

## Commission to tackle international roaming fees

National Consumer Commissioner Mamodupi Mohlala yesterday revealed that the commission has set its sights on tackling the high cost of international roaming for cellphone users. Briefing the National Assembly's Trade and Industry Portfolio Committee, Mohlala said the commission would seek the advice of experts around international roaming fees.



The commission is currently looking into cellphone and internet service providers that provide pre-paid data but do not allow consumers to carry over unused data to the next month.

The commission had sent a number of service providers a letter warning them that this current practice was in breach of Section 63 of the Consumer Protection Act.

Mohlala said operator iBurst had already amended its agreements after it received the letter.

She said the commission had already held meetings with MTN, FNB connect and G Connect and would meet with Vodacom and Cell C soon over the matter.

Among other future investigations, the commission is also looking at running a nationwide inspection of businesses in rural areas and townships around those returns policies for goods, allowed for under the Consumer Protection Act.

Since its launch in March last year, the commission has received 9709 complaints to date and 4 506 requests for advice from consumers, said Mohlala. In all 4124 complaints have been resolved, while the resolution is still at 42.5% of all cases.

At present there are 14 matters are before the Consumer Tribunal

## Challenges

Since the end of the third quarter last year, the number of consent agreements increased from a cumulative number of 878 to 2301 cases, with a further 301 compliance notices having been issued so far.

Mohlala said despite handling 8000 calls per month, 20 000 dropped calls or those calls not picked up - the commission still does not have a "full call centre".

She said each of the commission's five call centre agents were expected to handle an expected 5000 calls per month.

Other challenges the commission faces include hiring and retaining skilled staff, a shortage of computers and the absence of a fully-fledged case management system.

The commission recently recruited eight legal advisors and is considering whether to beef up its legal team further, as outside lawyers can cost up to R75 000 a day, said Mohala.

Mohlala mentioned that consumers attending workshops would often ask the commission's officials what their political views are, when the commission is there to serve all South African consumers.

The commission has also held workshops in various provinces with stakeholders such as NGOs and business chambers and with rural communities and consumers, including those on trains, stokvels, schools, the IEC and malls.

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