

ICASA investigates mobile data competition

South Africa's Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA) has welcomed the publishing last month by the Independent Communications Authority of SA (ICASA) of a formal notice of its intention to conduct an inquiry into competition in the provision of mobile broadband services.



Source: pixabay.com

According to ISPA, this is a process that everyone should get excited about.

“This investigation cuts to the heart of the cost to communicate in South Africa and - together with the merging of the communications-focused government ministries – is the best ICT industry news that came out of 2018,” says ISPA regulatory advisor, Dominic Cull.

This will be a similar process to the inquiry which led to regulation of voice call termination rates. An inquiry into these rates led to massive reductions in wholesale rates charged between operators with a knock-on effect on pricing to consumers for voice communications.

Now ICASA is investigating taking similar measures for mobile data.

“*This is perhaps the most important regulatory process that ICASA has ever undertaken, and it should have the support of all South Africans. Everybody who cares about or feels the cost to communicate should take an interest in this process and participate where they can.*” ”

Complicated process

There is a complicated legal process to be followed, with ICASA expecting to finish its work and publish final regulations by the end of March 2020.

The first step in the process is for ICASA to gather information through a questionnaire and meetings with licensees. Next year a discussion document will be published for comment and public hearings. This will be followed by a findings document and, if ICASA finds that it should use its power to stimulate competition in mobile broadband markets, draft regulations.

“The commencement of this process is most welcome. It is ICASA which has the real power in law to do something about mobile data pricing. If ICASA finds that there is a failure of competition in a mobile broadband market, it can impose conditions on licensees found to be dominant in that market which will have real impact on how much South Africans pay for their mobile data.”

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