

**BILL C-37: AN ACT TO AMEND
THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT**

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LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF BILL C-37

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Bill Stage	Date
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First Reading: 13 December 2004

Referred to
Committee: 7 February 2005

Committee Report: 13 June 2005

Report Stage and
Second Reading:

Third Reading:

SENATE

Bill Stage	Date
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First Reading:

Second Reading:

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Third Reading:

Royal Assent:

Statutes of Canada

N.B. Any substantive changes in this Legislative Summary which have been made since the preceding issue are indicated in **bold print**.

Legislative history by Peter Niemczak

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BILL C-37: AN ACT TO AMEND
THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT*

BACKGROUND

Bill C-37, An Act to amend the Telecommunications Act, was introduced in the House of Commons and given first reading on 13 December 2004. It was referred to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology on 7 February 2005.

This bill addresses unsolicited telecommunications, known as telemarketing calls, in Canada.

A. The Problem

Many Canadians consider telemarketing calls to be irritating and do not wish to receive them. According to a poll cited by Industry Canada, 97% of Canadians claim to have a negative reaction to such calls.⁽¹⁾

* Notice: For clarity of exposition, the legislative proposals set out in the bill described in this legislative summary are stated as if they had already been adopted or were in force. It is important to note, however, that bills may be amended during their consideration by the House of Commons and Senate, and have no force or effect unless and until they are passed by both Houses of Parliament, receive Royal Assent, and come into force.

(1) Industry Canada, News Release, “Minister of Industry Tables Legislation for National Do Not Call List,” 13 December 2004, <http://www.ic.gc.ca/cmb/welcomeic.nsf/af913527c10aeb6a852564820068dc6c/85256a5d006b972085256f690056a4a8!OpenDocument>.

B. The Existing Regulatory Framework

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC, or “the Commission”) regulates telecommunications and telemarketing, the latter authorized by section 41 of the *Telecommunications Act*, 1993, c. 38.⁽²⁾

The CRTC defines telemarketing as “the use of telecommunications facilities to make unsolicited calls for the purpose of solicitation where solicitation is defined as the selling or promoting of a product or service, or the soliciting of money or money’s worth, whether directly or indirectly and whether on behalf of another party. This includes solicitation of donations by or on behalf of charitable organizations.”⁽³⁾

Current CRTC regulations state that telemarketers must remove a customer’s name and telephone number from their calling lists upon request and maintain a “do not call” list which must remain active for three years. Each “do not call” list is company-specific, and a customer must therefore make individual requests to be removed from the calling list of each of Company A, Company B, Company C and so on.

Telemarketers who fail to comply with this and other regulations can have their service suspended or disconnected by their telecommunications service provider. As a further enforcement tool, the CRTC can issue an order that service to a telemarketer be suspended or disconnected, and it can also issue an order prohibiting all service providers from reconnecting that telemarketer for a set period of time.

The *Telecommunications Act* also provides for the possibility of a criminal prosecution for the contravention of a CRTC order with respect to telemarketing calls. Upon summary conviction, an individual is liable to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 for a first offence or \$25,000 for a subsequent offence; in the case of a corporation, to a fine not exceeding \$100,000 for a first offence or \$250,000 for a subsequent offence.⁽⁴⁾ Such prosecutions are rare, and the CRTC itself lacks the power to impose these fines.

(2) This section states:

The Commission may, by order, prohibit or regulate the use by any person of the telecommunications facilities of a Canadian carrier for the provision of unsolicited telecommunications to the extent that the Commission considers it necessary to prevent undue inconvenience or nuisance, giving due regard to freedom of expression.

(3) CRTC Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-35.

(4) *Telecommunications Act*, section 73(2)(c).

Telemarketers appear undeterred by the present regulations.⁽⁵⁾

C. The Proposed Solutions

1. Power to Impose Fines

In its review of telemarketing rules released in May 2004, the CRTC noted that “better enforcement of the existing rules is the major factor in increasing their effectiveness.”⁽⁶⁾

The Commission observed that a key to that better enforcement would be the ability of the Commission itself to impose appropriate fines on telemarketers that have breached the rules.

Noting that Parliament has granted the power to impose “administrative monetary penalties” to numerous other agencies and departments, the Commission sought this power for itself as a means of enforcing compliance with the legislation. The Commission stated that such a fining power would “provide a flexible, timely and cost-effective response to violations that do not warrant criminal prosecutions or other costly and lengthy procedures.”⁽⁷⁾ It would also have “a significant deterrent effect”⁽⁸⁾ on telemarketers that might be inclined to operate beyond the regulations.

2. Ability to Delegate Various Administrative Duties

The Commission was also of the view that it would be advantageous to delegate various powers to an administrator to handle telemarketing complaints, but again noted a lack of statutory authority to do so.⁽⁹⁾

3. Creation of a National Do Not Call List

Perhaps most significantly, the Commission acknowledged that separate “do not call” lists for each telemarketer are less effective and more onerous on consumers, who must contact each telemarketer individually in order to remove themselves from that particular telemarketer’s call list. In the Commission’s view, a national “do not call” list where consumers could register once to stop all unwanted telemarketing calls would be more efficient.

(5) CRTC Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-35, paras. 84 and 85.

(6) *Ibid.*, para. 83. See also paras. 86-88.

(7) *Ibid.*, para. 88.

(8) *Ibid.*

(9) *Ibid.*, para. 90.

However, the CRTC stated that it would be counter-productive to establish a national “do not call” registry without significant enforcement and administrative measures,⁽¹⁰⁾ both of which are lacking in the current legislation.

This bill addresses these three proposed solutions.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Bill C-37 contains only three clauses.

Clause 1 proposes amending the CRTC’s authority to regulate unsolicited telecommunications, under section 41 of the *Telecommunications Act*, by adding proposed sections 41.1 through 41.5 to the Act.

A. A National Do Not Call List

The proposed provisions establish the legislative framework necessary for the creation and administration of a national do not call list (section 41.1).

Clause 1 gives the Commission the power to administer databases or information systems for a national do not call service (section 41.2). It also allows the Commission to delegate to a third party the operation of this service (section 41.3).

The clause allows the delegate to charge rates for carrying out its delegated duties (section 41.4), and it grants the Commission powers to regulate the rates the delegate charges for its services and regulate the manner in which the delegate exercises its powers (section 41.5).

B. Administrative Monetary Penalties

Clause 2 represents the majority of the amendments proposed by Bill C-37. This clause proposes numerous amendments to Part V of the *Telecommunications Act*, dealing with investigation and enforcement matters.

After section 72 of the *Telecommunications Act*, a section entitled “Administrative Monetary Penalties” is added. This section gives the Commission the power it seeks to levy administrative monetary penalties as an enforcement measure. It also gives the Commission the power to delegate various administrative, investigative, inspection and enforcement powers to a third party.

(10) *Ibid.*, paras. 91-93.

New section 72.01 states that every contravention of a prohibition or requirement of the Commission under section 41 of the *Telecommunications Act* constitutes a violation. Thus, each telemarketing call to a number registered on the do not call list is a violation.

Individuals who commit such a violation are subject to an administrative monetary penalty of \$1,500 per infraction (i.e., per offending call). The penalty for corporations committing violations is \$15,000 per infraction.

The Commission is given the power to designate persons for the administration of telemarketing regulations under section 41 of the Act. These authorized persons will be able to request from telemarketers periodic reports or other forms of information necessary for the administration of the Act (section 72.06).

Where they believe, upon reasonable grounds, there is information relevant to the enforcement of section 41, authorized persons may enter and inspect any place (section 72.06(1)). If that place is a dwelling-house, however, an *ex parte* warrant obtained from a justice by information on oath is needed before entry (section 72.06(2)).

Proposed section 72.07 details the contents of the notice of violation, which must include: the name of the person believed to have committed the violation; the penalty; and the right to either pay the penalty or make representations to the Commission with respect to the violation. The proposed legislation thus gives the person the option of disputing the notice of violation. The notice must also include a statement that if a person fails to pay the penalty or make representations to the Commission, he or she will be deemed to have committed the violation and the Commission may impose the penalty (section 72.07(2)(c)).

If a person chooses to make representations to the Commission with respect to a notice of violation, the Commission must decide, on a balance of probabilities, whether he or she committed the violation (section 72.08(2)). Where the Commission decides, on that balance, that a violation has occurred, it may impose the penalty outlined in section 72.01.

Where a violation has been made out, the Commission must provide the person with a copy of the decision, together with a notice of a right of review or appeal of that decision, as set out in sections 62 and 64 of the Act.

An administrative monetary penalty is a debt owed, and may be recovered as such. However, there is a five-year time limitation on the right to commence a recovery action (section 72.09(2)).

C. Defences

A person may establish that he or she exercised due diligence to prevent the violation (section 72.1(1)). This means that a person may give evidence that he or she took all reasonable efforts to ensure that the actions taken were within the law. If that evidence is accepted, it constitutes a defence.

All common-law rules and principles available as justification or excuse in relation to a violation of the telemarketing regulations apply (section 72.1(2)). This means that unless they are specifically excluded by the *Telecommunications Act* or inconsistent with the Act, all excuses and justifications available in common law may be used to justify or excuse a violation of these telemarketing regulations.

D. Time Limitations

An action in relation to a violation must be commenced within two years after the day on which the subject-matter of the proceedings became known to the Commission (section 72.12(1)).

As well, there is a five-year time limitation on the right to commence a recovery action for an administrative monetary penalty (section 72.09(2)).

E. Coming Into Force

Clause 3 states that this Act will come into force on a day to be fixed by the Governor in Council.

COMMENTARY

This bill sets up the framework for certain changes to the way in which telemarketing calls are regulated.

The expectation is that if the bill is passed, the CRTC will embark on a series of consultations with industry and consumers to determine how best to implement these changes. Questions such as how the national do not call list will operate, how much it will cost, whether companies will be allowed to contact existing customers regardless of whether or not they are on

the do not call list, and whether certain organizations such as those with existing business relationships, or charities or political parties, should be exempt from the do not call list are certain to be raised.

It is anticipated that once a national do not call list is operational, Canadians who do not wish to receive telemarketing calls can simply make a single call to a centralized registry at a 1-800 number, or perhaps fill out an on-line form, to add their telephone number to the do not call list. Telemarketers would be required to regularly download and respect this list.

The registry is expected to be funded on a cost-recovery basis from the telemarketers themselves.

There appears to be considerable support for a national do not call list. Industry Canada background information on this legislation cites a 2004 Environics survey indicating that 79% of respondents queried on telemarketing supported a national do not call list and 66% of respondents stated that they would be likely to sign up for this service.⁽¹¹⁾ The same survey further indicated that 97% of Canadians reported a negative reaction towards unsolicited calls.

A similar do not call registry in the United States has proven to be very popular. Created in late 2003, it now has 65 million registrants, or slightly more than half of all households. In addition to being popular, it appears to be effective: “More than half the people on the list say they don’t get any calls at all, and others say the number of calls has dropped from 30 a month to less than 5.”⁽¹²⁾ Fines for offending calls can reach US\$11,000 for each complaint.

A. Comments From Marketers

Unsurprisingly, some telemarketers do not support the proposed legislation.

According to one such marketer, telemarketing calls work: “The latest statistics show 18% of calls result in a sale – more effective than any other form of advertising.” Telemarketing “allows firms to sell millions of dollars worth of products [and gives] thousands of people the chance to earn a living.”⁽¹³⁾

(11) Industry Canada (2004).

(12) J. Fitzpatrick, “Legislation will offer relief from telemarketers,” *The Chronicle Herald* [Halifax], 27 December 2004, p. C1.

(13) Stan Body, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you,” Letters, *Edmonton Journal*, 19 December 2004, p. A17.

This commentator suggested that the current rules for telemarketing are sufficient to regulate marketers through “voluntary or company-specific do not call lists that have been the industry standard for years among legitimate firms.”⁽¹⁴⁾ It was further argued that being on a do not call list removes a consumer’s “chance to learn about new products and services that could improve their lives in some way. It removes a business’s opportunity to reach the consumer directly.”⁽¹⁵⁾

Moreover, some commentators have pointed out that there is an alternative to adding more regulation and more bureaucracy: when called by a telemarketer, an individual may request to be put on that company’s do not call list and then hang up.

On the other hand, the Canadian Marketing Association (CMA) supports this legislation; indeed, it has been urging the creation of a national do not call registry since 2001.

The CMA is the largest marketing association in Canada. It has 800 corporate members across a wide range of marketing disciplines, including major financial institutions, insurance companies, publishers, retailers, charitable organizations, agencies, relationship marketers and those involved in e-business and Internet marketing.

The CMA has maintained its own version of a do not contact registry on behalf of its members since 1988, but can do little beyond revoking the membership of marketers who do not respect its list. Moreover, the organization cannot police other marketers who are not members of the association.

John Gustavson, president and chief executive officer of the CMA, stated:

We believe a compulsory do-not-call service for all companies that use the telephone to market their goods and services to potential customers is the most effective means to curtail consumer annoyance with telemarketers. At the same time, such a service will help protect the viability of a marketing medium that employs over 270,000 Canadians and generates more than \$16 billion in sales each year.⁽¹⁶⁾

The CMA further argues that a do not call registry would make marketers more efficient by making them target only those customers who were open to their product pitches.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) Canadian Marketing Association, News Release, “Canadian Marketing Association welcomes legislation to create national do-not-call service,” 13 December 2004, http://www.the-cma.org/media/nr_dnc2004.cfm.

B. Media Coverage

The proposed legislation has attracted some media attention. Coverage has been mostly favourable, citing the Environics poll that suggests the majority of Canadians support this legislation and would probably sign up on a national do not call list, as well as the recent and apparently popular U.S. legislation on the same subject.⁽¹⁷⁾

Some commentators have observed that serious questions remain, notably whether charities, political parties, public opinion research organizations and companies that have a previous consensual relationship with their customers will be exempt from the regulations.⁽¹⁸⁾

Also noted as a cause for possible concern in relation to the operation of the do not call list is the federal government's "astonishing incompetence as displayed in the national gun registry, the cost of which has now soared past \$1 billion."⁽¹⁹⁾ On this topic, one commentator stated: "A Canadian registry could be effective and popular, too. However, as the federal gun registry shows, Ottawa has an uncanny way of turning a modest project into a billion-dollar fiasco. This project will only be worthwhile if bureaucrats can keep it simple and inexpensive."⁽²⁰⁾

Another commentator suggested an alternative opt-out version of the registry, rather than the proposed opt-in approach. In other words, why must call recipients be the ones to remove themselves (opt out) from call lists? "Why shouldn't everybody be assumed to be off the list, except for those who sign on?"⁽²¹⁾

(17) See, for example, Fitzpatrick in *The Chronicle-Herald*, 27 December 2004; Forum, "'Don't call' list the perfect gift," *The StarPhoenix* [Saskatoon], 17 December 2004, p. A14; Opinion, "Putting a hold on telemarketers," *The Edmonton Journal*, 14 December 2004, p. A14; J. Ibbitson, "Not coming to a phone near you," *The Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 14 December 2004, p. A4; and Editorial, "Don't-call-us legislation is most welcome, with one reservation," *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 December 2004, p. A14.

(18) See Forum in *The StarPhoenix*, 17 December 2004; Ibbitson in *The Globe and Mail*, 14 December 2004; and T. Hamilton, "Ottawa unveils don't-call decree," *The Toronto Star*, 14 December 2004, p. C01.

(19) Editorial in *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 December 2004, p. A14.

(20) Editorial, "Can Ottawa run a registry?" *The Calgary Herald*, 14 December 2004, p. A12.

(21) C. Gordon, "Timely government whacking," *The Guardian* [Charlottetown], 21 December 2004, p. A6.

Other comments expressed concerns about the need to divulge more personal information (name, telephone number) to another database, and the security of that information.⁽²²⁾

Comments in opposition to the bill question the necessity of regulation in the first place, wondering instead why Canadians simply don't hang up in the face of unwanted telemarketing calls.⁽²³⁾ It is suggested that "this is not something that needs government intervention in order to solve the problem."⁽²⁴⁾ Some cite this legislation as an example of over-regulation and "over-kill"⁽²⁵⁾ that threatens to "stifle the industry and kill jobs."⁽²⁶⁾

Presumably the concerns raised by supporters and opponents will be addressed in the public consultations the CRTC will be holding in the spring of 2005.

C. Next Steps

If this legislation is passed by Parliament, the CRTC will begin public consultations with interested parties to work out details of the national do not call registry, such as how it will operate and which businesses and organizations, if any, should be exempt from the list.

(22) Opinion in *The Edmonton Journal*, 14 December 2004.

(23) Editorial, "Has it come to this?" *The Winnipeg Sun*, 21 December 2004, p. 10; Editorial, "Hang up on this law!" *The Edmonton Sun*, 19 December 2004, p. 15.

(24) Editorial in *The Winnipeg Sun*, 21 December 2004.

(25) Body in *The Edmonton Journal*, 19 December 2004.

(26) Stan Body, "I'm a telemarketer and I resent the labelling," Letters, *The Whitehorse Star*, 20 December 2004, p. 8.