



# Malicious Communications Act 1988

## 1988 CHAPTER 27

### 1 Offence of sending letters etc. with intent to cause distress or anxiety.

(1) Any person who sends to another person—

- (a) a [<sup>F1</sup>letter, electronic communication or article of any description] which conveys—
  - (i) a message which is indecent or grossly offensive;
  - (ii) a threat; or
  - (iii) information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender; or
- (b) any [<sup>F2</sup>article or electronic communication] which is, in whole or part, of an indecent or grossly offensive nature,

is guilty of an offence if his purpose, or one of his purposes, in sending it is that it should, so far as falling within paragraph (a) or (b) above, cause distress or anxiety to the recipient or to any other person to whom he intends that it or its contents or nature should be communicated.

(2) A person is not guilty of an offence by virtue of subsection (1)(a)(ii) above if he shows—

- (a) that the threat was used to reinforce a demand [<sup>F3</sup>made by him on reasonable grounds]; and
- (b) that he believed [<sup>F4</sup>, and had reasonable grounds for believing,] that the use of the threat was a proper means of reinforcing the demand.

[<sup>F5</sup>(2A) In this section “electronic communication” includes—

- <sup>F6</sup>(a) any oral or other communication by means of [<sup>F6</sup>an electronic communications network] (c. 12)); and
- (b) any communication (however sent) that is in electronic form.]

(3) In this section references to sending include references to delivering [<sup>F7</sup>or transmitting] and to causing to be sent [<sup>F8</sup>, delivered or transmitted] and “sender” shall be construed accordingly.

[<sup>F9</sup>(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

*Status: Point in time view as at 28/04/2022. This version of this provision has been superseded.*

*Changes to legislation: There are currently no known outstanding effects for the Malicious Communications Act 1988, Section 1. (See end of Document for details)*

- (a) on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine (or both);
  - (b) on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine (or both).
- (5) In relation to an offence committed before [<sup>F10</sup>2 May 2022], the reference in subsection (4)(b) to 12 months is to be read as a reference to six months.
- (6) In relation to an offence committed before section 85 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 comes into force, the reference in subsection (4)(b) to a fine is to be read as a reference to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.]

#### Textual Amendments

- F1** Words in s. 1(1)(a) substituted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(1)(a)**, 138(2)
- F2** Words in s. 1(1)(b) substituted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(1)(b)**, 138(2)
- F3** Words in s. 1(2)(a) substituted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(2)(a)**, 138(2)
- F4** Words in s. 1(2)(b) substituted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(2)(b)**, 138(2)
- F5** S. 1(2A) inserted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(3)**, 138(2)
- F6** Words in s. 1(2A)(a) substituted (25.7.2003 for specified purposes, 29.12.2003 in so far as not already in force) by [Communications Act 2003](#) (c. 21), s. 411(2), **Sch. 17 para. 90** (with [Sch. 18](#)); [S.I. 2003/1900](#), arts. 1(2), 2(1), [Schs. 1](#) (with art. 3) (as amended by [S.I. 2003/3142](#), art. 1(3)); [S.I. 2003/3142](#), art. 3(2) (with art. 11)
- F7** Words in s. 1(3) inserted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(4)(a)**, 138(2)
- F8** Words in s. 1(3) substituted (11.5.2001) by 2001 c. 16, ss. **43(4)(b)**, 138(2)
- F9** S. 1(4)-(6) substituted for s. 1(4) (13.4.2015) by [Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015](#) (c. 2), ss. **32(1)**, 95(1) (with s. 32(2)); [S.I. 2015/778](#), art. 3, [Sch. 1](#) para. 26
- F10** Words in s. 1(5) substituted (28.4.2022) by [The Criminal Justice Act 2003 \(Commencement No. 33\) and Sentencing Act 2020 \(Commencement No. 2\) Regulations 2022](#) (S.I. 2022/500), regs. 1(2), 5(1), **Sch. Pt. 1**

**Status:**

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**Changes to legislation:**

There are currently no known outstanding effects for the Malicious Communications Act 1988, Section 1.