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Number Portability on Schedule for December 2nd Start

Implementation of Fixed Number Portability (FNP) in The Bahamas is expected to begin on December 2, 2013 as per URCA's October 29, 2013 Determination. FNP will allow customers switching voice services from one provider to another, to do so without having to change their telephone number. Service Providers have met testing and readiness criteria, making the start possible everywhere in The Bahamas where fixed line telephone service is offered by more than one provider.

In the October Determination [URCA document reference ECS 15/2013] the two service providers, the Bahamas Telecommunications Company (BTC) and Cable Bahamas Limited (CBL), were required to meet a November 27th readiness deadline. By that date BTC and CBL were expected to have completed installation and testing of all required systems and processes necessary for FNP implementation. Both operators met the deadline and have demonstrated satisfactory achievement of stipulated testing and readiness criteria. URCA has now issued **Certificates of FNP Readiness** to BTC and CBL, both by the required November 29th deadline.

According to URCA Director of Policy and Regulation (DPR) Stephen Bereaux, URCA is satisfied with the state of FNP readiness. "We have not only looked at their tests but we have tested the systems ourselves. We've tried it, and it works". The system he says is substantially ready to go and he lauded the efforts of service providers to achieve the December 2nd target. "What our industry has achieved and the timeframes they have achieved it in is best practice in the region, this is a benchmark". 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. The December 2nd launch date brings the implementation process to an approximate 2½-year conclusion; compared to places like the Cayman Islands where the process reportedly took about 7 years and other Caribbean countries which after several years of working towards number portability, have yet to achieve the goal. What Bahamian service providers have been able to achieve, at required industry standards, yet in a substantially shorter space of time Bereaux said is highly commendable.

In November 2011, following the initial consultation, URCA established and chaired an industry working group comprising representatives from existing telephone service providers in The Bahamas. That industry working group's primary responsibility was to identify a solution for number portability in The Bahamas and to develop a detailed work plan for its implementation.

The industry working group approach to addressing the number portability issue in The Bahamas also ensured the engagement of operators throughout the process.

URCA will continue to monitor the FNP system and will also take steps to monitor the consumer experience with number porting, to ensure that the service remains at the required standard. The system used to implement FNP will be the basis for future mobile telephone number portability, when that market is opened to a second provider.

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