THE AUSTRALIAN **DOMAIN NAME** ADMINISTRATOR

auDA submission to the
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
***Digital Economy Future Directions* Consultation Paper**

February 2009

Background

.au Domain Administration Ltd (auDA) is the not-for-profit organisation endorsed by the Australian Government to administer the .au domain space under an industry self-regulatory regime. auDA's governance arrangements facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in the management of .au.

auDA welcomes this opportunity to provide comments on DBCDE's "Digital Economy Future Directions" consultation paper.

The comments in this response do not attempt to address all of the topics and questions raised by the Department but rather aim to identify the critical steps towards maximising the potential of Australia's participation in the digital economy. The comments include examples drawn from auDA's experience in managing the .au space.

Key to Success

A consultative, multi-stakeholder model

auDA welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to fostering increased, effective participation in the digital economy and shares the Government's goal of enhancing the benefits of the internet to the Australian community.

Above all else, securing meaningful engagement of all stakeholders is the key to realising the full benefits the digital economy has to offer – both in developing a strategy and taking action.

Given the cross-sectoral impact of ICTs – and the ubiquity of the internet, in particular – initiatives developed and implemented collaboratively by government, industry and the community will be more effective than those developed in isolation.

The concept of multi-stakeholderism is not new, and has been used increasingly in the ICT and internet arena with great success over the last decade.

auDA, itself, is a local example of governance and policy development structures which actively facilitate the engagement of industry, governmental and users.

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At an international level, a number of ICT and internet-related fora have adopted multi-stakeholder models for consultation, information exchange and policy development.

auDA believes that these initiatives provide useful exemplars[1] for a national model for realising the important contribution the Internet and related ICTs can play as drivers of innovation, productivity and economic growth and maximising the potential of Australia's participation in the digital economy.

Further information on these collaborative models is at *Annex A*.

Measures of Success

In addition to the overarching importance of stakeholder involvement, the following are a series of specific themes that would assist in developing a strategy for the digital economy and measuring its success.

In the parlance of the DBCDE paper, they are critical to defining "what success looks like" and assessing "have we been successful?"

- **Security**, trust and confidence in Australia's online environment;
- Improved **knowledge and skills,** both for end-users and small businesses;
- Community **access** and participation irrespective of factors such as age, gender, geographical location or economic status;
- **Openness** in the transmission of information, particularly between government and the community and in the provision of public services; and
- Cultural and linguistic **diversity** in content and participation**.**

These themes have been used within global fora[2] and are equally relevant to the Australian experience.

In terms of empirical measures of success, auDA agrees with DBCDE's observation that developing and maintaining a strong evidentiary base is critical to guiding investment in the digital economy.

The range of statistics and data collected by auDA and the .au registry operator, AusRegistry, regarding domain name registrations, renewals and expiries could provide a useful contribution to this evidentiary base.

[1] auDA is not advocating a particular form this collaboration should take. It could involve the establishment of peak bodies, increased interaction between existing representative groups and/or the establishment of regular fora dedicated to digital economy policy issues.

[2] http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/index.php/home

Security, Trust and Confidence

As identified in the consultation paper, increasing trust and confidence in the Internet is critical to realising the continued social and economic benefits that the digital economy offers. The internet is a medium that has revolutionised modern communications, allowing users to interact openly and efficiently across borders. However, this strength is also a weakness and has provided a fertile environment for the proliferation of criminal and nuisance activity that challenges existing legal and regulatory mechanisms.

While action in response to these undesirable activities is essential, it must be flexible, co-ordinated and coherent. The safety of users and businesses should not come at the cost of innovation and flexibility.

Australia has a strong track record of developing and propagating domestic e-security strategies such as its legislative approach to combating spam, the National e-Security Awareness Week initiative, the ALRC's review of Australian Privacy Law, Stay Smart Online, an e-security education module for Australian schools, and the Australian Internet Security Initiative. This strong domestic effort is backed by recognition by the Australian Government that effective, future-focused e-security measures are a global concern, requiring Australia's participation in international fora.[3]

The continuation and expansion of these efforts – particularly within Australia through awareness campaigns, industry leaders' meetings and open fora – is vital to ensuring trust and confidence in the digital economy. Efforts at raising awareness, developing strategies, promoting initiatives and recognising best practices should take advantage of the skills and knowledge offered by ICT industry stakeholders such as auDA, the Australian chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC-au) and the Internet Industry Association (IIA).

Since 1999, auDA has worked with Australian internet stakeholders to develop and implement a policy and regulatory framework[1] for the .au domain that is widely recognised as a world's best practice model.

auDA's policies address domain name eligibility, the registration, renewal and transfer of names, regulation of registrars and resellers that are accredited to sell .au names, dispute resolution, and new second level domains (2LDs).

This framework is flexible enough to allow growth and competition in the .au space, while contributing to Australian consumers' and businesses' trust when interacting with .au websites.

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[3] "Towards a framework for cybersecurity and critical information infrastructure protection" - Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy's address to the ITU Cybersecurity Forum, 16 July 2008.

Knowledge and skills

The level of confidence with which Australians embrace the online economy is closely related to the digital knowledge and skills they possess. As the DBCDE consultation paper notes, many Australians are already online and have access to broadband services.

Businesses, too, are widely using the internet, although only a third are utilising the full range of benefits and services it offers. It is by targeting this area of under-developed e-business potential that Australia can realise significant improvements in productivity and economic growth.

While the DBCDE paper recognises the the need to develop more advanced e-business skills relating to marketing and advertising, product development and embracing new technologies, auDA's experience with Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) suggests that there is a real need for government and other key stakeholders to offer more basic information and assistance in setting up an online business.

auDA provides a range of services to help meet consumers' and businesses' need for simple, clear information on how to get online, do so safely, and make the most of the experience.

These include a small business guide to domain names and a series of "Lets Talk Net" podcasts that provide businesses with a range of information including how to:

- get started online;
- establish a web presence;
- get a domain name;
- use email effectively and efficiently;
- share information and network online;
- communicate and trade securely; and
- develop e-commerce opportunities.

Further information is available at;

http://www.auda.org.au/help/smallbus-guide/

Access

On a global level, access to the internet and the services it facilitates is often identified as an issue for developing countries. However, bridging the digital divide[4] remains an issue for developed countries such as Australia.

Consultation on how to address equitable access for all irrespective of race, gender, geographic isolation, ability, age and social status, is a notable omission from DBCDE's consultation paper.

A large number of Australians currently use the internet and have access to broadband connectivity. However, improving the speed, quality and reliability of existing services is only one step in developing our information society.

The true measure of Australia's success in embracing the digital economy will be its ability to facilitate access for all Australians that wish to engage online - including those who are currently unable to do so.

It is the joint responsibility of all stakeholders, led by Government, to develop strategies for ensuring appropriate infrastructure, connectivity and equipment can be accessed by those in regional and remote areas, indigenous communities, the elderly, people living with a disability or literacy problems, and those on limited incomes.

It is equally important to encourage, recognise and support the development of tools, websites, content and software that specifically reach out to the needs of these groups.

[4] The gap between those that have effective access to ICTs such as the internet (and the benefits they provide) and those that do not.

One initiative facilitating access for Australians – particularly those in rural and remote areas – is the .au Community Domains Trust (auCD).

auCD was established by auDA in 2006 to allocate a new series of Community Geographic Domain Names (CGDN's -in the form *town.state.au*) and to assist communities in developing a unique, dedicated identity on the internet.

Communities across the country have embraced the initiative, including locations as geographically diverse as Wyndham in Western Australia, Gheerulla in Queensland and Talgarno in Victoria.

Through the initiative, communities are empowered to develop websites that fulfil their particular local needs, including:

- promotion of tourism and local events;
- engagement between local councils and constituents;
- provision of employment services;
- co-ordination of community groups; and
- emergency communication and information (including during the recent Victorian bushfire crisis).

Further information is available at http://www.aucd.org.au/outcomes

Openness

auDA agrees with DBCDE's view that open access to Public Sector information plays a significant role in enabling innovation and promoting the digital economy. It is appropriate that all levels of government in Australia are undertaking initiatives to promote access to publicly-funded geo-spatial data, research statistics and cultural materials.

However, the concept of openness of the digital economy extends far beyond access to public sector data.

The internet has greatly contributed to the fast, effective and efficient flow of ideas, information and knowledge. Billions of users are now active participants in the global information society.

In the Australian context, the internet should be utilised to bring users closer to government, to improve the provision of public services, and provide access to a

range of valuable resources offered by educational institutions, charitable organisations and training groups.

From a practical perspective, initiatives could include:

- Developing federal, state and local government portals and websites that bring government closer to citizens and facilitate meaningful interaction;
- Expanding the provision of public services online;
- Promoting innovative methods (across all sectors) for increasing Australians access to online materials, knowledge or information; and
- Developing initiatives that will educate users in maximising their online experiences.

Diversity

Australia is uniquely positioned as a truly multi-cultural, multi-lingual society. This diversity – and the benefits it brings – should be reflected in the digital economy.

Government, industry and user groups' collaboration to promote diversity will empower those cultural and language groups that currently find it difficult to participate online.

Online diversity will contribute to our national understanding and use of the unique skills and experiences that different cultures provide.

Practical initiatives to achieve this could include:

- Encouraging the development of multilingual content to serve relevant communities;
- Developing tools that facilitate the translation of existing content into other languages;
- Developing sites that assist those with language proficiency difficulties;
- Encouraging and assisting expressions of culture and language online; and
- Promoting a diversity of cultures within Australia and internationally.

Summary

The Australian Government's goal of developing an overarching strategy for the future direction of the digital economy is a broad, challenging initiative. It is also a critical step in realising the social and economic benefits that the digital economy – and the internet, in particular – can offer.

Success will require the meaningful buy-in of all interested stakeholders and will be measured by how secure, open, accessible and diverse Australia's digital future becomes.

ANNEX A

Australian case study – auDA

The .au Domain Administration (auDA)[5], is the not-for-profit, membership-based, industry self-regulatory body established in 1999 to manage Australia's .au domain space.

auDA is endorsed by the Australian Government to perform this role and is also recognised at a global level, by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, as the appropriate operator of .au.

auDA's membership is divided into two classes – supply (the .au registry, registrars and resellers of domain names) and demand (internet users – generally anyone not eligible for supply membership).

auDA's operations are overseen by a Board of Directors. Eight directors are directly elected by members – four representing each class. Three independent directors are appointed by the elected directors and auDA's CEO participates as a non-voting board member.

auDA develops new policy with the assistance of various Panels and Committees. These comprise various industry and consumer representatives, and other stakeholders of the .au domain. Draft policies are made available for public comment – allowing all Australian internet users to contribute to the management of .au.

International case study – WSIS

In 2003 and 2005, the United Nations sponsored a pair of conferences – the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)[6] – that delivered a valuable dialogue on global issues pertaining to the information economy, a commitment for further collaboration and an agenda for action. These events engaged stakeholders beyond the UN's traditional base of Member States. Representatives from governments, industry and academia, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and charities participated in the WSIS process on equal footing.

The issues discussed and actions taken at WSIS relate closely to the themes identified in DBCDE's consultation paper – openness and access to information, security and trust in the internet, knowledge and skills sharing, the development of enabling regulatory frameworks, fostering innovation and promoting the role of the ICT sector in improving environmental standards.

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[5] http://www.auda.org.au

[6] http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html

International case study – IGF
Participants in the WSIS process recognised that:

> *"The international management of the Internet should be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations."*

This acknowledgement led to the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)[7], an annual conference for stakeholders to discuss public policy issues to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet. At a practical level, the IGF provides an opportunity for:

- The exchange of information and best practices in internet governance;
- Discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international policies relating to the internet;
- Proposing ways and means of accelerating the availability and affordability of the internet
- Liaison with intergovernmental organisations;
- The identification of emerging issues; and
- Identifying solutions to issues arising from the use and misuse of the internet.

Now in its fourth year, the IGF has proven a tangible, practical implementation of the goals established at WSIS. Policy principles and commitments are evolving into a forum for action.

International case study – ICANN
The United Nations is not alone in promoting collaborative mechanisms for ICT-related policy development and action. One of the longest-standing examples of a multi-stakeholder model for addressing internet issues is the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers(ICANN)[8]. Established in 1998, ICANN is a not-for-profit corporation based in the United States that is responsible for the global coordination of the internet's unique naming and numbering identifiers. ICANN oversees the allocation of Internet Protocol (IP addresses - which facilitate the inter-connection of millions of computers) and the management of the Domain Name System (DNS - which provides a more human-friendly interface for navigating the internet).

ICANN's Board is made up of directors that represent governments, the technical community, security interests, commercial and non-commercial industry operators, and end users. The Board is supported by a range of Advisory Committees and Supporting Organisations (SO's) that work collaboratively to develop policies across areas as diverse as:

- The management of generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs, such as .com);
- Mechanisms for the introduction of new gTLDs;

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[7] http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/index.php/home
[8] http://www.icann.org

- The management of national country code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs such as .au);
- The development of processes for the introduction of Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs – names in non-Latin character sets such as Arabic and Cyrillic);
- The development, adoption and promotion of standards and protocols that facilitate the secure and stable functioning of the internet; and
- Policies for the operation of the internet's core infrastructure (such as the Root Servers which coordinate all of the internet's traffic).

ICANN does not create or make Internet policy. Rather, policy is created through a bottom-up, transparent process involving all necessary constituencies and stakeholders in the internet community.

There are several redundancies built into the policy making process to ensure that new policy addresses the needs of the entire Internet community and not one special interest area or geographical region.

International case study – OECD

The OECD, much like the United Nations, is another inter-governmental organisation that has recognised and acknowledged the importance of the internet economy to economic growth and prosperity. The OECD has also recognised the importance of engaging the private sector, civil society and the internet community to secure these aims.

The OECD's priorities are outlined in the 2008 Seoul Declaration on the Future of the Internet Economy[9] - a document endorsed and signed by ministers and representatives from 40 economies, including Australia.

The Declaration sets out a roadmap to upgrade the communication policies that have helped the Internet become the economic driver that it is today and ensure that they support its future development. It provides a valuable source of guidance for a national digital economy strategy.

[9] http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/49/28/40839436.pdf