

News story: Tough new measures to end the blight of nuisance calls

Rogue companies making unsolicited calls related to personal injury claims could now be fined up to £500,000

New powers coming into force today will see consumers given the choice to 'opt-in' to receive these calls. People being harassed by nuisance calls will be given new powers to stop them from today.

Cold calls offering to help claim compensation for mis-sold sell payment protection insurance (PPI) will be banned if the claimant has not chosen to 'opt-in' to receive them.

Previously people had to 'opt-out' of receiving such calls by registering with the free Telephone Preference Service or withdraw their consent while on the call.

However, the new powers will force the caller to make the necessary checks to make sure they have the recipient's consent before calling.

Those offering unwanted claims management services could be fined as much as half a million pounds by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) if they breach the rules.

The Financial Conduct Authority [highlighted](#) that in the last 12 months, approximately 2.7 billion unsolicited calls, texts and emails were made to the UK's adult population offering to help them make a claim. This includes calls about recent accidents or mis-sold PPI. This is equivalent to approximately 50 calls, texts or emails being made to every member of the adult population.

Minister for Digital Margot James said:

Today we are one step closer to ending the menace of nuisance calls. Our new laws mean people will now have to give consent to receive calls and have the power to choose where they seek compensation for personal injury claims or mis sold payment protection insurance. This is a big boost for the Information Commissioner's Office and will help them crack down on the cold call sharks.

Individuals will be able to opt-in to receiving these calls by consenting to be contacted by claims companies when enquiring about settling a claim, or when seeking claims advice.

These new measures together with the strengthened Data Protection Act, will curb the number of nuisance calls received by consumers.

If they receive nuisance calls they can [report](#) it to the ICO who will investigate and take action against those responsible.

Andy Curry, Enforcement Group Manager at the Information Commissioner's Office, said:

Millions of nuisance calls, texts and emails are made every year in the UK and can cause real distress to people.

This amendment to the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations will increase our ability to take action against those companies who deliberately flout the law and cause real upset and harm.

The government has already made it easier for regulators to fine those breaching direct marketing rules, forced companies to display their number when calling customers and increased fines for wrongdoers.

On top of this the government has also: * Consulted on new measures to fine bosses of companies which plague people with unsolicited nuisance calls up to half a million pounds under new proposals to make them personally liable if their firm breaks the law;

- Introduced a measure in the Digital Economy Act 2017 to make it a requirement for the Information Commissioner to issue a statutory code of practice on direct marketing;
- Amended the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR) to require all direct marketing callers to provide Caller Line Identification;
- Lowered the legal threshold at which the ICO may impose a monetary penalty on organisations breaching PECR (a previous requirement to prove that the call caused alarm or distress was removed);
- Made it easier for the ICO to more effectively share information with Ofcom in relation to nuisance calls through an amendment to the Communications Act 2003;
- Given the ICO the power to issue monetary penalty notices up to £500,000 for serious breaches of PECR;
- Introduced a ban on cold calling in relation to claims management services through the Financial Claims and Guidance Act 2018, except where the receiver has consented to such calls being made to them. The 2018 Act also includes powers to ban cold calls from pension providers;

and

- Given £500,000 to Trading Standards to help install call blocking devices installed in the homes of vulnerable people.

Notes to editors

For more information call the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport press office on 020 7211 2210.

Press release: FCO Minister for Asia and the Pacific visits New Zealand

Britain and New Zealand are set to work together more closely and deeply than ever before as the UK government establishes a greater diplomatic presence in the Pacific region and opens diplomatic missions in Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu.

As well as enhancing existing joint-working on climate security which was the focus of the recent Pacific Islands Forum, Britain and New Zealand are working on tackling threats to international security and championing free trade. Preparatory work is also underway to lay the groundwork for a UK-NZ Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Speaking while on his visit to New Zealand today, Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said:

New Zealand is an obvious partner of choice for us in our work with the Pacific islands to tackle climate change and marine plastic pollution. But our co-operation goes far beyond these issues as we share common values and both believe the international rules-based system affords the best opportunity for security, growth and sustainability.

Our posts in the Pacific region are a concrete demonstration of Britain's commitment to the region, and will allow us to engage with New Zealand in particular to tackle the effects of climate change, and bolster resilience in Pacific Island communities.

As well as opening posts in Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu, the UK is also expanding its presence in Fiji.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) is currently consulting on Free

Trade Agreements with New Zealand, as well as Australia, and the US, and also on accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which New Zealand is a member.

Speech: Secretary of State Speech to the British-Irish Association Annual Conference

Since 1972 the BIA has played a key role in bringing together politicians, civil servants, academics, business people, faith leaders, journalist, commentators and many more to promote dialogue and understanding throughout these islands and to try and shape a better future together.

So thank you for everything you have done and I am sure will continue to do in the years to come.

This is of course my first BIA conference since the Prime Minister asked me to take on the role of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in January, something that I had absolutely no hesitation in accepting.

And as Secretary of State, I know what an amazing place Northern Ireland is and what it has to offer.

Indeed, it's not surprising that nearly all of my predecessors look back on their time with huge affection, with a number regarding it as the most rewarding and important job they ever had in government.

So as I've gone out and about over the past nine months, meeting as many people as I can, it's impossible not to be struck by the warmth of the place. Its beauty, its spirit and, yes, its history but also its massive potential.

I've made a point of visiting with my family some of the great attractions that Northern Ireland has to offer: the Fermanagh lakes, the Giant's Causeway, the Titanic Visitor attraction, to name but a few. And each time they can't wait to come back for more.

So Northern Ireland is a very special place, and I believe one with a great future.

And this year of course we have been marking the 20th anniversary of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, an historic landmark in the history not just of Northern Ireland but of these islands as a whole.

It was, as I said in April, a triumph of politics over the previous decades of violence, division and despair.

Twenty years on it is perhaps easy for some to lose sight of the magnitude of what was achieved in 1998.

So let me spell some them out.

The constitutional position of Northern Ireland settled on the principle of consent.

The Irish constitution amended to reflect that fact.

Political institutions to accommodate and give expression to both the main traditions in Northern Ireland.

Strong new bodies to foster greater North-South and East-West co-operation.

Powerful protections for people's rights, culture and identities.

Reforms to make policing and the criminal justice system more accountable and acceptable across the community.

And of course the consequences of all of this: a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland that is in so many ways unrecognisable since the dark days of the troubles, notwithstanding the severe threat we continue to face from dissident republicans.

All of these gains were hard fought, the result of years of painstaking discussions and negotiations, and we should never forget just how precious they are or indeed shy away from making the case for the 1998 Agreement.

It is our duty to do whatever is necessary to protect and defend it, and that is what this Government will continue to do.

So let me reiterate for the avoidance of any doubt: the UK Government remains steadfast in its support for the Belfast Agreement, the bedrock on which the progress across the three interlocking relationships – within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and Ireland and between the UK and Ireland – has been made over the past twenty years.

We will do nothing that undermines this, including as the UK leaves the EU next March.

And over recent years Northern Ireland has continued to take many great steps forward, not least on the economy.

Unemployment, which in 2010 stood at just over 7 per cent, is now 3.8 per cent, one of the lowest figures on record and significantly below the EU average.

Meanwhile employment, at just over 69 per cent, is at near record levels. In all, 63,000 more people are in work in Northern Ireland today than in 2010 ... with nearly 19,000 new jobs in the past year. That's more people with the security of a regular pay packet for them and their families.

Average weekly earnings have grown at a faster rate in Northern Ireland than in any other UK region.

There are over 12,000 more businesses than was the case 8 years ago.

Over 900 overseas companies have invested in Northern Ireland, making it the most popular location for FDI outside of London and the South East – the highest number of FDI jobs per head of any part of the UK.

Since 2011, exports are up by 11 per cent, and external sales, including to the rest of the UK, are up 18 per cent.

Tourism is booming, as anyone who has seen the cruise ships docked in Belfast this year will testify.

We have more people staying for longer than ever before, with impressive new hotels to accommodate them and more in the pipeline.

And of course next year the eyes of the world will once again be on Northern Ireland as the oldest and most famous golfing championship in the world, the Open, is played at Royal Portrush.

None of this has happened by accident. It has been the result of the hard work of the people of Northern Ireland, with productivity increasing in Northern Ireland at a faster rate than in any other UK region.

And, I might add, a fiscally responsible UK Government prepared to take the necessary measures and pursue policies at a national level to allow business and enterprise to thrive across the whole of the UK, with the result that we now have the lowest levels of unemployment across the country than at any time in over 40 years.

A UK Government that despite severe pressures on public expenditure continues to recognise Northern Ireland's special circumstances through generous support in the Block Grant.

We have maintained public spending in Northern Ireland at around 20 per cent per head higher than the UK average.

Over the current spending review period UK Government financial support to the Northern Ireland Executive has increased by 5 per cent in real terms.

The Prime Minister's recent pledge of an additional £20.5 billion to the NHS by 2024, which means an extra £760 million a year by 2023-24 for Northern Ireland under the Barnett formula.

We've helped hard working people: some 745,000 people in Northern Ireland will have gained by an average of £182 as a result of our increases to the personal allowance and higher rate tax threshold.

We've increased the National Living Wage to £7.83, delivering a £600 annual pay rise to full-time workers in Northern Ireland.

And we've committed substantial additional security funding to help the PSNI tackle the continuing terrorist threat: £160 million over this spending review period and £230 million in the last one.

These are just a few examples of how Northern Ireland has shared in our national economic recovery in recent years, and how Northern Ireland benefits from the strength and security of being part of the world's fifth largest economy.

Yet for all the successes there are significant challenges too.

Economic growth in the past year has been flat, lower than the UK as a whole and in Ireland.

Rates of economic inactivity remain higher than in other parts of the UK.

Hospital waiting lists are longer than in England and are getting worse.

There are other examples of where a current lack of ministerial decision making is holding Northern Ireland back.

Corporation tax has yet to be devolved, meaning that Northern Ireland remains at an economic disadvantage when it comes to competing for foreign direct investment with Ireland.

Construction projects worth up to £2bn are at risk due to the lack of key planning decisions, including plans for a new £30m quay for cruise ships, a new £175m transport hub for Belfast, a £280m power plant, the North-South electricity interconnector worth around £200m and a £50m office block at Belfast Harbour.

Strategies for building a stronger society and a shared future, as well as tackling paramilitary activity, have lost momentum.

And of course while I continue to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests and needs are represented at the heart of Government, Northern Ireland would be better placed to meet the challenges and opportunities of Brexit with an Executive in place.

In the absence of a devolved Executive we have brought forward measures at Westminster to ensure good governance and stability.

In July the Government took a budget through Westminster to enable the continued delivery of public services

And before the summer recess I announced plans to bring forward legislation enabling me to make key public appointments, for example to a reconstituted Policing Board.

But none of this is any substitute for devolution – a locally elected Assembly and Executive taking decisions on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland.

And while I am not saying that a devolved government would solve all the problems I've just mentioned overnight, I am convinced that it could make a real difference to people's lives and helping to unlock even further the undoubted and enormous potential that Northern Ireland has to offer.

The absolute priority, therefore, for this Government – as I know it is the Irish Government – is to see a restoration of the devolved power sharing institutions at Stormont, and all the other related bodies, at the earliest opportunity.

And yesterday in the House of Commons I set out a plan to try help bring that about.

I announced that I intend to bring forward legislation that will provide for a limited and prescribed period in which there will be no legal obligation to set a date for an election.

Importantly, during this time an Executive may be formed at any point without the requirement for further legislation. This will provide the opportunity to re-establish political talks aimed at restoring the Executive as soon as possible.

The legislation I intend to introduce after the party conference recess will also include provisions to give greater clarity and certainty to enable NI departments to continue to take decisions in Northern Ireland in the public interest and to ensure the continued delivery of public services.

I intend to consult parties in Northern Ireland over how this might best be done.

I also intend, therefore, to use the next few weeks to engage in further discussions with the parties and the Irish Government, in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach with the intention of establishing a basis for moving into more formal political dialogue that leads to a restoration of the institutions.

Finally, I also announced that I would be bringing forward a reduction in MLA pay.

I believe that the people of Northern Ireland want to see a restoration of their political institutions and that is what this Government is committed to achieving.

Stable and effective devolved government is the right thing for Northern Ireland.

And I am in no doubt that it is best for the Union.

Media queries should be directed to Bob Honey, NIO Communications Team, on 07956 579 286

News story: Civil news: 2018 contract interim arrangements end 7 September

It is important for providers to accept their 2018 Standard Civil Contracts by 7 September 2018.

Providers may still execute their contracts later than 8 September but will not be able to open new matters until they do so.

We made interim arrangements, which were published on 31 August 2018, to allow providers to continue working without having accepted contracts.

These arrangements only applied to providers:

- advised by us that their contracts have been successfully verified but who have been unable to execute their contract in Contracted Work and Administration (CWA)
- who have successfully completed verification but are yet to be assigned account numbers for new offices Details of the interim or 'contingency' arrangements and a further update on 3 September can be downloaded on the 2018 civil contracts tender page.

Civil contract work from 8 September 2018

From 8 September 2018 all providers must have a 2018 Standard Civil Contract which they have accepted in CWA to be able to undertake work.

Almost 1,400 contracts have been uploaded into CWA with a small number of contracts being uploaded on 7 September where issues have been resolved. However, there are 100 still to be accepted, with some of these having been uploaded over two weeks ago.

Outstanding issues

We are continuing to resolve outstanding issues and upload contracts for acceptance. Such outstanding issues include where organisations:

- have submitted information for verification after the initial deadline of 20 July and in some cases close to the final deadline of 31 August
- are yet to provide compliant AC1 forms to enable account numbers to be assigned

We will continue to contact organisations that still have outstanding issues. This will be done on a case by case basis.

Further information

[Civil 2018 contracts tender page](#) – to download details of interim arrangements

[CWA detailed user guides](#) – for ‘contract acceptance user guide’

Speech: Eyes on Idlib

Thank you very much Madam President. Thank you to the Special Envoy. Thank you very much to John Ging, and thank you Minister for being with us today.

This is a terrible situation and I think what we’re hearing today is very strong support for the primacy of the political process, but also a very strong appeal for there not to be an all-out military offensive against civilians in Idlib and I’d just like to echo those two things right up front before I go into the bulk of my remarks. And I think the French Representative put it very well when he talked about the importance of this issue for international peace and security.

I wanted to begin again by thanking the Special Envoy and his team for everything they do and obviously OCHA. We’re very grateful to those humanitarian organizations and workers who are making tireless efforts in the most difficult circumstances to provide aid to people across Idlib. And once again we’re reminded of the importance of cross-border assistance as a critical lifeline for civilians who otherwise cannot be reached.

We very much support the urgent diplomatic efforts being made by Turkey and the UN to deal with Idlib, both on the civilian side and on the humanitarian side. The fate of nearly 3 million people is at stake and we would very much appreciate, Madam President having a briefing on Astana. I suspect that’s not possible today, but if it were possible to get a briefing from DPA, we hope – indeed we urge – Russia and Iran to use their influence to live up to their commitments to uphold the de-escalation arrangements they have agreed and to reach a negotiated way forward with Turkey. And if there is anything that my government can do to assist in that process then we will happily do it.

On the military situation, like other speakers, we’re very concerned at the reports in the last few days of dozens of Russian air strikes against areas of Idlib. Local monitoring organizations have reported 38 civilian casualties as a result of these strikes on 4 September alone. I’ve already said that nearly 3 million civilians are at risk of their lives in Idlib. The UN estimates that there are at a maximum 15,000 fighters for the terrorist groups, which is 0.5 percent of the total population. So we too in Britain

know what it's like to suffer from terrorism, but those figures are very small, as the Minister said about the doctrine of proportionality, discrimination and precaution.

The Secretary-General has been clear that the systematic use of indiscriminate weapons in populated areas may amount to war crimes. We should be crystal clear about this. There are more babies in Idlib than there are terrorists. And I think that should give those engaging in military action pause for thought. Last time we discussed this issue, Madam President, the military side, we were in the Consultations Room and then I read out our understanding of which Syrian military units are in the vicinity of Idlib. And echoing the Secretary-General's call, I'd like to read these units out in the Chamber and I'd like to make very clear that if there is a major offensive against civilians with massive civilian casualties in Idlib, then these are the people that the international community will be holding accountable for those abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Our understanding is that the overall head of the Syrian army is the Minister of Defence General Ali Abdullah Ayyoub, but the primary unit deployed to the Idlib area are the Fourth Armoured Division to the west side of Idlib and Mahir-al-Asad is the overall commander of that unit, but we believe that Major General Ali Mahmoud is the Deputy Commander. We understand the Republican Guard are probably deployed to the east side around Abu Duhr and their commander is Major General Talal Mahkluf. Tiger Forces are likely deployed to the southeast side and their commander is Brigadier General Suhayl 'Tiger' Hasan. And then we think that there are also 2nd Corps and 5th Corps units in the area and the commander we know about for that is Major General Aous Aslan. So as I say Madam President there is a major offensive against Idlib. Then, in addition to the Syrian regime, these commanders, these units will be held accountable by the international community.

If I may, Madam President I'd like to say a word about the aid package for Idlib. The United Kingdom has announced an additional aid package to ensure that the most vulnerable can get medical treatment, food, water and support that they desperately need. \$15 million of new aid includes support medical centres and mobile clinics and psychological support. And we are also backing a new technology which provides civilians with early warnings in the hope of saving lives in communities bombarded by airstrikes. Thanks to this we believe we've been able to warn more than 2 million people and to have reduced casualties by up to 27 percent in areas and the heavy bombardment. But really donors should not have to do this, Madam President. Donors are not a substitute for the Syrian regime with Russian support stopping their campaign against their own civilians.

And I'd like to conclude by just saying once again that we support Turkey's efforts to reach a peaceful solution and avert a humanitarian catastrophe. We call on Russia to do more to restrain the Syrian authorities from attacking Idlib and to bring about de-escalation and we call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law.

I won't touch on chemical weapons because we dealt with that in this chamber yesterday, but I did want to end by echoing what the Equatorial Guinea Representative said about the primary importance of the political process

bringing an end to this cruel war. Thank you Madam President.