

NACOTEL

National Telecommunications Contingency Plan

National policy on contingency planning and crisis management in the telecommunications sector

Society is becoming increasingly dependent upon telecommunications networks and services. It is essential to ensure the undisturbed functioning of telecommunications. By means of NACOTEL, the national telecom operators and the Ministry of Economic Affairs are working together to assure the optimum functioning of telecommunications services.

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NACOTEL, the National Telecommunications Contingency Plan, was established to structure contingency policy and crisis management in the telecommunications sector. To achieve this goal, NACOTEL seeks to organize the sector in a way that avoids and where necessary promptly rectifies serious disruptions capable of harming vital interests in society. The national telecom operators – BT, Enertel, KPN, Telfort, Orange, T-Mobile and Vodafone - and the Directorate General of Telecommunications and Post of the Ministry of Economic Affairs have agreed arrangements on how best to fulfil this objective. The arrangements have been set down in an agreement.

Agreement

NACOTEL is based on an agreement that provides for contingency planning and crisis management in the telecommunications sector. The parties have agreed several matters in the agreement with regard to:

- how telecommunications services can continue uninterrupted;
- how a fault can be cleared as quickly as possible.

The telecom operators and the Ministry have given a commitment to exercise their best efforts to draw up their own contingency plans, establish a crisis management organisation, write a report on production of the contingency plan and supply an incident report if a major problem has occurred.

Necessity

The major changes that have occurred in the telecommunications sector over the past ten years require a new approach to assuring the continuity of telecom services. The entry into the market of numerous relatively young players makes it necessary to inject uniformity into this policy. This will allow each operator to produce its own contingency plan based on the same principles and using the same tools. At times of crisis, thinking and acting in unison is a precondition for resolving problems quickly and properly.

Mutual interests

NACOTEL addresses the mutual interests of telecom operators and the government with regard to contingency planning and crisis management. Through NACOTEL, the government can protect the public interest. This will avoid repeated and prolonged failures of services that disrupt public order, pose a threat to safety or damage economic prosperity. Through NACOTEL, the telecom operators will serve their corporate interests. Uninterrupted service-provisioning provides a good commercial basis for running and expanding a company and maintaining profitability. Safeguarding services can also improve competitive positions, especially when potential customers want a reliable partner. Through participation in NACOTEL, the telecom operators will also serve the public interest. The proper working of their services reinforces the general prosperity of the Netherlands and also safety.

NACOTEL and the Telecommunications Act

NACOTEL was modelled along the lines of a public-private partnership without embedding in legal frameworks. As a fallback option, it is possible to invoke the “exceptional circumstances” provisions of the Telecommunications Act. This remedy will be used only if the normal powers that exist are no longer sufficient to solve a crisis and the Minister of Economic Affairs has to issue instructions directly to telecom operators. NACOTEL is expected to reduce still further the need for such action, because the telecom operators and the government will strive to ensure – based on their respective responsibilities - the proper working of telecommunications services.

The coming two years

Signature of the agreement will complete the policy-making phase for contingency planning and crisis management for the telecommunications sector. The coming two years will be used to work towards fulfilment of the agreement. A number of documents have been included in NACOTEL to help the telecom operators and the Ministry of Economic Affairs to achieve the defined objectives.

Comprehensive checklists have been produced that the parties can use when drawing up their contingency plans. A standing working party, consisting of representatives of all participants, will oversee implementation and make adjustments if necessary. At the end of the two years, the produced products will be examined, after which policy will be evaluated and if necessary realigned. All participants have declared their intention to continue the agreement subject to achievement of a satisfactory result.

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