



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **URCA Launches Major Initiatives, Including Draft Regulations for the Protection of Consumers**

On June 10 2013, the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) launched two major initiatives: an information and public awareness campaign in the lead up to the September 3<sup>rd</sup> implementation of Number Portability, and a public consultation exercise to establish regulations for the protection of consumers in the electronic communications sector (ECS).

Number portability or number porting, enables users to keep their current telephone number when switching from one telecommunications service provider to another, which for landlines will become available in The Bahamas on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, in places where there is more than fixed line telephone services provider. Currently that includes four islands: Abaco, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and New Providence.

Between now and September, URCA will conduct a multimedia information campaign to educate consumers on key issues related to number portability, including but not limited to eligibility, costs, the porting process and various business rules that operators will be required to observe.

The process of bringing number portability to The Bahamas began in April 2011 when the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) launched its initial public consultation and later in November of that year, established an industry working group comprising representatives from existing telephone service providers in The Bahamas. Chaired by URCA, that industry working group's task was to identify a solution for number portability in The Bahamas and to draft a detailed work plan for its implementation.

By a competitive process, Porting Access BV, also known as Porting XS, was selected to provide the system which makes number portability work. The company provides and manages number portability services in many places, including the Cayman Islands, Panama, Ghana, Kenya, Chanel Islands (Guernsey and Jersey) the Isle of Man, the Netherlands and Gibraltar. The company's locally based and incorporated subsidiary, Porting Access Bahamas, LLC, is licenced by URCA, to provide and operate the Number Portability Administration Service in The Bahamas.

The consumer protection initiative follows URCA activities that generated widespread public comment on issues of service and the quality of services in the ECS. URCA has released for public consultation, draft consumer protection regulations that address a range of areas. Among them:

- **Consumer sales, contracts and services**, which addresses subjects like the provision of information, including pricing information, bundling and tying; contract terms and termination and product warranties.
- **Consumer obligations**, including issues like acceptance of service provider terms, tampering with equipment, reselling services without authorisation and dishonest churning e.g. hopping from one provider to another while leaving an accrued balance with the previous provider.
- **Advertising**, covering subjects like the use of disclaimers and claims made by providers, e.g. claims about savings.
- **Billing and credit management**, including the itemisation of charges, timelines for issuance of bills, charging for bills and related subjects.
- **Customer Complaints Handling**
- **Customer Quality of Service Standards**

The consultation will be open for public feedback until August 2<sup>nd</sup>. During the consultative period, URCA plans to conduct community meetings in Abaco, Andros, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama, New Providence and San Salvador, to allow persons forums to share their questions and concerns. URCA will also make various media appearances in both television and radio to discuss details of the consultation to wider audiences.

The consultation document **Utilities Regulations and Competition Authority (URCA) Consumer Protection Regulations** [URCA document reference ECS 07/2013] is available on URCA's website, [www.urbahamas.bs](http://www.urbahamas.bs). Number Portability information may also be obtained on the website, and URCA's Facebook page.

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