

TELECOM REGULATORY AUTHORITY OF INDIA

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TRAI issues Consultation Paper on the Redressal of Consumer Grievances and Consumer Protection in Telecommunication

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) today issued a Consultation Paper on the Redressal of Consumer Grievances and Consumer Protection in Telecommunication. The tremendous growth and competition the telecom sector is witnessing and the frequent introduction of new tariff plans and value added/ premium rate services by service providers have brought about increasing number of incidences of consumer grievances leading to consumer dissatisfaction. One of the recurring grievance brought before the Authority by the consumers is lack of information relating to where and how to lodge grievances, the officials of the service providers to be contacted/ approached for redressal of grievance and the time period by which the grievance will be resolved. Although Department of Telecommunications has mandated that service providers have to set up Consumer Grievances Redressal Mechanism (a) At the Call Centre level and (b) An Appellate Authority within the company, the complaints being received in the Authority show that the implementation of these mechanisms is not effective enough to address the grievances of consumers. The system of Nodal Officer introduced through the Common Charter of Telecom Services is also not effective, as per the feedback received from Consumer Advocacy Groups (CAGs)

2. The redressal of individual consumer complaint lies with service providers and in case the consumer is not satisfied with the redressal by the service provider he can take legal recourse through consumer courts. However, recourse to consumer courts is time consuming and expensive, considering the stakes involved. Only disputes between service providers and group of consumers fall for redressal in the domain of Telecom Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT). The various licences mandate the Licensee to notify in writing all the arrangements with respect to repair, fault rectification, compensation or refunds. These licences also provide that all complaints in this regard will be addressed/ handled as per the guidelines, order or regulation or direction issued by the LICENSOR or TRAI from time to time.

3. Therefore, in order to raise the level of satisfaction of consumers there is a need to deliberate the issue and seek comments from the stakeholders for evolving a well defined institutional mechanism including procedure and practices for handling consumer complaints and their speedy and effective resolution as is prevalent in many countries across the world. The consultation paper raises the problems and also the possible solutions for offering comments by stakeholders before drawing a final blue print. It is in this background, the Authority has issued this Consultation Paper seeking views of all stakeholders.

4. The salient features of the institutional mechanism proposed in the Consultation Paper for the redressal of consumer grievances and consumer protection in telecommunication are summarized below:

- a. The proposed institutional mechanism focuses on resolution of consumers grievances within the company and is service provider centric. It defines structural framework of institutional mechanism at the level of call centre, Nodal Officer and appellate authority. It also outlines the processes and procedures and time limits for redressal of grievances at these levels.
- b. Consumers may contact the Call Centre of service provider on toll free number at the first instance for redressal of their grievances. All the complaints, pertaining to fault/ service disruption, shall be attended within 3 days and all other complaints shall be attended by the Call Centre within 7 days, subject to time limits laid down in Regulations on Quality of Service.
- c. In case the consumer is not satisfied with the redressal of his grievance at the Call Centre level or in case the Call Centre within the above time limit does not attend to the complaint, he may approach the Nodal Officer for redressal of his grievance. All grievances received by the Nodal Officer with respect to fault or service disruption or repair/ restoration of fault shall be got redressed within 3 days and other grievances shall be redressed by the Nodal Officer within 10 days of the registration of the grievance.
- d. In case the consumer is still not satisfied with the redressal of his grievance by the Nodal Officer or in case his complaint is not redressed by the Nodal Officer within the above time limit or no reply is received regarding resolution of the complaint from Nodal Officer, he may appeal to the appellate authority for redressal of his grievance and the appellate authority shall decide on the appeal within 30 days.
- e. The service provider shall publish a “Manual of Practice for handling consumer complaints” outlining the various provisions, time limits, benchmarks and procedures for seeking redressal of grievances including information which affect the consumers.

The consultation paper has already been placed on TRAI's website (www.trai.gov.in). All the stakeholders are requested to send their written comments through email/ fax/letter by 23rd January 2007.

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Authorised for Issue

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