

Note to Ofcom on NTS review, 27 October 2004

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Further Consumer Panel reflections on NTS

1. Consumer Panel members returned again to the subject of NTS at their latest meeting. As you know from your discussion with them in September, they are concerned about the increasing use of 0845/0870 numbers to provide services – and especially essential public services – without a geographical alternative because of the additional costs that citizen-consumers are obliged to incur.
2. Of particular interest to members is the rationale for excluding NTS numbers from call packages e.g. free minute bundles in mobile tariffs, which exacerbates the costing issue for consumers. The Panel would be interested to understand why firms do this and whether there are any regulatory measures, formal or informal, which could improve the position of consumers in this regard. *I have been asked to seek your views and report back to members at their 18 November meeting.*
3. With regard to the current Ofcom consultation, I anticipate that the Panel will want to make a formal submission to supplement the points they made whilst the options for consultation were being developed. Panel members were also keen to make a public statement about the consumer issues surrounding 0845/0870 numbers, urging both the public and private sector to treat their customers fairly both by making geographic numbering alternatives available and increasing retail price awareness. Such a statement is likely to accompany the Panel's submission to the consultation and I will make sure you have advance notice.

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