

**The two ways in which action must be taken to address the problem of Nuisance Telephone Calls**

## 2 - Mitigate the effect

The **fair telecoms campaign** is delighted to hear that the government is to support efforts to help vulnerable people diminish, and perhaps escape from, the impact of its failure to eliminate the problem of Nuisance Telephone Calls. **A £3.5M package for this purpose was announced in the Budget statement** ([see 2.289](#)). We look forward to the detail of how this will be distributed.

Effective call filtering technology, focussed on allowing wanted calls to get through, is already available for landlines, but the expense can often be a barrier to those who are vulnerable. It is imperative for vulnerable people to remain connected with the world by telephone, whilst being protected from nuisance calls and scams. (Blocking calls and reporting breaches is not enough!)

The simpler, cheaper “call blocker” devices simply attempt to cut off particular groups of callers, often blocking important wanted calls and failing to block nuisance and scam calls. In many cases these are themselves associated with “scam” registers. We suggest that those who wish only to block calls save their money and unplug or switch off their telephone - that is not the answer!

To reduce the cost and extend call filtering to mobile users, it is essential that this technology be deployed on telephone networks. Work on this is already underway, although acceptance by the major networks has not yet been achieved. This will offer effective selective call management to all telephone users, without additional equipment at their end of the line, on a subscription basis.

Government funding of provision of this service for those who are seen as “vulnerable” represents a fair recognition of the fact that little is being done to properly stop the continuing problem.

## 1 - Stop the problem

Efforts to date sadly continue to focus on the ineffective 2003 regulations which demand that emails, text messages, recorded telephone messages and attended telephone calls for direct marketing purposes are only made with the consent of the recipient. (Only in the latter case, consent is assumed unless the number called is registered with the Telephone Preference Service.)

Given that the primary purpose of direct marketing is to draw one’s attention to something of which one was not aware, the concept of consent is essentially absurd. Enforcement is carried by the Office of the Information Commissioner (ICO), a body so remote from businesses that there is little or no hope of securing willing compliance ... with an absurd notion.

Furthermore, the powers of the ICO to impose penalties are severely limited. One limitation is currently in the course of being lifted, but the ICO will remain unable to inflict substantial financial damage on an offender and the resources it is able to commit to this area of its work are scarce.

Ofcom also has powers in this area, however it continues to regard it as reasonable for 3% of calls made by a call centre to result in silence for the person called.

**To stop the problem** it will be necessary for the behaviour of many businesses (including some that are highly reputable) to be changed. This can only be done by the closely engaged regulators of each business sector. Please get in touch for details of how the fair telecoms campaign is starting to succeed with these efforts, despite opposition from government ministers and Which?.

