

Submission: Consultation on auDA's Purpose

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Strategic Context & Methodology

I submit this formal response to the Consultation on auDA's Purpose as an active participant in the Australian digital ecosystem. I approach this consultation through a highly specialized lens that synthesizes strict corporate governance, technical infrastructure architecture, and rigorous consumer advocacy.

Please note that the research and structuring of this submission were AI-assisted, but not AI-written. I utilized advanced Large Language Models as a highly skilled, efficient research assistant under my direct, strict human supervision. Practically, this meant providing the AI with precise instructions on strategy and direction, leveraging its capacity for vastly fast research to gather auDA's consultation materials, and having it generate initial analytical frameworks. I applied strict executive oversight to every draft, iteratively refining the arguments to ensure they perfectly matched my strategic intent.

This practical collaboration reflects my fundamental belief regarding modern board

governance. Boards do not need directors who blindly accept artificial intelligence outputs, nor do they need directors who fear and ignore the technology. Businesses and auDA must know how to efficiently and effectively work with AI. This involves providing clear guidance, maintaining absolute human oversight of the final commercial strategy, and treating the technology as a competent assistant that improves decision-making speed without ever replacing human executive judgment. As algorithmic liability becomes a central concern for the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), demonstrating safe, supervised AI adoption at the board level is no longer optional. It is a mandatory governance competency.

Response to Consultation Questions

Question 1: Does auDA's revised purpose statement use accessible and memorable language?

Yes. The proposed shift toward "trust and confidence" is commercially and socially sound. The previous 2026-30 strategy statement was bloated, heavily bureaucratized, and entirely unmemorable to the average Australian. In an era dominated by catastrophic data breaches affecting millions of citizens, the proliferation of AI deepfakes, and rampant digital scams, consumers and businesses are desperate for safety.

Highlighting "trust and confidence" speaks directly to the current national anxiety and uses highly accessible, resonant language. It successfully captures the psychological value of the .au domain. When an Australian user sees a .com.au or .au extension, they implicitly understand that the entity behind the screen has satisfied local verification requirements. By centering the words "trust and confidence," the Board has successfully identified the core emotional and commercial product that auDA actually delivers to the Australian market.

Question 2: Does auDA's revised purpose statement clearly and simply articulate what auDA does, for whom and to what end?

No. While the language is highly accessible, it fails technically and operationally. The verb "Connecting" is highly problematic and invites severe mission creep. To the average Australian, "connecting" them to the open internet is the job of an Internet Service Provider (ISP) like Telstra, Optus, or the National Broadband Network (NBN). auDA does not lay fiber-optic cables, operate cell towers, or sell Wi-Fi access. auDA secures, anchors, and verifies digital identity.

Describing auDA as an entity that "connects" Australians fundamentally misrepresents the mechanics of the Domain Name System (DNS). The DNS is the foundational phonebook of the internet. It does not provide the connection; it ensures the connection goes to the correct, verified destination.

More importantly, the proposed statement completely strips out the ".au" namespace. A domain registry's primary, statutory purpose statement must reference the actual infrastructure it governs. By omitting the .au namespace, the statement describes a generic digital advocacy NGO or a telecommunications provider rather than the strict technical administrator of a critical national asset. A purpose statement dictates internal corporate culture and resource allocation. If the stated purpose is simply "connecting Australians," it dilutes auDA's strict mandate to rigorously protect the integrity of the specific .au registry.

Question 3: Is auDA's revised purpose statement a clear improvement on its previous purpose statement? If not, why not?

It is a clear improvement in brevity and marketing tone, but a severe regression in statutory accuracy. The previous statement correctly identified the "secure and reliable operation of the .au". The new statement throws out the core technical mandate entirely in pursuit of a catchy marketing slogan.

A successful corporate purpose statement for a critical infrastructure operator must bridge the gap between technical accuracy and public resonance. It must be simple enough to print on a marketing brochure, but accurate enough to defend in a parliamentary inquiry. The current draft sacrifices too much technical reality for the sake of simplicity.

Corporate Governance: The Purpose vs. Tagline Distinction

A critical corporate governance conflict is currently causing the proposed statement to fail its primary objective. The Board is inadvertently conflating a "Purpose Statement" with a "Marketing Tagline." For a highly technical infrastructure operator like auDA, these two assets serve entirely different operational and legal functions, and attempting to merge them creates severe structural risk.

The Purpose Statement is a foundational governance tool. It sits at the absolute core of the Board Charter, the Annual Report, and the 5-Year Strategic Plan. It legally and operationally dictates what the executive leadership team and the CEO are permitted to allocate capital and engineering resources toward. Because of this strict fiduciary and governance function, a Purpose Statement must be technically accurate and explicitly reference the organization's statutory mandate. In auDA's case, this is the secure, reliable operation of the .au namespace. If the Purpose Statement is too vague or consumer-focused (for example, "Connecting Australians"), it invites severe mission creep, confusing the internal culture and diluting the organization's core technical identity in the eyes of regulators and enterprise stakeholders.

Conversely, a Marketing Tagline (or Slogan) is purely a consumer-facing acquisition tool. It belongs on the website header, in public marketing campaigns, and in co-marketing materials shared with accredited registrars. Its sole operational job is to be brief, memorable, and emotionally resonant for the general public.

The current consultation draft ("Connecting Australians to an open internet with trust and confidence") is attempting to force a foundational, legal governance statement to perform the job of a consumer marketing campaign. In an understandable effort to make the statement "catchy" and "accessible," the proposed draft inadvertently strips out the actual technical infrastructure the organization exists to protect.

The highly detailed, structural solution is to definitively separate the two. The Board should adopt a highly accurate, slightly longer Purpose Statement that explicitly retains the .au namespace and defines the technical mandate (such as Option 1 or Option 2 detailed below). Once that governance anchor is set, the marketing department can easily extract a punchy, consumer-facing tagline from it for registrar campaigns.

For example, adopting an official Corporate Purpose Statement of "Empowering Australians with a secure and trusted .au digital identity" allows the marketing team to deploy a highly effective, derived tagline such as: "The .au Domain: Trust and Confidence Online." This bifurcated approach perfectly satisfies both the strict legal and governance requirements of a highly technical board, and the commercial conversion requirements of the marketing department, without sacrificing accuracy for brevity.

Stakeholder Impact Assessment

auDA explicitly serves a diverse cohort with dual technical and societal roles. Analyzing the proposed statement ("Connecting Australians to an open internet with trust and confidence") across all major stakeholder perspectives reveals distinct vulnerabilities and opportunities:

- **The General Public (Individuals & Consumers):** The statement succeeds here. Consumers value "trust and confidence" above all else when navigating the web. Following the severe psychological impacts of the Optus, Medibank, and Latitude Financial cyber incidents, everyday Australians view the internet as a high-risk environment. Positioning auDA as the guardian of their trust is a highly effective societal message.
- **Australian Business (SMEs & Commercial Entities):** The statement fails here. Australian businesses form the economic backbone of the country. They rely on the .com.au extension as a verified trust signal to protect their brand equity and daily revenue from bad actors, overseas counterfeiters, and domain squatters. They rely on auDA to protect their digital real estate and secure their commercial identity, not to act as a telecommunications provider "connecting" them to an open web. The statement must reflect the defensive commercial moat that auDA provides to local enterprises.
- **The Registrar & Technical Community:** The statement represents a regression in statutory accuracy. By completely stripping out the explicit mention of the .au namespace and the naming system, the statement ignores the actual technical infrastructure auDA governs. Registrars, server administrators, and cybersecurity professionals require a purpose statement that anchors the organization to its technical mandate, strict uptime requirements, and its relationship with global bodies like ICANN.
- **The Marketing & Promotion Perspective:** While "trust and confidence" provides a strong marketing angle to encourage SMEs to upgrade to a verified .au domain, "an open internet" is a rapidly outdated marketing term. In the emerging era of the Agentic Web, autonomous AI agents, deliberate data poisoning, and unauthorized web scraping, an "open" internet is often synonymous with a polluted, legally toxic, and dangerous environment. Modern technology marketing must focus on security, cryptographic verification, and digital sovereignty, not just open access.

- **Government & Global Internet Governance:** On the international stage and in domestic public policy, auDA must be recognized as the authoritative manager of a sovereign asset. Under frameworks like the Security of Critical Infrastructure (SOCI) Act, domain registries are vital to national security. "Connecting to an open internet" is far too vague to describe the rigorous, militarized defense of critical national infrastructure required by federal agencies.

Proposed Alternative Statements

To resolve the conflict between memorable marketing and technical accuracy, I propose three alternative statements for the Board's consideration. Each option specifically reintroduces the .au namespace while preserving the desired consumer-friendly tone.

Option 1: The Digital Identity Approach (Highly Recommended)

Proposed text: "Empowering Australians with a secure and trusted .au digital identity."

Pros: This is the strongest strategic option. It entirely removes the confusing "connecting" ISP language. It tells businesses, consumers, and government agencies exactly what auDA provides, which is a verified, secure digital identity. It reintroduces the .au namespace, anchoring the organization to its core product. The word "empowering" is active and highly positive.

Cons: It drops the phrase "open internet," which some internal policy advocates or legacy stakeholders may miss, though this is arguably a net positive given the shifting nature of web security.

Option 2: The Direct Evolution Approach

Proposed text: "Securing the .au namespace so Australians can navigate the internet with trust and confidence."

Pros: This is highly diplomatic and requires the least amount of change from the Board's

current draft. It keeps the exact ending the Board clearly favors ("with trust and confidence") but replaces the flawed opening with a highly accurate description of auDA's actual daily operations. It perfectly balances the technical reality of "securing the namespace" with the societal benefit of "navigating with trust."

Cons: It is slightly longer and more technical than the Board's current simplified proposal.

Option 3: The Infrastructure Anchor Approach

Proposed text: "Anchoring a secure and trusted internet through the .au namespace."

Pros: This accommodates the desire to mention the broader internet but clarifies auDA's specific, mechanical role as the "anchor" or bedrock. It explicitly retains the .au namespace, satisfying registrars, cybersecurity professionals, and technical stakeholders who demand infrastructural accuracy.

Cons: The word "anchoring" is slightly more industrial and less consumer-friendly than "empowering," potentially lacking the emotional resonance of the other options.

Final Recommendation

I strongly recommend the Board adopt a variation of **Option 1 or Option 2**. A purpose statement must be memorable, but it must never sacrifice the core technical identity of the organization to achieve that brevity.

auDA does not merely connect users to the internet. auDA manages the .au namespace, safeguarding Australia's digital sovereignty and protecting the commercial identities of the national economy. That critical sovereign asset must remain front and center in how the organization defines its permanent value to the nation.

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