

Dear Sir,

Please find the answers to questions in consultation paper

Question 1: Whether TRAI should prescribe any format for publishing tariff?

Please support your answer with rationale.

The telecom tariffs are very complicated and there are many aspects of tariffs, some of which may be relevant and some may not be so relevant to the consumer's experience. The TSPs may bombard the consumer with a lot of information which may not be very relevant and hide certain critical aspects of the tariff offer. To avoid the same, TRAI should continue to prescribe the format for publishing tariffs. The format may contain the information considered as most critical to consumer's experience.

Question 2: If the answer to the Question 1 is yes, then please give your views regarding desirability of publishing tariffs on various modes of communication viz., TSP website/Portal, App, SMS, USSD message, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Customer care centers, Sales outlets etc. If the answer to the question is that tariffs should be published on multiple channels as above, please state whether TRAI should prescribe a separate format for each channel. Please also suggest the essentials of the format for each channel.

Question 3: Whether the extant format prescribed for publishing tariff at TSP's website conveys the relevant information to consumers in a simple yet effective manner? If no, please provide the possible ways in which the same can be made more effective?

The extant format captures most of the relevant information but certain issues relating to tariff which have gain prominence over a period of time such as disclosure of Fair Usage Policies, detailed terms and conditions relating to bundled offerings etc. need to be brought out clearly. If required, TRAI may consider introducing separate formats for different tariffs.

Question 4: Whether the service providers be required to publish all the tariff offerings and vouchers in addition to the publishing of tariff plans, in the prescribed format? Please provide rationale for your response.

Over a period of time, the differences between various tariff types viz., plan vouchers, special tariff vouchers and combo vouchers have blurred and therefore it is highly recommended that all the tariffs should be published by the TSPs and they should not be allowed to withhold information in respect of any tariff voucher on account of any technicality.

Question 5: Whether there is a need to mandate TSPs to introduce a tariff

calculator tool to convey the effective cost of enrolment and continued subscription? If yes, what can be the essential features of such a tool? If the answer is in negative, then please give reasons for not mandating such a tool.

Considering multiplicity of tariff offerings, the consumer is not in a position to understand all implications of tariff plans subscribed. Further, the consumer is not able to effectively compare the tariff offerings of different service providers due to lack of standardization in information disclosed. Tariff calculator has the potential to bridge both the aforesaid limitations. Tariff calculator may capture the most important tariff products such as voice, sms and data and to ensure that it works efficiently a self certification from TSPs should be mandated that the tariff offering shown by the calculator is the least cost offering for the given parameters. The TRAI may consider mandating other disclosures also as considered appropriate.

Question 6: Whether the service providers be asked to disclose clearly the implications of discontinuation of tariff plan after expiry of mandatory tariff protection period of six months on the provision of non-telecom services offered as a part of the bundle at the time of subscription to a particular plan? If yes, what should be the exact details that service providers may be required to provide in case of bundled offerings? If the answer is in negative, then please give reasons for not mandating such a disclosure.

It has been brought out clearly in the consultation paper, the subscriber runs the risk of losing the remaining free subscription period if he does not agree to the revised tariff or exercise option to migrate to the plan offered after expiry of mandatory tariff protection period. Thus, with tariffs containing offers with benefit period exceeding tariff protection period, the consumers have a right to know in no less than explicit terms that what will happen to the benefits in the event of discontinuance of plan.

Question 7: Whether the service providers be required to provide a declaration while reporting tariffs to TRAI and displaying tariffs through its various channels that there are no terms and conditions applicable to a tariff offering other than those disclosed here? Do we require additional measures to ensure that all the terms and conditions are clearly communicated to the subscribers and the Authority? If the answer to the above is yes, then please provide your suggestions in detail. If you do not agree with the above requirement, please provide detailed reasons for the same.

Question 8: Whether the service providers be required to publish details of all plans in the prescribed format including the plans not on offer for subscription but active otherwise? Please support your answer with rationale.

The purpose of the law is to ensure protection of not only the prospective consumers but also the existing consumers. Thus, the provisioning of details of

plans not on offer but active otherwise are critical for the existing consumers. These consumers have a right to know their entitlements till the time they are subscribed to a tariff.

Question 9: Whether the service providers be required to update the information on point of sale and retail outlets simultaneously with the launch/change of a tariff offer?

In the age of instant communication, there seems to be no rationale for any time lag in updating of tariffs. Any time lag has potential to adversely affect a section of consumers who may have made a decision of subscribing to a particular tariff without complete knowledge of all tariff offerings. Thus, it is critical that the information on tariffs should be updated on all channels instantly.

Question 10: Whether the tariffs published in prescribed formats are displayed on websites of the service providers in an effective manner? If no, should the manner of display on website may also be prescribed by the Authority? If it is felt that the manner of display on website may be prescribed by the Authority, please give your views on the proposed display framework.

On perusal of websites of a few TSPs, it is learnt that they show only a few of their tariff offerings when the consumer tries to buy a new prepaid sim online. The offerings do not even indicate whether the tariff is a plan voucher or a special tariff voucher thought this can be relevant to the consumer from cost perspective as it is not possible for a consumer to subscribe to a special tariff voucher directly and therefore in the process the TSP will register the consumer on some plan and then load a special tariff voucher adding to the cost to the consumer. Further, in absence of any link to other plans on offer or other combinations of plans and special tariff vouchers etc., the consumer's choice cannot be considered as optimal. The link to tariff offerings in TRAI format is very difficult if not impossible to find. Further, there is no standardization of information across TSPs which makes exercise of choice by consumers further difficult.

Thus, it would be appropriate if TRAI regulates the manner of presentation of tariff on websites etc. The TSPs can be allowed to display tariffs in their desired format but a channel should be created such that the consumer invariably accesses the complete details in TRAI format before completing the transaction.

Question 11: What are your views on introduction of concept of unique id and requiring the service providers to link the tariff advertisements etc. with corresponding tariffs published in TRAI prescribed formats including requirements to publish dates of implementation of tariff and that of reporting of tariff. Do you

think that any other safeguards need to be introduced? If yes, please elaborate. Please support your answer with rationale.

As brought out in the consultation paper, unique id has multiple benefits. The consumers may not remember the names of the plan to which they subscribe and some of the conditions of a plan may also undergo a change over a period without active knowledge of the consumer. The unique id of subscribed plan will lend certainty to the consumer regarding the plan subscribed and will also freeze the conditions which can be changed only when the tariff is revised and a new unique id issued.

Question 12: Whether the proposed monitoring and compliance mechanism is enough to deter any violation of compliance with

applicableregulations/directions. If no, please suggest further safeguards that may be introduced to ensure a robust monitoring and compliance mechanism.

Any lapse in the transparency has wider ramifications for consumer class as a whole who may have subscribed to a plan in absence of complete information. Thus, there should be strong deterrence mechanisms in form of audits scheduled at fixed regular intervals and imposition of strict fines for detected cases.

Question 13: Any other issue relevant to the subject discussed in the consultation paper may be highlighted.

The consultation paper, with regard to need for unique id, notes that in the present regulatory framework, there can be a time lag of seven working days between the tariff implementation and date of reporting and generation of unique id and during the same time, only the information regarding date of implementation can be made available. Just like simultaneous updating of tariffs on websites, CSCs, etc., it would be appropriate if the TSPs are required to report the plans simultaneously with launch/changes. Under this approach, there won't be any time lag and there will be 360 degrees of consumer protection.

With Regards,

Yours Sincerely,

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