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Dear Tom

A zero tolerance approach in order to end nuisance calls

Our national telephone network is inundated with nuisance calls, turning what should be a means of bringing us together into an instrument of mass harassment – which we pay for. People are more and more angry that their fixed and, increasingly their mobile, phone lines are being used against them. At the best it is a huge aggravation, at worse it is a doorway to financial and emotional exploitation of the vulnerable.

It needs to stop. I recognise the positive measures in the DCMS Action Plan¹ such as raising of fines and enabling better data sharing between Ofcom and the ICO.

But I fear these measures will barely stem the tide never mind reverse it.

The criminals have automated the generation of nuisance calls, and we have not automated the response. Detection, reporting, investigating and conviction of the gangs behind nuisance calls remains stuck in the last century whilst they race ahead.

As a telecoms engineer for twenty years who has written the software and built the circuits behind call routing, I know that much more can be done. I believe we can end the scourge of mass nuisance calls if we can bring industry and regulators together to achieve a co-ordinated and comprehensive zero tolerance approach, one which could include:

1. Automated reporting of a nuisance call – for example dialling 1971 identifies the last number that called as a nuisance call to your service provider.
2. Automated identification of the caller party – routing software should be able to do this

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299140/Action_Plan.pdf

3. Automated collating of nuisance calls – for example more than 100 complaints and the calling number and owner is automatically referred to Ofcom, the ICO and the police
4. Automatic victim redress – for example 10p per call which you can choose to donate
5. Automatic nuisance call patterns identification without victim reporting though Big Data type network traffic analysis.

I am writing to the four major Telco's², Ofcom, the ICO to challenge Government, regulators and industry to explain why we cannot take this action to put an end to the scourge of nuisance calls. If costs are considered to be too great then let's at least agree that. At the same time my colleague Yvonne Fovargue, shadow Consumer Affairs Minister, is addressing the issues around customer data and nuisance calls, including on-selling, consumer consent and consistency of consent tick boxes

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



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Shadow Minister for Culture & the Digital Economy

² BT Retail, Virgin Media, TalkTalk, Sky,