auDA 2026–30 Draft Strategy

Consultation Paper

April 2025

About auDA

.au Domain Administration Limited (auDA) is an Australian not-for-profit community-based organisation responsible for administering the .au domain.

It was established by the Australian Internet community in 1997, to be the administrator of, and the Australian self-regulatory policy body, for the .au country-code Top Level Domain (**ccTLD**).

auDA has been endorsed by the Australian Government since 2001 to manage the .au domain for the benefit of all Australians. The Government sets out the basis for its endorsement in formal **Terms of Endorsement**, which outline auDA's core functions and principles and guide our work. We also operate under an agreement with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (**ICANN**), the international body that coordinates the internet's naming and numbering systems.

The .au domain name system (**DNS**) is Australian critical infrastructure in the communications sector, designated under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018 (Cth) (**SOCI**). As the trusted administrator of the DNS, auDA supports more than four million .au domain names that facilitate internet users in Australia and around the world to connect to websites, email addresses and other Internet resources using a globally unique identifier ending in .au.

Any individual or organisation that has an Australian presence is eligible to have a domain name in .au, and is also eligible to become a member of auDA.

auDA is governed by the Corporations Act and the auDA Constitution, which sets out our governance requirements as a not-for-profit, including the appointment and duties of our Board Directors, Nomination Committee, Advisory Committees and members.

To deliver our work in the interest of Australians, we engage with the Australian public, .au members, industry, government, civil society, and academia, and administer .au through multi-stakeholder processes that are inclusive, consensus-based, transparent, and accountable.

Introduction from auDA CEO Bruce Tonkin

auDA is the trustee of Australia's .au ccTLD for the internet community. We are responsible for ensuring .au delivers value for the community and is secure, reliable and trusted. We do this on behalf of all Australians and this is front of mind as we develop our 2026-30 Strategy.

auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy sets out our proposed strategic direction over the next five years, informed by a range of inputs and a thorough planning process. We commenced work in 2023 with a current and prospective operating environment scan which culminated in our *Future Scenarios Project Report 2024*. We have deeply considered the opportunities and challenges we face as a not-for-profit ccTLD manager within a rapidly evolving technology and geopolitical environment.

Collaborating with our multi-stakeholder community is core to auDA's commitment to multi-stakeholder processes. Our Draft Strategy has been shaped by community feedback including stakeholder and .au member surveys that tell us what our community expects from and envisions for auDA. It is also informed by the Australian Government's 2025 Terms of Endorsement for auDA, reviewed by the Government in early 2025, and leverages staff and Board expertise, with all team members and Directors having had the opportunity to envision what auDA could achieve by 2030 and how we can get there.

At its core, our Draft Strategy outlines how auDA will continue to fulfil our Core Functions while maintaining a strong operating position, innovating and responding to change.

We now seek community feedback to help us refine and finalise our Strategy. I Invite all interested stakeholders to share your thoughts with us so we can reflect the views of our multi-stakeholder community and strengthen auDA's ability to deliver value for all internet users.
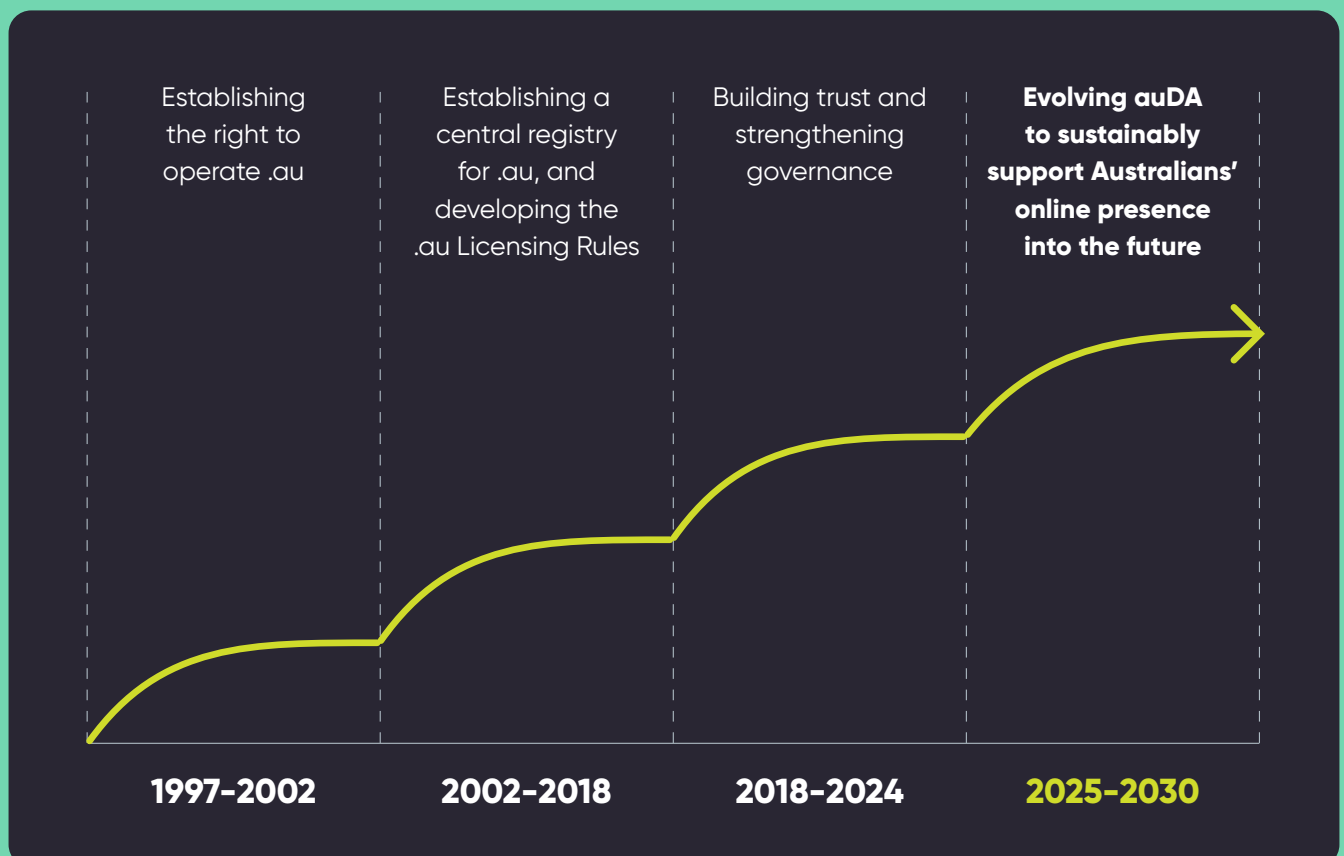
auDA's story

auDA was established in 1997 by the Australian internet community as the administrator of, and the Australian self-regulatory policy body, for the .au ccTLD.

In 2001, we were officially endorsed by the Australian Government to administer the .au ccTLD and received formal delegation for the administration of .au from ICANN.

Since that time, auDA has built consumer confidence in .au as a trusted choice for Australians online, supported significant growth in .au registrations, facilitating Australia's digital economy and social connection, built trust in auDA as a steward of the .au ccTLD, and embedded robust corporate governance processes to support our work.

As we look to 2025 and beyond, auDA faces a markedly different geopolitical environment, evolving technologies and different operating environment, which are set out in greater detail on page 8.

Against this backdrop, we seek to embed sustainable business operations so we can continue delivering social and economic benefits for Australians through the use of .au domain names. Our Draft 2026–30 Strategy is designed to guide us through this evolution.

Establishing the right to operate .au	Establishing a central registry for .au, and developing the .au Licensing Rules	Building trust and strengthening governance	**Evolving auDA to sustainably support Australians' online presence into the future**
1997-2002	**2002-2018**	**2018-2024**	**2025-2030**

auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy on a page

Purpose

To ensure the secure and reliable operation of .au and the internet's naming system, and champion an open, free, secure and interoperable internet, for the benefit of all Australians.

Vision

.au is the primary online identity for Australian individuals and organisations, supported by a nimble and resilient auDA.

Strategic Pillars

Trust

Strengthen Australians' trust in the .au and auDA, and grow Australians' engagement in the digital economy and society.

Capability

Grow auDA's leadership and technical skills so that it is nimble and resilient and can confidently meet the challenges of a technically and geopolitically dynamic environment.

Innovation

Utilise new technologies to ensure the financial sustainability of auDA as a self-funded, not-for-profit organisation, and improve the utility of the .au.

Impact

Leverage auDA's expertise to develop the next generation of internet governance and DNS experts locally and regionally, and support under-served communities to establish an online presence.

Terms of Endorsement · auDA Constitution

Trust · Innovation · Capability · Impact

Values
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Accountability and Excellence
- Curiosity

2026-30 Strategy development

auDA is the trusted administrator of the .au domain – a role we carry out on behalf of the Australian community. To continue supporting Australians into the future, we've undertaken a thorough strategic planning process to consider our operating environment, challenges and opportunities, and determine our proposed areas of strategic focus for 2026-30.

The auDA Board has participated in the process for developing the Draft Strategy and seeks feedback from auDA's multi-stakeholder community prior to finalising and endorsing the Strategy.

Process

auDA used design thinking methodology to develop its strategy. This involved considering our future operating environment and the challenges and opportunities ahead, and clarifying or "discovering" them through workshops, "defining" them in greater detail with staff and the Board, before framing or "developing" the areas of focus for auDA.
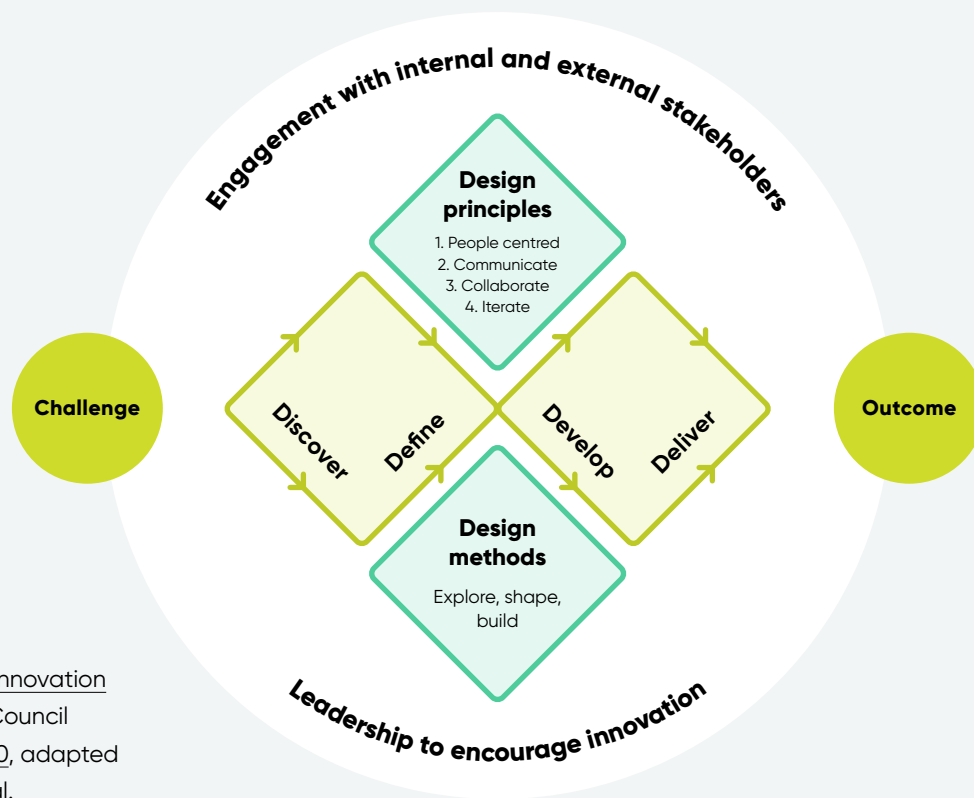
We then used systematic thinking to develop ideas to solve challenges and optimise opportunities that we face. The output of this work is presented here in our draft strategy.

Future Scenarios

auDA recognises that we operate in a complex geopolitical environment subject to rapid change and innovation. To support our strategic planning, we commenced our strategy planning in 2023 with a long-term foresight project that explored the communications and technology environment in 2044 with three contrasting scenarios: State of Alert, Ecological Civilisation, and The Price is Right. These scenarios consider issues that will impact auDA's operating environment including geopolitics, use of technology, security and trade, and environmental impacts. They were developed over several months with input from our multi-stakeholder community, our standing Advisory Committees, and local and global experts.

The scenarios enabled us to anticipate future complexity and consider how auDA and .au can continue to deliver value for Australians into the future, in what will undoubtedly be a vastly different environment to that which we operate in now.

You can learn more about the scenarios and how we developed them in auDA's *Future Scenarios Project Report*.

Design principles
1. People centred
2. Communicate
3. Collaborate
4. Iterate

Challenge

Discover

Define

Develop

Deliver

Outcome

Engagement with internal and external stakeholders

Leadership to encourage innovation

Design methods
Explore, shape, build

Framework for Innovation by the Design Council under CC BY 4.0, adapted from the original.

Staff and Board workshops

Over 2024-25, auDA staff and Board Directors participated in a range of strategic planning activities based on design thinking principles, to identify potential areas of focus for auDA over the next five years. Staff and Directors have contributed through all-staff workshops, staff working groups and Director workshops.

In addition to the Future Scenarios Report, inputs included consideration of:

- Technology and market developments
- auDA's enterprise risks
- Feedback from our 2023 stakeholder survey and 2024 .au member survey
- Feedback from auDA's Materiality Survey which identified what matters are most material to our stakeholders (You can learn more about our material themes in our 2023-24 Annual Report)
- auDA's Terms of Endorsement from the Australian Government.

Throughout the process, auDA staff and Directors identified and iterated strategic opportunities and areas of focus for auDA over 2026-30. The Draft Strategy presents the outcomes of this work.

Next steps: community input

Reflective of our commitment to the multi-stakeholder approach to engagement, auDA now seeks feedback from its community on the Draft Strategy.

The consultation period closes at 5pm on 16 May 2025. Following consultation, we will:

- Consider submissions and insights received from the community to inform refinement and finalisation of our Strategy
- Seek endorsement of the Strategy from the auDA Board
- Publish our final 2026-30 Strategy early in the 2025-26 financial year, sharing it with .au members, stakeholders and the public.

Strategic environment

Trust

.au domain names are the preferred choice among Australian consumers and small businesses, and .au is the seventh largest ccTLD in the world. auDA research identifies high levels of consumer trust in .au year-on-year. Our most recent **Why .au?** research report indicates half of Australian consumers will only purchase from a business online if it has a website ending in .au.

This trust is supported by robust .au Licensing Rules that ensure .au registrants (domain name holders) have a connection to Australia, a comprehensive compliance framework, and complaints and disputes processes that are transparent, fair and accessible. In 2025, auDA will appoint a Policy Advisory Panel to conduct a review of the .au Licensing Rules, which will include extensive community consultation.

Demand

Long term averages show global domain name registrations are slowing. Registrations have been impacted by competition from social media accounts, online marketplaces and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), each of which impact the visibility of domain names when users seek information on the internet.

Demand for new .au domain names flattened in financial year 2023-24 following several years of strong growth driven by the introduction of .au direct. The .au namespace currently aligns to global trends, with stable registrations year-on-year.

As auDA considers the changing demand for domain names, we recognise the need to explore new products and services that align with our mission. This will support our long-term sustainability as a fully self-funding not-for-profit organisation and the administrator of the .au domain, in accordance with our Terms of Endorsement.

Security

The .au has significantly lower levels of DNS abuse (phishing and malware) compared to global averages and auDA operates a reliable, secure .au DNS with 100 per cent availability.

The .au DNS is defined as *critical DNS* infrastructure within the critical communications sector under the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018* (Cth) legislation. We promote strong cyber security through our commitment to best practice security standards, delivering our legal and regulatory requirements and a culture of continuous improvement.

Our operations

How we work and the tools we use are undergoing a period of change. The take up of AI within workplaces globally and development of new AI tools continues at a rapid pace. auDA is committed to using AI where relevant to improve our operations in a secure and risk-controlled manner.

Our staff are an essential part of auDA's ability to deliver and our ways of working and capabilities are key in the rapidly changing environment we operate in. Professionals with expertise in emerging technology and security are in high demand. As our operating environment develops and changes, recruiting, training, supporting and retaining skilled staff in the right roles will be an important focus.

Within this changing landscape, auDA must also ensure our governance model remains fit for purpose and maintains the transparency and rigour required by our unique position as custodian of the .au DNS.

Internet governance locally, regionally and globally

auDA actively advocates for, and is committed to, the practice of the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance that is inclusive, consensus-based, transparent and accountable. The multi-stakeholder approach balances the needs and views of the community, civil society, industry, the technical community, academia and governments.

Internet governance has also become an increasingly contested space, as governments and non-government stakeholders navigate a shifting governance landscape. There are mounting efforts to move internet governance away from existing multistakeholder institutions into multilateral forums, or to increase the influence governments have over the management of internet resources. Digital and cyber policy – including combatting cybercrime, regulating harms, promoting online safety and maximising the benefits of the digital economy – is central to the national interest of many nation states. This has led governments to increasingly prioritise control over digital resources.

We are a founding member of the global Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism (**TCCM**), which comprises members from the internet naming and numbering community, and through which we contribute to global dialogue to strengthen multi-stakeholder decision making.

auDA actively participates in and sponsors a range of multi-stakeholder forums including ICANN, the Asia Pacific Top Level Domain Association (APTLD), and Internet Governance Forums (IGFs) globally, regionally and nationally. We are committed to engaging with and diversifying our communities at all levels to collectively support an open, free, secure and global internet

Strengths

- Reliable and secure operation of the .au DNS
- High community trust in .au domain names
- World-leading approach to tackling DNS abuse
- .au Licensing Rules developed through multi-stakeholder processes

- Robust corporate governance
- Best practice cyber security and network resilience
- Regular engagement with the Federal Government, ICANN, members and our multi-stakeholder community
- Strong relationships and active participation in the multi-stakeholder internet governance community

- More than 5,000 .au members, with considerable growth in diversity
- Commitment to driving positive public impact through the Public Benefit Program and internet governance and public policy
- Robust registrant data quality and identity validation processes
- Motivated, expert staff and Board Directors.

Challenges

- Geopolitical instability and differences could lead to a splintered internet with different technical and content-related rules, and reduced interoperability
- High cyber threat environment and increased sophistication of cyber attacks with the use of AI
- Increasing regulatory requirements, including in areas of cyber security and data management

- Emerging technologies and growth of online platforms and marketplaces may impact the demand for domain names
- Flattening demand for domain names – impacted by drop in visibility of domain names in common internet applications

- Inflationary pressures, increased regulatory obligations and security requirements put upward pressure on cost base
- Recruiting, training and retaining skilled, future-ready staff in a competitive operating landscape.

Opportunities

- Invest in innovation and product development to support sustainable revenues
- Further enhance trust and security throughout the .au ecosystem
- Broaden our impact in our local, regional and global communities in service of our purpose and encourage use of common internet standards and common approaches to reduce DNS Abuse

- Take a leading role in multi-stakeholder internet governance locally, regionally and globally to contribute to improved policy and strengthened multi-stakeholder decision making. Consider how we can work with the others in the industry to mitigate against content-related online harms

- Develop our workforce and add new capabilities to take advantage of new technologies and ways of working.

auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy

Our purpose

To ensure the secure and reliable operation of .au and the internet's naming system, and champion an open, free, secure and interoperable internet, for the benefit of all Australians.

Our values

auDA's work is aligned through a shared purpose, vision and values.

Our values guide the way in which we work together and work within our multi-stakeholder community.

We value:

Leadership

We are committed to communicating openly, and adding value to our multi-stakeholder community, locally, regionally and globally

Collaboration

We work together as one auDA in the service of Australian, regional and global internet users

Accountability and Excellence

We honour our commitments, are responsible for our decisions, actions and performance, and deliver all outcomes at the highest quality

Curiosity

We seek to continuously grow our knowledge and improve our understanding of our stakeholder view points

Our vision

.au is the primary online identity for Australian individuals and organisations, supported by a nimble and resilient auDA.

Core functions

- Ensure stable, secure and reliable operation of the .au domain, as part of Australia's suite of critical infrastructure
- Administer a licensing regime for .au domain names based in multi-stakeholder processes that is transparent, responsive, accountable, accessible and efficient.
- Actively advocate for, participate in, and support multi-stakeholder Internet governance processes domestically, regionally and internationally.

Our Objectives & Key Results (OKRs) and related projects

Our vision will be fulfilled through the successful completion of strategic projects to achieve our Objectives and Key Results (OKRs). The details of these projects will be refined in an Annual Operating Plan over the lifetime of the Strategy, with projects to be delivered in phases across the five year strategy horizon.
The sections below provide an illustrative set of strategic projects which will inform the development of annual operating plans.

Our OKRs and related projects

Trust

Objective

Strengthen Australians' trust in the .au and auDA, and grow Australians' engagement in the digital economy and society.

Key Results

- Raise the trust and integrity of .au domain names
- Successful implementation of the Australian Government's Information Security Manual (ISM) controls
- Diversify membership and grow member engagement
- Achieve net zero carbon emissions in the operation of .au.

Strategic Projects*

- Automated validation of domain name registration data to assess registrations
- Data insights platform to optimise integrity of domain name registrations
- Lift security to implement all relevant controls in the Australian Government's ISM, and implement the Zero Trust Maturity Model
- Research public trust in the internet environment, and utilise findings to enhance trust through auDA service delivery, advocacy and action by auDA and others
- Continue to increase the diversity of members and innovate the member program to leverage the membership base to better support the development of .au policies and policy approaches
- Track carbon emissions and adopt approaches that provide a local environmental and social benefit.

Innovation

Objective

Utilise new technologies to ensure the financial sustainability of auDA as a self-funded, not-for-profit organisation, and improve the utility of the .au.

Key Results

- auDA is financially sustainable
- Improve organisational productivity.

Strategic Projects*

- Develop privacy protections for those who register domain names with their personal name and email address
- Develop an online identity service, linked to a .au domain name, compliant with the Australian Government's digital ID system
- Utilise AI technologies to improve the integrity of .au domain names and ensure that auDA continues to meet community expectations
- Increase .au domain name take up and use amongst small businesses through comprehensive resources for small businesses
- Improve productivity through process re-engineering, process automation, operating model redesign, role redesign and new ways of working.

* under consideration

Impact

Objective

Leverage auDA's expertise to develop the next generation of internet governance and DNS experts locally and regionally, and support under-served communities to establish an online presence.

Key Results

- Develop the Asia Pacific Internet Governance Academy (APIGA) Australia, build a comprehensive fellowship program, and embed internet governance into university curriculums
- Regional ccTLDs are enabled to run a resilient DNS anycast network with DNSSEC enabled, and registry database backup
- Communities challenged by digital inclusion are supported to participate in the digital economy and society through use of .au domain names.

Strategic Projects*

- Train university students and early-stage professionals in the DNS ecosystem, and embed DNS skills and internet governance into university curriculums
- Use multi-stakeholder approaches to build the integrity of domain names, and review the competition model for the .au domain
- Support regional ccTLDs to build resilience through technical and policy capacity building
- Support communities in Australia with digital inclusion challenges to utilise .au as their digital identity to create value
- Work with TCCM members to ensure diversity of TCCM membership and to demonstrate the value of multi-stakeholder decision-making processes.

Capability

Objective

Grow auDA's leadership and technical skills so that it is nimble and resilient and can confidently meet the challenges of a technically and geopolitically dynamic environment.

Key Results

- Leadership Team members have completed a leadership training program
- AI is integrated into the business, enabling greater business productivity
- Staff rate auDA as a great place to work, as measured through an annual staff engagement survey
- Stakeholders consider auDA is a trusted and effective organisation.

Strategic Projects*

- Develop an auDA-specific leadership training program to support leadership capability and career development
- Develop a culture of skills development and innovation across all areas of operation.
- Develop a program for staff to annually map and meet relevant professional development goals
- Develop a holistic operating model that leverages new technology, and aligns capabilities and services with strategic objectives.

* under consideration

Consultation framework and questions

We seek community feedback on the auDA Draft 2026-30 Strategy. We ask that you consider and respond to the following questions to inform us about community perspectives on our proposed strategic direction. We will take all submissions made during the consultation into consideration to inform our final Strategy.

Questions

auDA asks that you consider the following questions in your submission:

1

Does auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy establish a clear strategic direction for the organisation?

2

Will auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy support it to deliver on the proposed strategic purpose and vision by 2030?

3

Does auDA's Draft 2026-30 Strategy effectively position auDA to meet the operational challenges and capitalise on the opportunities it faces over 2026-30?

How to make a submission

We ask that submissions address the questions above.

The preferred method for the receipt of submissions is via the online form available on the auDA website.

Submissions can also be made by:

- Email at consultation@auda.org.au
- Post at auDA Strategy Consultation, PO Box 18315, Melbourne, VIC 3000.

Please note that following consultation, submissions will be made public and published on auDA's website. You may ask for your submission to be published anonymously.

auDA reserves the right to redact or decline to publish the submission where it includes inappropriate content such as potentially defamatory material. We will advise you if such as decision is made, provided you have included your contact details with your submission.

Next steps

- Consultation will close at **5pm AEST on 16 May 2025**.
- auDA will then collate feedback to inform its final Strategy.
- Submissions will be published on auDA's website and auDA's Strategy will be released early in the 2025-26 financial year.

Glossary

.au member

.au members are members of auDA as set out in the auDA Constitution. They are critical stakeholders who enhance auDA's understanding of Australians' online needs and provide input to auDA policies and strategy. Members support the independent administration of the .au domain and have access to a range of benefits including events, insights and partner offers.

Country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD)

A two-character top level domain reserved for a specific country listed in the ISO 3166 standard (e.g. .au).

Domain name

A human-readable internet address that allows internet users to find websites and send emails without having to remember complex Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.

Domain name licence

When you register a domain name you don't 'own' it, instead you're granted permission to use the domain name for specific period of time via a licence. The domain name holder (registrant) can choose to renew the licence before its expiry date or let it lapse, making the domain name available to be registered by other eligible parties.

Domain name system (DNS)

A critical component of the internet that enables users to find and connect to websites and email addresses by mapping domain names to their corresponding IP addresses. The .au DNS is defined as critical infrastructure under Federal legislation.

DNS abuse

Malicious behaviour that uses the DNS and domain names to carry out online harm. DNS abuse is classified into five categories; malware (such as ransomware), botnets, phishing, pharming and spam (where it facilitates one of the other four categories of DNS abuse).

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

The organisation responsible for coordinating the internet's number and naming systems to help ensure a stable, secure and unified global internet.

Multi-stakeholder community

auDA's multi-stakeholder community is the network of key stakeholders that auDA regularly interacts with including the .au registry operator, registrars, resellers, registrants, local, state, and federal government entities, civil society, academia, industry bodies, technical community and .au members.

Multi-stakeholder internet governance

The rules, policies, standards and practices that coordinate and shape global cyberspace, which operate largely by consensus, with ideas and proposals debated on their merits. This leads to outcomes that have considered a full range of perspectives and have broad support. Representatives from governments, industry, the technical community, civil society and academia all participate on an equal footing.

Namespace

Domain name extensions (or different types of .au domain names) including .au direct, com.au, net.au, org.au etc.

Open, free, secure and global internet

An open, free, secure and global internet is an internet that is interoperable across borders, accessible to all without undue restrictions, and is safe, reliable and resilient.

Registrant

The individual or organisation who holds a domain name licence. Registrants do not own a domain name. They hold a licence that allows them to use the registered domain name for the duration of the licence period.

Registrar

Companies that offer domain name services to the public, including registering, maintaining and renewing .au domain name licences. auDA accredited .au registrars are accredited by auDA to offer .au domain name registration services. They have direct access to the .au registry database.

Registry database

A database of all licensed .au domain names and associated information, such as the name and contact details of the registrant and registrar. Selected registry data is publicly available via the WHOIS tool, which allows people to find information about a domain name licence.

Registry operator

The .au registry operator is a third-party contracted by auDA to deliver registry services and support the reliable operation of the .au domain. Identity Digital Australia (formerly known as Afilias Australia) was appointed as the .au registry operator following a global tender process in 2017 and reappointed following a subsequent global tender process in 2023.

Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018 (Cth)

The *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018* (Cth), often referred to as the SOCI Act, is Federal legislation that outlines the legal obligations for operators of critical infrastructure assets. The .au DNS is defined as Australian critical infrastructure under the Act.

Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism (TCCM)

The TCCM comprises global members from the internet's naming and numbering community who work together to operate the critical infrastructure and services that sit at the heart of the internet and advocate for a stronger technical voice in internet governance.

Terms of Endorsement

auDA's Terms of Endorsement from the Federal Government outline the Government's formal endorsement of auDA. auDA must operate the .au for the benefit of all Australians in accordance with the Terms for ongoing endorsement.