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Huge Group warns that State's Vans appeal threatens competition

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Published: 22 Sep 08 - 18:02

Telecommunications firm the Huge Group said on Monday that the the decision by Communications Minister **Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri** to appeal a High Court ruling on the right of value added network service providers, or Vans, to self provide was a potentially major blow to the industry in South Africa.

Last week, Matsepe-Casaburri announced that government would appeal against the High Court judgement regarding telecommunications provider Altech Autopage Cellular's right to convert its existing Vans licence into an individual electronic communications network service (I-ECNS) licence.

Matsepe-Casaburri stated that if Vans licensees were allowed to obtain I-ECNS licenses under license conversions, government's managed liberalisation policy would be seriously undermined to the detriment of the Information and Communications Technologies industry.

"If this appeal is upheld, it will be a sore blow for telecoms competition in South Africa, which has long suffered under stifling legislation," said Huge Group CEO **Anton Potgieter**.

He added that the policy of managed liberalisation had had limited success so far, and argued that there was considerable merit in the market itself now being allowed to take the lead in addressing the high-cost and limited service access inherent in the industry.

"Public reaction to the Altech ruling has been overwhelmingly positive, and already within hours of the Department of Communications' announcement to appeal, an online public opinion poll is running at an absolutely staggering 99% of respondents not in favour of the appeal," said Potgieter.

He was hopeful that the appeal would be quickly resolved and that those Vans wishing to self-provide would be allowed to do so without further complications.

"Setting up a network is going to take considerable time and effort for any player, the sooner the Vans with the appetite for this task are allowed to begin, the better. We look forward to the day when customers have free access to a wide range of communications, options served up on a level playing field – this can only be good for all in South Africa."

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