LICENSING RULES REVIEW 2025

Implementation Plan

Introduction

This document outlines the proposed approach to implement the recommendations from the review of the .au Domain Administration Rules: Licensing (.au Licensing Rules) undertaken by the **Licensing Rules Review 2025 Policy Advisory Panel** (the Panel) from September 2025 to August 2026.

The .au Domain Administration (auDA) Board requested management to prepare this implementation plan, taking into account the impact of the recommendations. The proposed implementation plan is subject to public consultation.

Concurrently, proposed amendments to the .au Licensing Rules giving effect to the recommendations are also subject to public consultation and should be reviewed in conjunction with this plan.

Scope of Implementation

A full list of recommendations from the Final Report of the Panel is available as **Appendix A.**

Implementation of these recommendations will require a range of solutions:

- No changes or updates to reflect current practice
- Preparation of information or improved processes to assist the public
- Registry system changes to align domain name lifecycle timing with common international practice
- Support for changes to the allocation criteria for com.au and net.au namespaces.

Proposed Transition Approach

Given the changes to allocation will require the most focus in implementation, transition to the new rules working closely with the .au registry operator and registrars, has been designed as follows.

Grandfathering

New allocation rules will only apply to new com.au and net.au domain name licences. No current registrant of a domain name licence will be affected by the proposed changes to the allocation criteria. When a domain name licence is transferred to an unrelated entity, a new licence is issued and the new registrant will be subject to the new rules. The new rules will not apply when a current registrant transfers their existing licence between registrars or when a current registrant's business structure changes e.g. sole trader to a trust or company structure, or vice versa.

Derivation

The com.au and net.au namespaces have always had both eligibility and allocation rules. Under the current rules, meeting allocation with a registered name does not require an exact match and acronyms are permitted. In the proposed new rules, expanded ways of deriving a compliant domain name from a registered name are being proposed. These include permitting synonyms, abbreviations and common alternative spellings or misspellings.

Further support

Tools to support compliance with the new allocation rules are being considered, including:

- **Availability Check Tool** - registrants can enter their ABN for suggested available domain names (an API or AI Agent version can be made available to registrars to incorporate into their processes)
- **Update and Validate Business Information** – registrants can directly upload ABN, trademark or business name information for validation (an API or AI Agent version can be made available to registrars to incorporate into their processes). This will enable auDA to assist registrants to comply with the allocation rules so registrars can continue their focus on eligibility validation.

auDA will also continue to support .au marketing programs with registrars and apply the compliance posture of communicate, educate, guide and facilitate before enforcement.

Timing Options for Roll-Out

There are two key recommendations that will require cooperation across the domain name eco-system – domain name life cycle changes and changes to allocation criteria. Considering this, two potential options for implementation have been identified.

Option 1 — **Staged implementation**

First tranche: Domain lifecycle rule changes introduced first (Q2 2027).

Second tranche: All other agreed changes introduced later (Q4 2027)

Option 2 — **Single date implementation**

All agreed changes introduced simultaneously on a single date (Q4 2027)

Indicative timeline

Sept 2025 to Aug 2026	Aug-Oct 2026 →	Nov 2026 →	Jan 2027 →	Feb 2027 →	Mar 2027 →	2027
Policy Advisory Panel consultation phases and final report	auDA accepts Panel Report in principle and consultation commenced	**Public consultation on proposed roll-out and rules changes**	**Consultation closes**	**Final Board decision**	**Development of tools and materials for roll-out**	**Roll-out of all changes agreed by the Board (either staged or on a single date)**

What are the proposals for change

Theme	Proposed change	What it means	What to expect
Allocation	For com.au and net.au domain name licences, the allocation rule allowing a match to unregistered name of a service, goods, event, activity or premises will be removed.	Registrations in com.au and net.au will need a matching registered name, such as the legal name of the sole trader, a registered business name, company name or Australian trade mark. It will provide an anchor to an authoritative source between a new domain name and its registrant. All new registrations and transfers of domain name licences to an unrelated registrant in com.au and net.au will need to meet the new rules from the implementation date. Existing com.au and net.au domain name licences may continue to meet allocation rules under the existing rules, and will be able to renew those licences. This change aligns with Australian law (*Business Names Registration Act 2011* (Cth)), where a business must either trade under their own name or a registered business name.	No changes for existing registrants at least until the next multi-stakeholder panel review of the licensing rules (expected to be approximately 5 years). On commencement of the rule change, new registrations and transfers of licences to unrelated registrants will be affected, requiring a 'matching' legal name, business name, trade mark or other entity name type listed in rule 2.4.4(2)(a)-(e). To support new registrations and transfers to unrelated entities, the new rules also consider the allocation rules to permit synonyms, acronyms, abbreviations and common alternative spellings and misspellings. auDA will develop tools to make it easier to check domain name availability, update registry records, including automated auDA-initiated updates to reduce the actions required by registrants. Some new registrants may need to register a business name to meet the rules and comply with Australian legislation. Current Australian Securities and Investments Commission costs to register a business name are $47 per year, or $108 for three years.
Lifecycle changes	Renewal may occur at any point in the licence term; cooling-off, redemption and pending delete periods will be updated and made more consistent with common international practice.	More flexibility and added protection against accidental loss. Greater consistency with common international practice. The .au registry operator will need to build and implement updates to the registry software. Registrars may need to update their websites, business processes and systems.	The .au registry operator will update systems with advance notice to registrars to give effect to the recommendations. Registrars will incorporate new rules into their practices and communicate to registrants as required.

Theme	Proposed change	What is means	What to expect
Uplifts	Registrar obligations to contact registrants about expiry, suspension and cancellation will be made clearer.	More timely, understandable notice for consumers at important points in the licence lifecycle. Potential time/resource impact on registrars where these contact requirements are not current practice.	Standardised frequency of required contact from registrars to registrants in advance of expiry, suspension or cancellation.
	auDA will publish criteria and aggregate information about .au domain names that are 'reserved' (prevented from use), rather than the list itself.	Greater transparency without enabling copycat or malicious behaviour.	Publication of the reservation criteria and aggregate information with security safeguards in mind.
	Scam cooperation and guidance will continue; transition guidance will support people leaving commercial activity (e.g. retirement).	Continued focus on trust and consumer wellbeing with more publicly available information on how auDA contributes to scam minimisation. More targeted help for retirees and others who cease to be eligible for com.au and net.au.	Plain-language guidance and targeted stakeholder information.
Reflecting current practice	These existing practices will be continued and, where necessary, reflected in the Licensing Rules with greater clarity: • **Monetistation** – Domain monetisation continues to be permitted in the com.au, net.au and .au direct namespace. • **Contested .au direct names** – Continuation of the current process for contested .au direct names. • **Audit complaints** – auDA currently accepts complaints related to outcomes of its proactive audits. The complaints process will be amended to reflect this existing practice, providing greater clarity and certainty for complainants. • **Rights to request an Internal Review** – A person affected by an auDA decision may request an internal review of that decision. The definition of the 'affected person' will be reviewed and the timeframe for lodgment about licence cancellation increased to 7 days. • **Role-based descriptors** – There will be information about how registrants can use role-based descriptions to limit publication of personal information. This information is already publicly available in the .au Domain Administration Rules: Registrar.		

APPENDIX A – RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE POLICY ADVISORY PANEL

Rec 1:	No change to the current approach that allows domain monetisation in the com.au, net.au and .au direct namespace.
Rec 2:	The Panel recommends deleting subparagraph (f) from section 2.4.4 (2) of the .au Licensing Rules. Note a minority of the Panel did not support this recommendation and instead supported the retention of the status quo.
Rec 3:	The Panel recommends continuation of the current process for the contested .au direct name allocation process.
Rec 4.1:	Remove the requirement under Rule 2.6.7 of the .au Licensing Rules for auDA to publish the reserved list.
Rec 4.2:	auDA should publish the criteria based on which it decides to put a domain name in a reserved list, and release aggregate metrics, such as number of Reserved Names, number of reversals that are being or have been reviewed, and average time taken from detection to reservation over periods of time.
Rec 5.1:	The Panel recommends that the complaints process in Part 3 of the .au Licensing Rules be amended to include audits performed by auDA.
Rec 5.2:	The Panel recommends that the scope of the 'affected person' is broadened appropriate to Rules 3.6.1 and 3.8.1 of the .au Licensing Rules such that they can demonstrate an interest in the domain name adequately.
Rec 5.3:	The Panel recommends increasing the time given to a person to file an application under Rule 3.6.3 of the .au Licensing Rules to 7 days from the current 48 hours.
Rec 6:	The Panel recommends amending the following rules regarding the domain lifecycle: **a)** Remove the 90-days renewal window within Rule 2.14.1 of the .au Licensing Rules and allow registrant to renew domain licences anytime during the lifetime of the domain until the expiration of the licence; **b)** Increase the cooling-off period from 3 days to 5 days in relation to Rule 2.15.4 of the .au Licensing Rules; **c)** Amend the redemption periods and apply a consistent deletion period with 30 days redemption period (to standardise along the lines of international best practices); and **d)** increase the pending/hold period from 1 day to 5 days (time between the redemption and purging of the domain name).
Rec 7:	The Panel recommends that the current approach to scams under the .au Licensing Rules be retained, and further, auDA should work with NASC to continually refine the approach to dealing with scams in the .au and publish processing guidance, scam referrals and outcomes. Acknowledging the fast-moving nature of scams particularly with the rapid development of AI technology, the Panel further recommends that this issue be included in the terms of reference for the next review of the .au Licensing Rules in three years' time.
Rec 8:	The Panel recommends that the .au Licensing Rules should incorporate clear information about a registrar's obligation to contact a registrant in the case of suspension, cancellation

	or expiry of a domain name and there should be an uplift in the frequency and method of contact like sending multiple notices in plain language.
Rec 9:	The Panel recommends adoption of flexibility within the compliance posture to facilitate a registrant transition to another appropriate namespace once they have ended their commercial operations and they no longer meet the com.au eligibility. The Panel also recommends that auDA distributes advisory/educational documents on how registrants can approach transitions in simple language.
Rec 10:	The Panel recommends that the .au Licensing Rules be amended to include information, along the lines of section 2.8.1 of the Registrar Rules, about how registrants can use role-based descriptions in the WHOIS to limit publication of personal information.