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English Edition with the International Herald Tribune

WWW.FD.NL

## KPN moves first to hike call charges

BY CORMAC MAC RUAIRI

AMSTERDAM — Dutch telecom firm KPN yesterday raised its connection charges for telephone calls in Holland by between 10% and 18%.

Consumer watchdog Consumentenbond expressed concern about the rises which will take effect on August 1 and September 1. But KPN insisted average bills would rise by no more than 4.5% on average.

'The increases, have to be seen in relation to the total telephone bill. Then the increases come out under the level of inflation,' KPN said.

From August, the connection rate for local calls will rise by 18% to €0.041, with inter local connection rates and those to mobile phones rising by 10% to €0.05.

Telecoms expert Ben Woldring, who operates Bellen.com which compares the prices of Dutch telecom operators, predicted KPN's rivals would also raise their prices. He said national land line rates were currently very low.

'Prices for national and European calls are very low here at the moment when compared to Belgium for instance. I expect the other providers here will increase their tariffs over the next few months for calling to most European destinations,' Woldring said.

He said consumers generally looked at the price-per-minute and would not take into account that KPN had raised the initial connection charge.

In June, regulator Opta decided KPN could raise its fees in line with inflation as a reward for removing barriers to competition. KPN raised its international charges by an average 8% in December.