



URCA Announces Final Decisions and Next Steps on Revisions to the Consumer Protection Regulations for the Electronic Communications Sector

8 March 2024

The Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) is pleased to announce the publication of its Statement of Results and Final Decision following a comprehensive public consultation process on proposed revisions to the Consumer Protection Regulations for the Electronic Communications Sector (ECS).

This process commenced on 18 September 2023, with an extended deadline for responses to accommodate comprehensive feedback from stakeholders.

The original Consumer Protection Regulations, introduced in December 2013 and revised in February 2014, have been instrumental in safeguarding consumer interests within the ECS.

However, evolving market dynamics and URCA's experiences in addressing consumer complaints necessitated a review to ensure the Regulations remain fit for purpose, clear any ambiguities, and introduce new measures to protect consumers effectively.

The consultation attracted valuable inputs from consumers, Cable Bahamas Limited and Be Aliv Limited (CBL/Aliv), The Bahamas Telecommunications Company Limited (BTC), and Global Nexus, among others.

Feedback ranged from general and specific comments on proposed revisions across various parts of the Regulations, including customer quality of service standards and complaint handling procedures.

URCA has carefully considered all feedback, leading to informed final decisions that balance industry capabilities with the need for enhanced consumer protection.

Notably, URCA has extended all sections of the consumer protections regulations to all service providers in the sector and not just those with significant market power. Previously, there were some sections of the regulations that were only applicable to providers with significant market power.

URCA has decided to extend the implementation timeline for service providers to comply with the updated Regulations to six months from the publication date, acknowledging the operational challenges highlighted by the respondents.

Revisions emphasize the need for service providers to display service arrangements, including rates and terms, clearly and prominently on their websites, and ensure timely updates coinciding with service launches or changes.

Service providers must now articulate policies for 'unlimited' services and acceptable use clearly, ensuring consumers are fully informed of any service limitations.

The timeline for resolving consumer complaints has been reduced from 30 to 20 business days, aligning with international best practices, and aiming for quicker redressal of consumer grievances.

Service providers are required to notify consumers of planned or unplanned disruptions with detailed information, including expected restoration times, through a minimum of three mainstream communication channels.

Service providers are required to receive permission from a customer before sending text messages containing advertisements.

With the publication of the Consumer Protection Regulations for the Electronic Communications, 2024, URCA outlines the following next steps for compliance and implementation: The 2013 Regulations will remain in effect until the six-month compliance deadline for the 2024 Regulations; service providers must submit revised compensation and refund packages to URCA within three months, reflecting the updated Quality of Service targets; and a Compliance Statement is required from all service providers within six months, detailing adherence to the new regulatory requirements.

URCA commits to a periodic review of the Regulations every three to five years, ensuring they continue to serve the best interests of Bahamian consumers and the ECS.

For further information and to access the full Statement of Results and Final Decision, please visit www.urcabahamas.bs.

About URCA:

The Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) is the regulatory body responsible for overseeing the electronic communications, broadcasting, and electricity sectors in The Bahamas.

Media Contact:

Juan McCartney

Corporate and Consumer Relations Manager

Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority

jmccartney@urcabahamas.bs

1 (242) 396-5242

UTILITIES REGULATION & COMPETITION AUTHORITY

Frederick House, Frederick Street | P. O. Box N-4860, Nassau, Bahamas | T.242.393.0234 / F. 242.393.0153 /242.393.0237

www.urbahamas.bs