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GENERAL NOTICES • ALGEMENE KENNISGEWINGS

INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**NOTICE 3997 OF 2026****THE NUMBERING PLAN FOURTH AMENDMENT REGULATIONS, 2026 UNDER
CHAPTER 11 OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS ACT, 2005 (NO. 36 OF 2005)**

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa has, under section 68(1) of the Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act No. 36 of 2005), made the regulations in the Schedule.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mothibi G. Ramusi'.

Mothibi G. Ramusi
Chairperson

Date: 03 / 05 / 2026

ICASA

SCHEDULE

1. Definitions

In these regulations "the Regulations" means the regulations published by Government Notice No. 370 (Government Gazette No. 39861) of 24 March 2016, as amended by Government Notices No. 245 (Government Gazette No. 43230) of 15 April 2020 and No. 1719 (Government Gazette No. 48328) of 29 March 2023.

2. Amendment of regulation 1 of the Regulations

Regulation 1 of the Regulations is hereby amended –

- 2.1. by the insertion, after the definition "harmonised number", of the following definition:

"Inactive mobile number" means a number that:

- (a) has not performed a Revenue Generating Activity for ninety (90) consecutive calendar days; and
- (b) has been deactivated from the mobile network."

- 2.2. by the insertion after the definition of "reserved" of the following definition:

"Revenue Generating Activity" means an activity that may generate revenue for a licensee for the use of its network or services, such activities include but are not limited to use of:

- (a) voice services;
- (b) Short Message Services (SMS);
- (c) mobile data services, which include:
 - (i) text messaging;
 - (ii) multimedia messaging (MMS); and
 - (iii) data and internet services;
- d) Value added Services (VAS).

3. Amendment of regulation 6A in the Regulations

3.1. Regulation 6A of the Regulations is hereby amended by the substitution for sub regulations (1) to (3) of the following sub regulations:

- (1) Churn rate must be calculated by taking the quantity of mobile numbers that have not perform Revenue Generating Activity and divide this by the quantity of active numbers at the beginning of the defined timeframe.
- (2) Inactive mobile numbers must be quarantined for a period of one (1) month before being placed into the pool of available numbers.
- (3) If a subscriber has not performed a Revenue Generating Activity on their assigned mobile number for sixty (60) consecutive days, a licensee must notify the subscriber of its intention to deactivate the assigned mobile number.

3.2. Regulation 6A of the Regulations is hereby amended by the insertion, after sub regulation (3), of the following sub regulations:

- (3A) Sub regulation (3) does not apply to subscribers on a postpaid service plan.
- (3B) A licensee must afford a subscriber a grace period of thirty (30) consecutive calendar days to perform a Revenue Generating Activity after having issued a notice in terms of sub regulation
- (3C) The licensee must within the grace period, issue a minimum of two reminders to the subscriber, including on the day prior of the impending deactivation, if the subscriber has not yet initiated a Revenue Generating Activity.
- (3D) In the event a subscriber anticipates that their assigned mobile number may be inactive for more than sixty (60) consecutive calendar days or becomes aware that their assigned mobile number is subject to

deactivation in terms of sub regulation (3), A licensee must allow a subscriber to apply for an exemption to sub regulation (3) in order to retain the use of the assigned mobile number.

(3E) The exemption in terms of sub regulation (3D) is valid for 183 calendar days from the date of application.

(3F) A licensee must cease the deactivation of a mobile number in terms of sub regulation (3) when a subscriber:

(a) performs a Revenue Generating Activity in terms of sub regulation (3A); or

(b) applies for an exemption in terms of sub regulation (3D).

3.3 Regulation 6A of the Regulations is hereby amended by the deletion of sub-regulation (4).

4. SHORT TITLE AND COMMENCEMENT

5.1 These regulations are called the Numbering Plan fourth Amendment Regulations, 2026 and will come into effect on the date of publication in the Government Gazette. .



INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

REASONS DOCUMENT

NUMBERING PLAN FOURTH AMENDMENTS REGULATIONS, 2026

ICASA

1. Introduction

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa ("the Authority") has decided to review and amend the Numbering Plan Regulations, 2016 ("the Regulations") in September 2023 in line with its mandate as provided for in section 68 (1) of the Electronic Communications Act No. 36 of 2005.

Following consultations with stakeholders on the Draft Numbering Plan Fourth Amendment Regulations, 2023 ("Draft Amendment Regulations, 2023")¹ the Authority decided to further consult on the provisions and published the amendments to Numbering Plan Regulations, 2025 ("Draft Amendment Regulations, 2025").²

2. Background

2.1. On 29 March 2023 the Authority published Numbering Plan Second Amendment Regulations 2023 ("the Regulations, 2023") to include aspects relating to the churn, inactivity period, quarantine period and notification for deactivation of an assigned mobile number in the effort to standardise the recycling period for mobile numbers.

2.2. However, upon publication of the Regulations, 2023 the Authority received submissions which reflected that although the principle of standardising the recycling period was accepted, concerns were raised regarding the period of inactivity.

2.3. The Authority embarked on a consultation process regarding the recycling period of mobile numbers in the form of the Draft Amendment Regulations, 2023 and a further consultation in the form of the Draft Amendment Regulations, 2025.

¹ Government Gazette No.49329

² Government Gazette No. 52944

2.4. By the closing date of the submissions (4 July 2025), the Authority had received five (5) written submissions in response to the published Draft Amendment Regulations, 2025, from:

- a) Cell C Limited;
- b) FNB Connect;
- c) Mobile Telephone Networks (Pty) Ltd ("MTN");
- d) Telkom SA SOC Ltd ("Telkom"); and
- e) Vodacom (Pty) Ltd ("Vodacom").

2.5. The reasons outlined below are a culmination of the abovementioned consultation processes which have informed the final amendments as contained in the Regulations.

2.6. The Authority does not intend to reiterate its preliminary views as contained in its explanatory memorandum to the Draft Amendment Regulations, 2025 ("explanatory memorandum"). As such, the reasons outlined below are specifically in response to the comments made by stakeholders in the further consultation process.

3. Amendments of regulation 1 of the Regulations

3.1. Insertion of the definition of "revenue generating activity".

3.1.1. As contained in the explanatory memorandum, the objective of the inclusion of the term is to provide means by which a subscriber can indicate usage of the assigned mobile number and thus object to a withdrawal of the assigned mobile number.

3.1.2. In response, Telkom proposed that the draft definition include reference to 'recharge purchases' and 'Value Added Services (VAS) purchases' to the list of revenue generating activities.³

³ Telkom submission, p 3.

- 3.1.3. Telkom also submitted that the word “may” in the definition is not clear and could lead to misinterpretations and regulatory uncertainty. To this end, it was recommended by Telkom that the word “may” be deleted or further clarified⁴.
- 3.1.4. Telkom further recommends reference to previous revenue generating activities in the definition. This, Telkom submits, is to cater for instances where a customer bought a bundled service, which may also include free elements (data, voice minutes, sms’s, etc.), which is then used after the revenue generating activity⁵.
- 3.1.5. MTN considers a subscriber to be active and remain connected to the operator’s network when the subscriber performs a revenue generating event (RGE). The underlying principle is that the event must have a revenue value associated with it to be considered an RGE. Consequently, this generally includes activities such as:
- 3.1.5.1. Subscriber originating events;
 - 3.1.5.2. Incoming events if the subscriber can influence value/volume; and
 - 3.1.5.3. Events relating to the recognition of revenue⁶.
- 3.1.6. MTN submits that the Authority must reconsider the definition for a revenue generating activity, to incorporate the underlying principle that such an activity must have a revenue value that can be associated with the subscriber’s number and that any request for exemption from deactivation should be a paid service which would then constitute as a revenue generating activity.

Decision

- 3.1.7. The definition of the term is based on the usage of a mobile number and by implication, a mobile service which includes the use of data, voice, SMS and value-added services offered in terms of primary

⁴ Telkom submission, p 3.

⁵ Telkom submission, p 3.

⁶ MTN submission, p 5.

service i.e. mobile service. The proposal by Telkom to include "recharge purchases" and "value-added service purchases" as part of the definition seeks to incorporate "pay-before-use" product offerings, which is inconsistent with the objectives of the definition in the context of the Regulations. This includes its second proposal to include other purchases into the definition i.e. bundle purchases.

3.1.8. The Authority has retained the term "may" in the definition. A licensee has the prerogative to charge for the use of services encompassed within a mobile service. Thus, irrespective of whether a licensee opts to charge for a voice call, the subscriber has nonetheless made use of the service as is the case with a voice call that is toll-free or zero-rated.

3.1.9. It is the Authority's considered view that this comment is of no moment considering that the definition of RGA has been amended. It doesn't have the word "initiated" by the customer.

4. Amendment of regulation 6A of the Regulations

4.1. Substitution of regulation 6A (2) in the Regulations

4.1.1. Telkom submits that it is important to indicate that, after the 90-day inactivity period, the number is deactivated, before placed in the 1-month quarantine period. The sequence of deactivation and quarantine must be clearly indicated and proposes the following text on regulation 6A(2):

"6A(2) *Inactive mobile numbers must be **deactivated and then** quarantined for a period of one (1) month before being placed into the pool of available numbers."*⁷

4.1.2. Cell C does not support the amendments to sub-regulation 6A (2) and proposes that the inactive mobile numbers be quarantined for a

⁷ Telkom submission, p 4.

maximum of 90 calendar days. In addition, Cell C recommends that 30 calendar days are also provided in addition to this duration for the churn process to occur, this noting that the churn of the MSISDN occurs during a specific time in the month when there is no bill run activity, network freeze and ensure validation of the MSISDN for churn. Cell C submits that it would require time for technical development, implementation and testing for the quarantine activity.⁸

- 4.1.3. Vodacom reiterates that reducing the quarantine period to 7 days would significantly improve number recycling efficiency and enhance the availability of the numbering resource. The Authority is requested to reconsider this period and further introduce an optional discretionary extended period within reasonable regulatory bounds. The Authority should clarify whether customers are allowed to request their number to be reinstated while it is in quarantine.⁹

Decision

- 4.1.4. In response to Telkom's proposal of amending the text to include the action of deactivation prior to placing the number in question into quarantine, in terms of sub regulation 6A(2) reference is made to an "inactive mobile number" wherein by definition that is a number has been deactivated from the mobile network. Therefore, it goes without saying that number will be deactivated first, and then quarantined before being placed into a pool of available numbers. The Authority does not consider that there could be any doubt or confusion.
- 4.1.5. During its consultation on the recycling of mobile numbers the Authority took into consideration the various models adopted by stakeholders. While it has taken into consideration the various models, the Authority is guided by legislation that requires a principle of efficient use of numbering resources.¹⁰¹¹ The proposal by Cell C

⁸ Cell C submission, p 6.

⁹ Vodacom submission, p 3.

¹⁰

¹¹ Electronic Communications Act no.36 of 2005 s68(1)(a)(i)

would total the recycling period to 210 days. This is inconsistent with the objectives of the Regulations, viz, to ensure the efficient use of numbering resources.

4.1.6. In response to Vodacom's submission, this submission is read within the context of its other submission (see par 4.2.1 of this Reasons document) that the Authority revise the inactivity period contemplated in sub regulation 6A (3) from sixty (60) days to a minimum of ninety (90) days. Based on Vodacom's submission, the recycling period would total 127 days + the licensee's discretionary extended period which is an unknown variable. Vodacom's alternative to the 120-recycling period contemplated in the Regulations is essentially one of an undefined period. This is contrary to Vodacom's submission that its proposal would significantly improve number recycling efficiency and enhance the availability of the numbering resource.

4.1.7. In response to Vodacom's request for clarification on whether the a mobile number can be reactivated whilst in quarantine, it is the Authority considered view that it is inconsistent with the objectives standardization and regulation of the recycling period.

4.2. **Insertion of regulation 6A (3) in the Regulations**

4.2.1. Vodacom recommends that the Authority extend the inactivity period to a minimum of 90 days (from the proposed 60 days), before the start of the 30 days grace period. This will result in a total of 120 days of inactivity before the number is quarantined.¹²

4.2.2. FNB Connect seeks clarification on how the notification can be sent and reach the subscriber if the sim card does not have any revenue generating activity and is not in use.¹³

¹² Vodacom submission, p3.

¹³ FNB Connect submission, p1.

Decision

4.2.3. Vodacom's proposal of an inactivity period of a minimum of ninety (90) days effectively implies that a licensee could opt to extend the inactivity period beyond 90 days where therein lies the licensee's discretionary extended period which, as stated above, is an unknown variable and will produce an undefined inactivity period that would be inconsistent across licensees. The Authority has thus opted to retain the inactivity period to a defined 60 days.

4.2.4. In response to FNB Connect, the notification contemplated in sub-regulation 6A(3) precedes the deactivation of the number as prescribed by sub-regulation 6A(4). Thus, the number in question remains active on the network to receive the notification.

4.3. Insertion of regulation 6A (3C) in the Regulations

4.3.1. Vodacom proposes a minimum set of standardised reminders to ensure consistency among licensees. It proposes reminders on day 1 and day 29 of the grace period. This will allow licensees the flexibility to include additional discretionary reminders, aligned to the responsiveness of their customer base.¹⁴

Decision

4.3.2. In response to Vodacom's submission, the Authority accepted the Vodacom's recommendation for a minimum of two reminders to the subscriber.

4.4. Insertion of regulation 6A (3B) in the Regulations

4.4.1. MTN recommends that the provision be revised to re-incorporate the term "at a cost" thus allowing operators to charge a nominal fee for the exemption from deactivation. MTN proposes the following

¹⁴ Vodacom submission, p 2.

revision:

*"(3B) In the event a subscriber anticipates that their assigned mobile number may be inactive for more than sixty (60) consecutive calendar days, licensees must provide an option, **at a cost**, for the subscriber to apply for an exemption from sub regulation (3) and retain use of the mobile number."*¹⁵

4.4.2. MTN submits that the rationale for the retention of "inactive numbers" should incur a cost to subscribers is two-fold, namely:

4.4.2.1. Network operators incur a cost, albeit minimal, to host a subscriber's number and related profile. These costs are offset by virtue of the subscriber making active use of the operator's network and engaging in revenue generating activities. Absent of any activity, the network operator still has a cost in terms of licence fees that should be taken into account; and

4.4.2.2. Furthermore, a free service has the potential for abuse, allowing subscribers to circumvent the 90-day inactivity period and creating a 183-day inactivity period. Should this behaviour become widespread, the inability to recover numbers to be recycled would increase thereby putting further demand on the scarce national numbering resources.¹⁶

4.4.3. FNB Connect similarly also seeks clarification in respect of a reasonable cost in keeping the number active. It submits that there may be possible abuses of sub regulation 6A(3B) in the absence of a reasonable cost being charged to keep the number active.¹⁷

¹⁵ MTN submission p 6.

¹⁶ MTN submission, p 7.

¹⁷ FNB Connect submission, p 1.

Decision

4.4.4. The proposed provision is aligned with the current inactivity rules licensees are applying at no cost. As one licensee stated in the public hearings that it is cheaper to resuscitate their current customer base than acquiring new customers.

4.4.5. In the submissions, most licensees recommended for a longer inactivity period beyond the proposed 90-days, which is indicative that the cost mentioned by MTN to retain customers is negligible as compared to the cost of acquiring new customers. Therefore, the provision for no cost is retained.

4.5. Insertion of regulation 6A (3C) in the Regulations

4.5.1. Telkom proposes an amendment to sub-regulation 6A(3C) to confirm that 183 days is an upper limit, which should not be exceeded when exempting a subscriber from deactivation and proposes the following text:

*"(3C) The exemption in terms of sub regulation (3B) is valid **for not more than** 183 calendar days from the date of activation."*¹⁸

4.5.2. Vodacom submits that the development of flexible, tiered and paid retention products that serve both customer needs and business models may be limited by this exemption's fixed duration. Vodacom recommends that the Authority allow licensees to introduce multiple exemption periods (e.g. 6, 12 or 24 months), at various price points. This, it submits, will allow customers the flexibility to choose exemption options that better match their needs, while still disincentivising number hoarding.¹⁹

Decision

4.5.3. There should not be a limitation on the option of the subscriber for

¹⁸ Telkom submission, p 4.

¹⁹ Vodacom submission, p 4.

the exemption or retention of their number. It is evident that subscribers vary in the use and enjoyment of their assigned number. Regulation 3(B) designates the type of a subscriber who will be protected by this provision. It also allows for timeous planning to secure the number for a specific period thus limiting complaints to the Authority for the withdrawal of the notice of deactivation.

4.6. General

- 4.6.1. Telkom submits that in the event the Authority resolve to adopt the proposed 30-day quarantine period, Telkom will require an implementation or transition period to implement this change. Telkom therefore requests the Authority to adopt a 6-month implementation period for the new regulations, after its publication.²⁰
- 4.6.2. Cell C submits that it would require time for technical development, implementation and testing for the notification activities, testing of the periodic reminders and testing of the application process for the exemption from the deactivation of the number by the subscriber.²¹
- 4.6.3. MTN proposes that the Regulations come into effect at a future date from the date of publication. It submits that three months would be a reasonable period to enable operators to make the necessary changes required to comply with the amended provisions of Regulation 6A.²²

Decision

- 4.6.4. In order to give effect to the amendments of the Regulations and allow for the necessary configurations of network systems to comply with the provisions in question, the Authority has opted to provide a transitional period of six months from the date of publication of these Regulations.

²⁰ Telkom submission, p 5.

²¹ Cell C submission, p 7.

²² MTN submission, pp 7-8.

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