



The TRA consults on consumer protection for prepaid services, bulk SMS and disconnection of service due to non-payment

PUBLIC URGED TO GIVE THEIR VIEW ON ISSUES AS THEY AFFECT THEM DIRECTLY

MANAMA – 24 January 2006- The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announced today the issuance of its first consumer protection consultation, which seeks the view of the public and the industry on consumer protection issues related to bulk SMS, prepaid services and disconnection of services due to non-payment.

The TRA first highlighted the need to consult on these issues in its Plan for 2005/2006, where respondents agreed that a public consultation was needed to identify what measures (if any) should be taken to enhance consumer protection in these areas.

The consultation issued today discusses bulk SMS, telemarketing, fax broadcast and bulk email. It indicates how other countries have dealt with these means of telecommunication and sets out possible options that can be implemented in Bahrain to enhance consumer protection.

The consultation also discusses another important matter, namely the disconnection of services due to non-payment of bills. It addresses the question of whether safeguards need to be introduced in light of the automated billing system currently in place. The consultation also seeks the consumers' views on whether access to emergency services (999) should also be cut off when a disconnection takes place.

The third topic discussed in the consultation is whether safeguards need to be introduced to protect the customer when a prepaid service provider goes out of business due to bankruptcy. The main concern in this case is what becomes of the unused amounts on purchased prepaid cards.

In publishing this consultation, the TRA hopes to receive feedback from consumers and the industry on the issues discussed, in order to aid it in formulating its final decision later on.

Commenting on the announcement, the General Director of the TRA, Mr. A. Andreas Avgousti, said: "This is the first consultation that focuses exclusively consumer protection, and although it has not come too soon, we are pleased to take the first step on three important

issues for consumers. We encourage all consumers to provide us with their comments, as we need to hear their views on the current situation and what they think of the proposed solutions. We have extended the usual comments period for this consultation to five weeks, and we will also hold a public hearing during this period to enable consumers to express their views directly to the TRA. It is an opportunity for the user to have its say, as such we urge each and every user to come forward with his or her views. This is not a matter that should just be left to the companies offering services”

The TRA will announce the time and date for the public hearing at a later stage, through the local media and its website. The consultation document can be viewed through the TRA’s website: www.tra.org.bh

About the TRA

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was established by Legislative Decree No. 48 of 2002 promulgating the Telecommunications Law. The TRA is an independent body and its duties and powers include protecting the interests of subscribers and users, and promoting effective and fair competition among established and new licensed operators. More information regarding the TRA can be viewed at www.tra.org.bh

- The TRA will be happy to provide hard copies of the consultation document for interested parties who do not have access to the Internet. In addition, the TRA is happy to provide copies in Braille or large print upon request and free of charge. The TRA can be contacted on telephone number 17 52 0044.