

Nuisance calls and texts: what can be done?

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MIIT ITU seminar, ICT Regulation in New Era
Chongqing, 15 July 2016

Information sources

- [Study](#) (published February 2015) for StepChange debt charity, covers Australia, Germany, India and Pakistan, UK, USA in detail and Canada, Netherlands and Norway in outline. [Appendix volume](#) contains details.
- Continuing work with UK voluntary groups and regulators; [briefing](#) and [blogs](#) published by LSE Media Policy Project.
- Thanks to all collaborators.

The challenges of unsolicited calls and texts: a complex picture

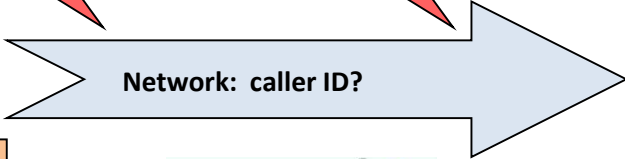
Bodies involved	Roles	Current costs and benefits	Cost/benefit balance
Companies behind campaigns; call centres.	<i>Originating</i> unsolicited calls and messages.	Low cost to call, benefit from sales .	Strongly positive.
Network operators and service providers.	<i>Carrying and delivering</i> unsolicited calls and messages	Benefit from traffic revenues, costs from preventive measures and user disaffection.	Unknown but reducing?
Consumers and businesses.	<i>Receiving</i> unsolicited calls and messages.	High cost of wasted time, low benefit from calls of interest. Extra cost for self-protection.	Strongly negative.
Regulators and legislators.	<i>Controlling</i> behaviours.	Costs of complaints, criticism and bad publicity.	Negative.

Actions to help reduce detriment



Block at source

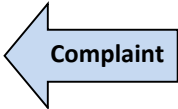
Block at destination



- Fewer calls
- Own screening
- No outlay
- Handling gambits
- Outlet for annoyance
- Complain

Profitability Data Connectivity

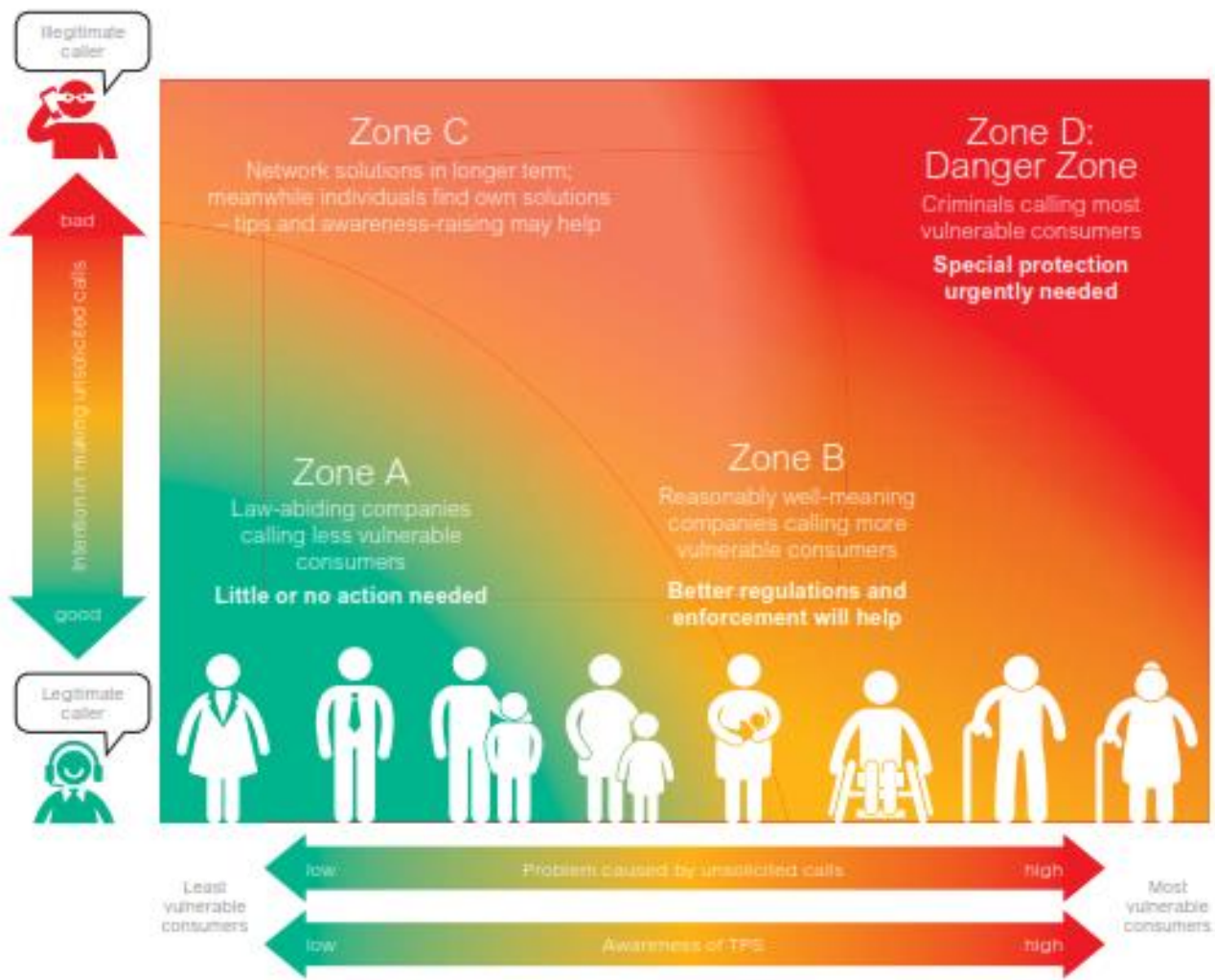
Legal or not penalised Availability



High level findings

- **Similar and often growing problems all over**, including developing countries (mainly SMS spam).
- Some countries suffer worse than others, but lack of statistics (and absence of comparable statistics) makes **comparison hard**.
- **Good practices** in some countries could be considered for wider adoption.
- **International co-operation** is key to progress.

Two problem dimensions

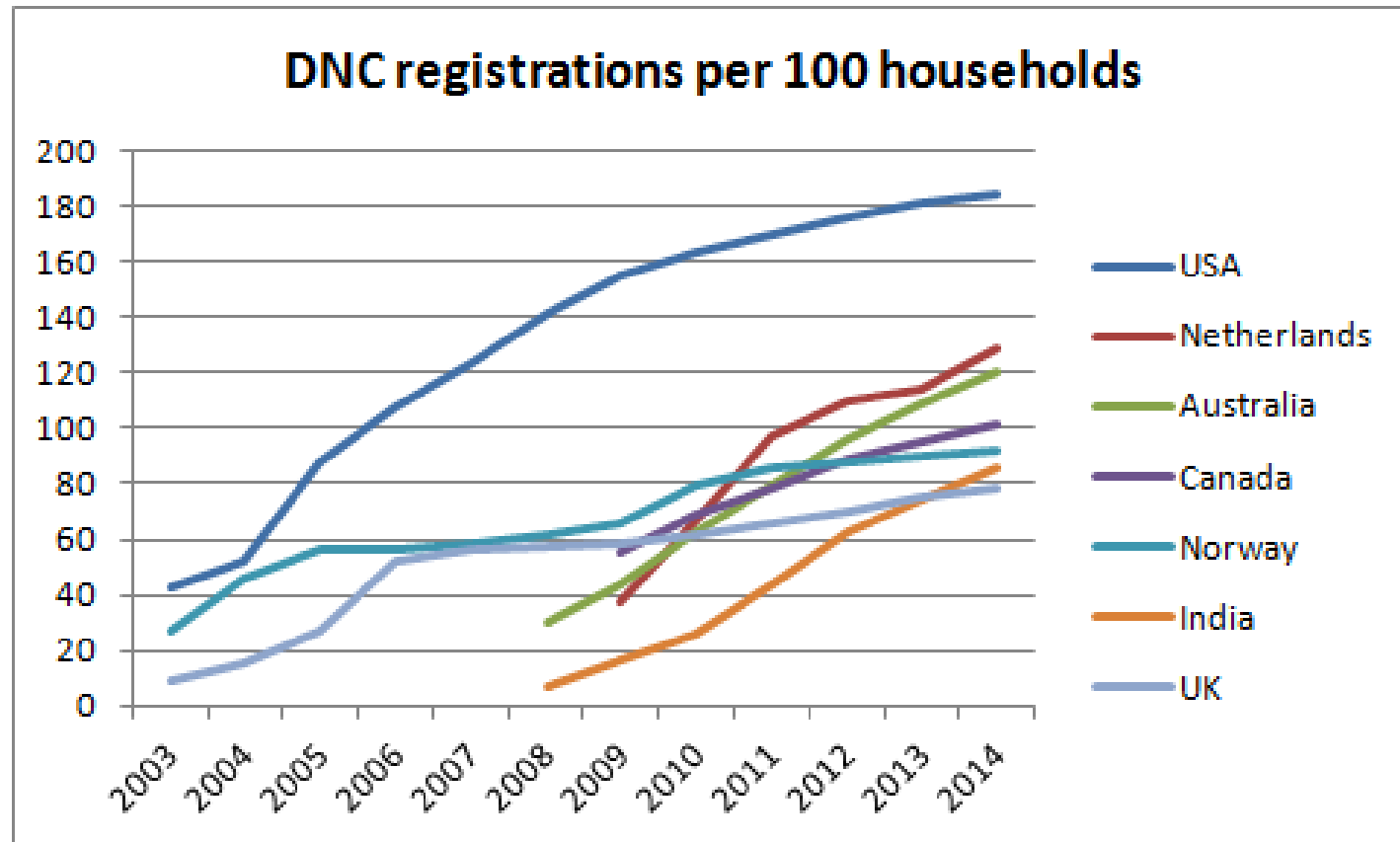


Robinson staircase

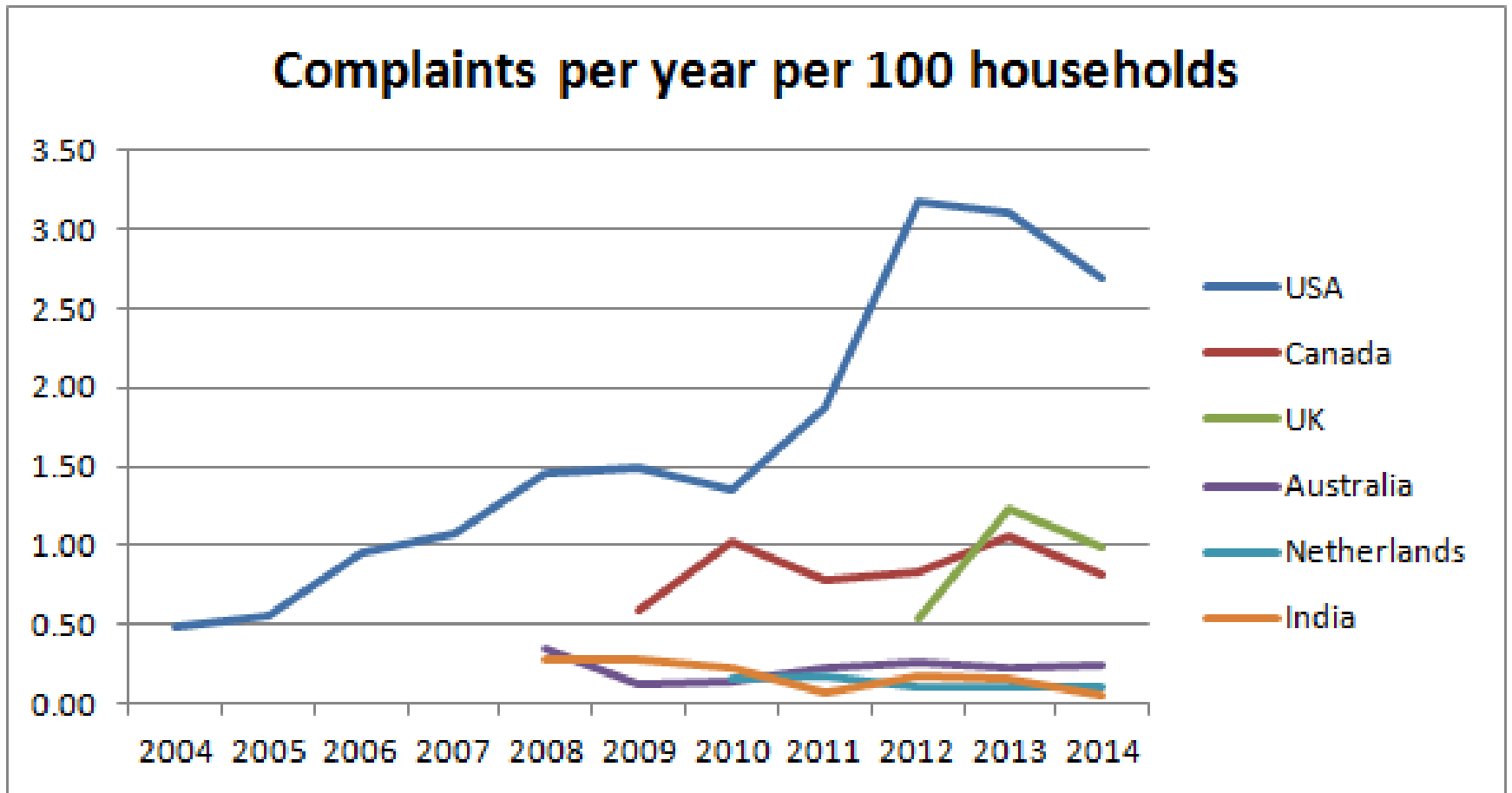


Economy	Year	Authority	Scope of authority
UK	1999	Ofcom, ICO	Communications, privacy
USA	2003	FTC, FCC	Consumer protection, communications
Spain	2003	AEPD	Privacy
Germany	2004	BNetzA	Networks, communications
Ireland	2005	Comreg, ODPC	Communications, privacy
Australia	2006	ACMA	Communications
India	2007	TRAI	Communications
Canada	2008	CRTC	Communications
Hong Kong (China)	2009	OFCA	Communications
Netherlands	2009	ACM	Consumer protection
Pakistan	2009	PTA	Communications
Italy	2010	MED, GPDP	Communications, privacy
France	2011	MEF	Consumer protection
Belgium	2012	SPFE	Economy, disputes
Singapore	2014	PDPC	Privacy

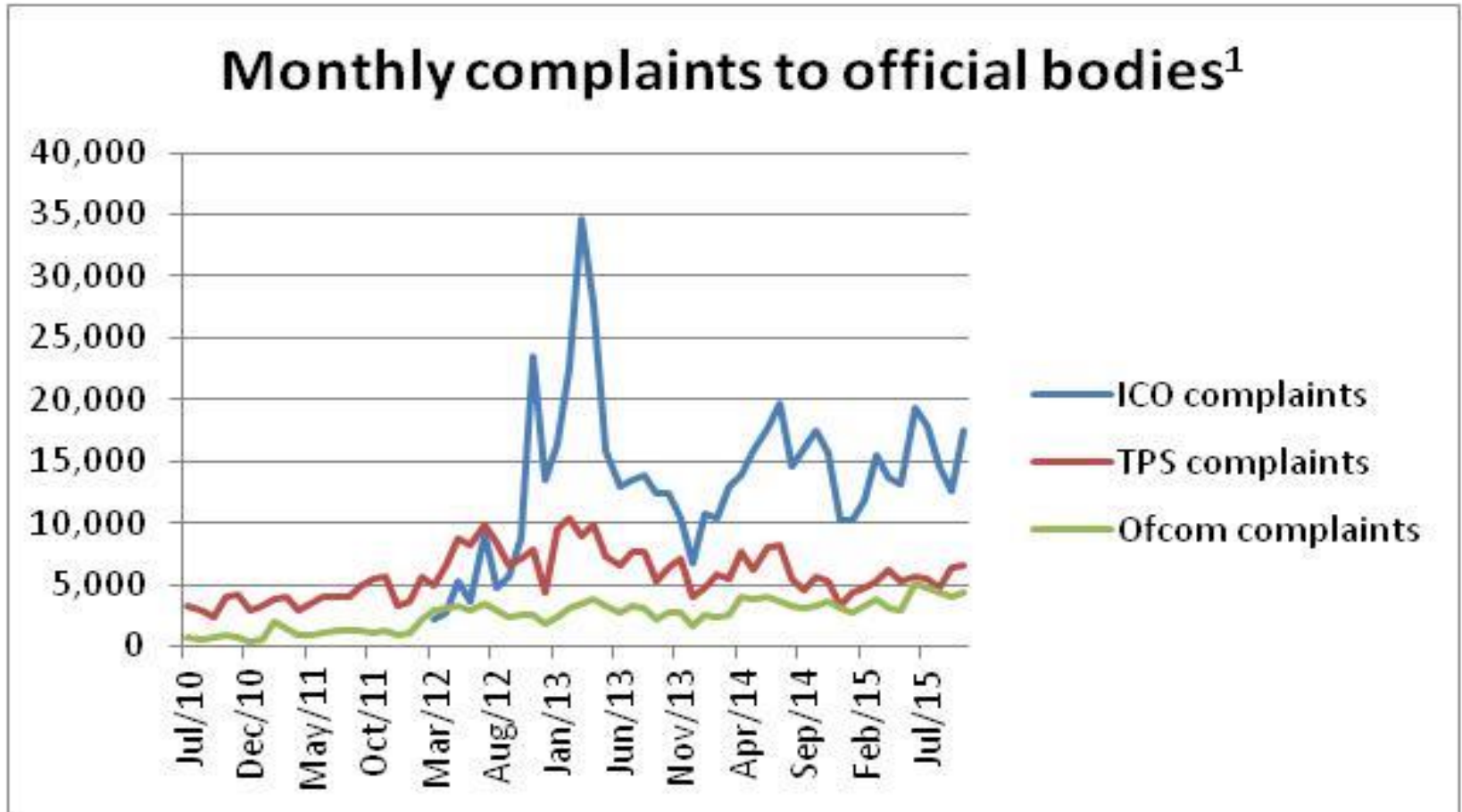
Do Not Call registrations



Complaint statistics



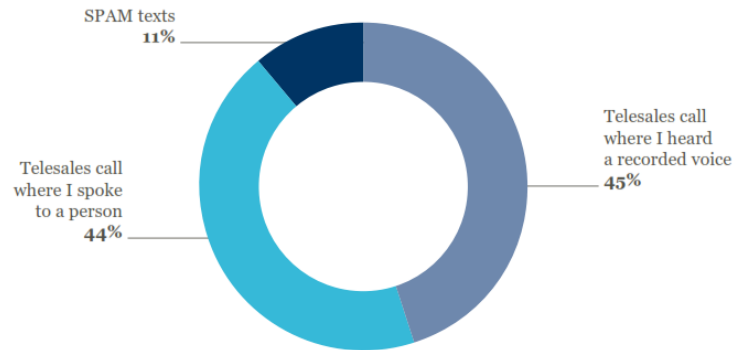
Complaints in the UK



1 From June 2015 onwards, complaints to Ofcom include complaints made to Which?

Statistics for the UK

Nature of telesales and SPAM texts reported



From ICO Annual Report 2015-6

- Complaints to ICO 2014-5: **180,188**; 2015-6: **161,190**

- Ofcom panel diary research shows 80-85% of fixed line customers have reported receiving nuisance calls over past 4 years, averaging 2 to 3 such calls a week (more for people who are not working). Little change in overall level since 2013.

- Ofcom omnibus research shows 59% of adults with fixed lines and 44% of adults with mobiles getting unsolicited calls or texts.

Some recent new measures in the UK

- Technology:
 - 7726 (“SPAM”) short code for forwarding spam texts
 - Mobile network detection and blocking of spam texts
 - Some government funding in 2015 for new technology ideas, and call blockers for vulnerable people
 - BT planning network detection of nuisance calls, offering customers the option of blocking them
- Consumer:
 - Improved consumer information, e.g. videos from [ICO](#) or [Ofcom](#)
 - Text service for registering mobiles with TPS (do not call list)
- Regulation:
 - Recent regulation that telemarketers must show valid Caller ID
 - New Digital Economy Bill will make a Direct Marketing Code of Practice obligatory, and strengthen ICO’s fining powers
 - Ofcom likely to broaden its approach to “persistent misuse”

Worth thinking about – each country

- Plan **next step up Robinson staircase** (based on proper study of those making and receiving calls).
- Simple regulatory structure with **adequate resource** (Canada).
- Relate fines to **severity of offence**, unconstrained by putting firm out of business (USA).
- **Restrict validity of contracts** made over the phone (Netherlands, Norway).
- **Boost consumer awareness** of DNC option (India).
- **Advanced low cost network blocking** options (France) and easy complaints (under development).

Worth thinking about - together

- Share statistical metadata, to enable **meaningful comparisons** between countries.
- Measure **incidence of unwanted calls** as well as complaints (as in UK).
- Joint study of enforcement focus – weigh **probability of detection** vs **consequences if detected**.
- **More collaboration** on caller ID, international investigations and enforcement, honeypots, etc.

Conclusion

- Thanks for your time and attention.
- Comments/questions welcome – any time today.
- And do get in touch later if you want to discuss any of this – cbm@antelope.org.uk.