5.79 and 5.86.

Question 18: Do you agree with the principle of using consumer protection tests in numbering in order to limit consumer abuses, as long as the relevant legal tests are met? Do you have any suggestions for what tests would be appropriate or any conditions that should be met to pass such tests?

INWG supports any methodology that will provide consumer protection. Ofcom however has not made a clear definition of the term "consumer abuse" and therefore it is impossible to take a more specific position on something undefined.

Citizen consumer feedback has identified concerns relating to the likely increased costs they will suffer from increased bureaucracy without a clear framework and specific tests being proposed.

Commercial feedback suggests that any proposed tests applied to a commercial organisation of either public or private limited liability structure, as well as limited liability partnerships, would be unlikely to discover individuals who may have consistently perpetrated the abuses referred to in this consultation. INWG looks forward to the development of tests that will genuinely achieve the results proposed and looks to assist in developing them.

INWG can see no logic in, and is worried by the absence of, the exclusion of 01, 02, 04 and 05 number ranges in this strategic review. This concern is underlined particularly by the current exclusion of the 05 range which is in current use and already supports a variety of services. INWG wishes to alert Ofcom to what may be a typographical error in this matter.

Question 19: Do you support the proposal to extend the tariffing provisions of the Numbering Plan so that they apply to customers of all providers on all types of network?

Yes! Absolutely! Yes!

Question 20: How do you think the new Numbering Plan could be effectively communicated to consumers?

INWG believes that the critical importance of effectively communicating the new Numbering Plan across society is in the vested interest of all parties involved in the provision and regulation of voice services.

Ofcom, in partnership with all Electronic Communications Providers, Service Providers (be they public service or commercial), and all groups representing societal interests such as INWG, must be fully involved in ensuring that every member of UK society has a clear and comprehensive understanding of the new Numbering Plan and the transparencies of price and service that it will define.

Question 21: What are your views on Ofcom's analysis and the different options for number charging?

INWG appreciates the initial thinking on the more fundamental changes Ofcom requires to implement to the way it allocates numbers.

INWG recognises the complexity of the choices and decision points facing not only Ofcom but those involved in communications. We do not feel it right therefore to comment on the inclusivity or exclusivity of this thinking. As stated in its Introduction, INWG believes that the current consultation should be more concerned with avoiding technological and regulatory cul-de-sacs than predicting either prescriptively or proscriptively defining which mechanisms may be used to assist in the optimum utilisation of the numbering inventory.

It is of the essence that Ofcom declare their strategic objectives in considering market-based mechanisms and related charging systems. It is essential that Ofcom declare for the avoidance of all doubt whether such mechanisms and charges are related to the efficient and consumer supporting activity of number allocation in its most effective form, or whether it is based on an unstated financial resourcing plan, funding Ofcom and its activities.

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This entire review has apparently been predicated on the existing restriction in the numbering inventory as well as the need to address strategic policies that will take into account the rapid advances constantly being made in communications technology.

INWG views with concern the many possible options being considered by Ofcom that seek to recover more than the cost of administration, research and regulatory practice of the activities laid down by it in the Communications Act 2003.

INWG has some specific caveats. INWG can see no underpinning logic in Ofcom, constrained by law to be a regulator, looking to take on a new role as a market-maker. By so proposing, Ofcom immediately would lose its authority as a regulator as is best demonstrated by the Latin phrase “quis custodiet ipsos custodiet”, and as referenced on the OfcomWatch site,⁶ when even further Ofcom would propose to be one of those that “custodes” should be guarding.

Further to these concerns, it is INWG’s intention to work with Ofcom on this complex, involved, convoluted and ultimately controversial area which INWG believes should have been the subject of a separate discrete consultation befitting its importance. All sectors of INWG believe that this matter is far too complex to be addressed with the absolute and undivided attention such a radical changes demands.

INWG’s fears are greatly increased by the inherent suggestions in 5.112 that appear to have little to do with the management of the finite numbering inventory and more to do with the leverage of financial rewards inherent in a finite environment controlled entirely by Ofcom. INWG cannot understand how such an approach will support the entry to market of innovative new companies that can deliver significant benefits to consumers. Nor can it see how this approach will serve the interests of the citizenry as inevitably any charges raised by Ofcom, howsoever predatorily, will be levied on such citizens and consumers as use the numbers and services against which such charges have been raised.

Completion of the response to the rest of this consultation and the lack of clarity regarding Ofcom’s rationale, precludes INWG from addressing this area in full detail. It is our intention to continue with this matter.

Question 22: Which, if any, numbers might appropriately be allocated using a value-based charge?

INWG refers to its response to Question 21 and reiterates that until Ofcom provides the clarification requested, INWG is unable to respond further.

⁶ www.ofcomwatch.co.uk
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Question 23: Do you have any other comments on Ofcom's proposals for numbering as discussed in Section 5, or any other suggestions for how Ofcom might revise the current Numbering Plan or its administration?

In its Introduction, INWG stated clearly that from the responses across all its contributory sectors, its refined view is that the most important outcome from the current stage of the Telephone Number consultation is the creation of appropriate strategic principles that will not constrain Ofcom in the furtherance of its tactical responsibilities.

INWG feels that all the comments it has made in its Introduction, together with its responses to Questions 1-23, clearly identify the principles by which INWG is motivated and which in turn it promotes to Ofcom.

It is INWG's intention to engage with Ofcom on all the matters contained in Questions 24-61 and trusts that Ofcom recognises that the complexity and inclusivity of the INWG membership demands a lucid and easily understood explanation of the technical matters contained therein, across a range of understandings from the technically inexperienced citizen consumer through public policy stakeholders as well as commercial and electronic communication providers.

The detailed answers to Questions 24-61 are indeed important, however pale into insignificance INWG believes, compared to the overarching criticality of developing the strategic principles that will guide the communications arena now and for the foreseeable future.

INWG is unshakably confident that Ofcom does not wish to exclude input from all these important sectors across society and will look forward to engaging with INWG in furthering this consultation.

Additional Comments

The great majority of questions 24-61 are either technical or addressable only by INWG's ECP community and, as such, INWG finds it improper to address these issues as it fears this may be taken as an endorsement of the total INWG community. Interested parties from within INWG have responded elsewhere. As we have said earlier, INWG intends to engage with Ofcom on the wider societal impacts of these questions directly with Ofcom.