

Telecommunications Regulatory Affairs Advisory Committee

Public Consultation on Better Utilisation of the 8-digit Numbering Plan

Purpose

This paper reports the progress of the Telecommunications Numbering Working Group (“TNWG”) on refined proposals for better utilisation of “4X” and “7X” numbers and informs Members that the Office of the Communications Authority (“OFCA”) will recommend to the Communications Authority (“CA”) to conduct a public consultation some time in the second half of 2015 to solicit views from the public and the industry in relation to a number of proposed measures to achieve better utilisation of the existing 8-digit numbering plan.

Background

2. The TRAAC Paper No. 4/2014 entitled “Better Utilisation of the 8-Digit Numbering Plan”¹ was discussed by the TRAAC at its 7th meeting on 20 November 2014. It provided an overview of the current status of the 8-digit numbering plan and invited Members’ to give views on certain proposed options to extend the lifespan of the 8-digit numbering plan. The paper provided a summary of the usage status of the 8-digit numbers for different types of services. With the continuous growth in the number of mobile subscribers, there would be shortage of 8-digit numbers for mobile services. As such, it identified a pressing need to explore number blocks which could be re-allocated to mobile services. As an update to the statistics given in the paper, as of 1st March 2015, there were 5.14 million vacant numbers in the “52X”, “57X” and “8(4-7,9)X” levels (excluding those reserved as Special Number

¹ Please refer to
http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/about_us/advisory_committees/TRAAC/papers/index.html.

Blocks²) currently available for allocation to mobile services. It is estimated that the number blocks available for mobile services will all be allocated by February 2018 with the assumption that the monthly mobile number consumption rate is 145k³.

3. The TRAAC paper put forth a number of proposed measures to deal with the mobile number shortage problem for consideration by Members, including two proposed new number level options for mobile services (i.e. Proposal 1 to re-allocate the “7X” level for mobile numbers and Proposal 2 to re-allocate the “4X” level for mobile numbers), and the proposal to raise the threshold of the utilisation rate from 70% to 80% before allocation of additional numbers to licensees.

4. Nevertheless, there were diverse views among the Members and no consensus could be reached about the adoption of any of the above measures. Some Members suggested that further study on the implementation arrangements and timeframe of Proposals 1 and 2 should be conducted and that the under-utilised “7X” level which was currently allocated for paging services should be put under review. Some Members were concerned about raising the threshold of the utilisation rate from 70% to 80% in view of the lead time required to recycle the numbers of pre-paid SIM cards. Following the discussion, it was concluded at the TRAAC meeting that the TNWG should further study the concerns raised by Members and, in particular, to review the utilisation of paging numbers to see if it would be technically possible to migrate paging users with minimal disruption to them, as well as the cost implication on the paging operators in the migration.

5. The TNWG subsequently convened a meeting in January 2015 to address the concerns raised by the TRAAC and to consider possible refinements to the proposed measures. The TNWG reviewed the current utilisation status of the “7X” paging numbers and discussed the proposal

² Special Number Block means a block of numbers or codes in the numbering plan for telecommunications services in Hong Kong, which are attractive, or are likely to be attractive, to a customer and for which the customer is willing to pay for the right of use. At present, there are 5.9 million numbers reserved under 59 Special Number Blocks in the numbering plan.

³ In this paper, the monthly mobile number consumption rate of 145k, which was the maximum monthly mobile number consumption rate over a 24-month period between March 2012 and February 2015, is adopted.

to relocate certain active paging numbers such that some of the 10k number blocks⁴ in the “7X” level could be vacated for re-allocation to mobile services. The relocation mechanism and implementation timeframe had also been discussed. In addition, the TNWG considered a new Proposal 3 on the new number ranges for mobile services in which vacant number blocks in the “4X” level and “7(0-3)X” levels would be re-allocated to mobile services at the same time. Under this proposal, while a substantial amount of vacant numbers will be made available for re-allocation to mobile services, certain number blocks are kept in reserve to enable future migration to the 9-digit or 10-digit numbering plan. Nevertheless, participants of the TNWG still had different views as to whether and how the proposed measures should be adopted.

Proposed Public Consultation

6. Telecommunications numbers are scarce public resources necessary for the operation of telecommunications services. It is the statutory duty of the CA to promote the efficient and equitable allocation and use of numbers and codes in the numbering plan, as enshrined in section 32F(2) of the Telecommunications Ordinance (“TO”). In light of the continuous demand for telecommunications numbers and the current status of the numbering plan, there is a need to enhance the utilisation of the existing 8-digit numbering plan to avoid as far as possible or defer the need for migration to a longer digit numbering plan which will incur significant social and economic costs to the community.

7. As reflected from the discussions in the TRAAC and TNWG, there are diverse views from the industry regarding the various proposed measures to extend the lifespan of the 8-digit numbering plan. In this regard, OFCA considers it appropriate to address the matter from a holistic manner by casting a wider net to solicit views from the general public and all interested parties through a public consultation. The topics to be included in the public consultation will include, but not limited to, the following –

⁴ A “10k number block” refers to a number block with 10,000 numbers available for assignment to end users. It is the current practice to allocate number blocks in unit of 10k numbers for paging, mobile and fixed (Class 1 and Class 2) services.

- (a) Better utilisation of the number level allocated for paging services;
- (b) Allocation of the “4X” and “7(0-3)X” levels for mobile services;
- (c) Allocation of vacant number blocks in the “8(1-3)X” levels for mobile services;
- (d) Raising the threshold of utilisation level for allocation of additional numbers; and
- (e) Possible release of the reserved Special Number Blocks for ordinary allocation.

Views Sought

8. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper. When the public consultation is launched, Members are welcome to give their views on the matter under consultation.

**Office of the Communications Authority
April 2015**