

● **16 July 2024**

First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA)  
GPO Box 594  
Canberra, ACT 2601

**Subject: Submission to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group in relation to the creation of a First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap**

To the members of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

The .au Domain Administration Limited ([auDA](#)) is the trusted administrator of the .au country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD). The .au ccTLD is part of Australia's critical infrastructure, supporting more than 4.2 million .au domain names. auDA is endorsed by the Commonwealth Government to deliver a secure, accessible and trusted .au domain for all internet users under its [Terms of Endorsement](#).

We are committed to digital inclusion and seek to ensure that its benefits can be understood and accessed by all Australians, regardless of their geographic location.

Accordingly, we welcome the opportunity to provide information to the Advisory Group, through the Department, that contributes to addressing the issues raised in the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap Discussion Paper.

### **auDA's Public Benefit Program and support for digital inclusion**

auDA is committed to improving digital inclusion and digital innovation for Australians and auDA's Public Benefit Program supports innovation by others through a range of research partnerships. We recognise that the internet is a great enabler to individuals, businesses, not-for-profits, educational institutions and government entities. This Program may in future include research into digital inclusion matters.

### **The auDA Foundation's grants program**

A key element of auDA's commitment to public good is the [auDA Foundation](#), a charitable trust established in 2006 to promote and encourage educational and research activities to enhance the utility of the internet.

Since 2021, the auDA Foundation has funded a community grants program focussed on digital inclusion and digital innovation for the benefit of specific cohorts including



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Programs that deliver on improving digital inclusion for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community include:

- 2021 Queensland University of Technology: Connecting in the Gulf – Understanding and addressing digital inclusion in low-income Indigenous families living on the Mornington Island,
- 2021 RMIT: Analysis of mobile telecommunications performance data in select Aboriginal communities to explore efforts to improve digital inclusion.
- 2022 Cool.org: Bridging the Digital Divide, a series of five culturally appropriate pathways to digital inclusion which showcase the work of 5 First Nations leaders in digital technology.
- 2022 National Justice Project: Tech4Justice, an AI powered platform that transforms how key community groups, including First Nations, use the internet to obtain justice.

auDA plans to deliver a community grants program in 2024 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be one of the five specific cohorts of grant focus.

### **auDA research: the Digital Lives of Australians**

auDA also seeks to support digital inclusion through community research. The *Digital Lives of Australians* research is an annual study undertaken by auDA each year since 2021. It explores the online experiences of Australian consumers and small businesses, spanning the significant benefits of the internet, perceptions of emerging technologies, views about cyber security, confidence keeping personal information secure and digital skills required for the digital future.

This research seeks to better understand Australians' use of the internet, how they seek to use the internet, challenges they may experience – including those of access, affordability and digital ability – and how they seek to resolve these challenges.

The [2024 Digital Lives of Australians report](#) (the report) is informed by a survey of 1,500 Australian consumers and 400 small businesses. The report highlights that regional Australians are increasingly using the internet for essential services such as banking, education and medical.

However, relative to metropolitan Australians, regional Australians experience slower and less reliable internet, often relying on satellite and fixed wireless connections. In addition, there is a notable gap in digital skills, limiting the ability of regional Australians to fully utilise essential online services.

The findings suggest investing in better infrastructure, targeted digital literacy programs, and ongoing research to understand and mitigate the digital divide and



improve digital lives of all Australians which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

auDA recognises that it is only through developing a better understanding of the digital lives of Australians that we can seek to address fundamental challenges and improve issues including access, affordability and digital ability.

### **auDA's Indigenous namespace consultation**

auDA's [2021-25 Strategy](#) sets innovation as key area of strategic focus. One of the ways in which we seek to innovate is to develop the .au domain and ensure it delivers greater choice for Australian internet users.

auDA has engaged Terri Janke and Company on a process of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to understand whether there is a demand for an Indigenous namespace in the .au domain.

We believe that if it is supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, an Indigenous namespace could provide significant benefits including supporting digital inclusion.

### **Conclusion**

As demonstrated in this submission, auDA supports digital inclusion and is committed to ensuring its work to support Australia's digital economy and society benefits all Australians, not just those living in metropolitan areas.

auDA supports the government's aim to develop a roadmap for First Nations Digital Inclusion, focussing on the issues of access, affordability and digital ability.

If you would like to discuss our submission or any of the auDA initiatives above, please contact auDA's Internet Governance and Policy Director, Jordan Carter, at [jordan.carter@auda.org.au](mailto:jordan.carter@auda.org.au).

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Sinclair

**Chief Executive Officer**