

## **Web Address Registration Pty Limited undertaking of 13 November 2023**

auDA is the administrator of the .au domain, endorsed by the Australian Government to administer the .au domain for the benefit of all Australians and ensure its stable, secure and reliable operation. One of the ways we do this is by administering a Licensing Framework for .au domain names that is transparent and accountable and enhances trust and confidence in the .au.

Registrars play an important role in ensuring the integrity of the Licensing Framework. The Licensing Framework comprises the Registrar Agreement between the registrar and auDA, the [.au Domain Administration Rules: Licensing](#) (.au Licensing Rules), the .au Domain [Administration Rules: Registrar](#) (Registrar Rules) and other relevant [auDA Published Policies](#).

Where a breach of registrar obligations under the Licensing Framework is identified, auDA has different remedies available depending on the nature and severity of the breach. One remedy is for the registrar to provide an undertaking to auDA for breach remediation/rectification and in respect of future conduct.

### **The relevant registrar obligation**

Section 2.12.2 of the Registrar Rules requires a Registrar to notify the Registrant Contact at least 30 calendar days prior to the expiration of a domain name licence.

### **The breach issue**

1. In April 2023, auDA began receiving complaints from registrants whose .au direct domain names had expired after 12 months and been purged from the .au Registry without the registrar Web Address Registration (or its related party and domain name licence reseller Dreamscape Networks International Pte Ltd trading as Crazy Domains) providing them with the required written notice at least 30 calendar days prior to expiry.
2. These registrants had all purchased what they thought were domain name licence terms of between 2 and 5 years, so they believed their domain names should not have expired after 12 months.
3. auDA received a number of complaints from registrants whose domain names were registered by other parties after they expired and were purged from the Registry.



## **auDA's investigation**

auDA contacted Web Address Registration and identified the following course of events leading to the breach:

1. The issue occurred due to a Web Address Registration software error that allowed successful applicants for .au direct names to purchase what they believed to be a multi-year domain name licence for a term of up to 5 years when in fact, .au direct names that had been allocated following contention were automatically registered for an initial 12 month term. (See the **Background** section below for information about the .au direct priority and contention process).
2. When these .au direct names were registered, the Registry provided the correct (12 month) expiry date to Web Address Registration.
3. Web Address Registration failed to correctly store the 12 month expiry date provided by the Registry in their domain name registration system. Therefore their domain registration system did not identify that these domain names required a notice of expiry towards the end of the 12 month period.
4. As a result, registrants who had selected and paid for a longer licence term were not contacted by Web Address Registration prior to or after their .au direct domain name licence expired after 12 months.
5. As the domain names were not renewed they were purged from the Registry and became available for registration by the public on a first come first served basis.

auDA found that Web Address Registration acted in breach of its obligation under the Registrar Agreement, in particular clause 2.12.2 of the Registrar Rules.

The breach has had a significant impact on registrants who lost domain name licences that they believed they had secured into the future. auDA has had ongoing discussions with Web Address Registration about the steps they are taking to address the issue with affected registrants.

## **Undertaking**

Web Address Registration acknowledged the breach and has provided the following undertakings to auDA:

1. It, and its sub-contractors, will manage and resolve any complaints and issues arising from the breach in a manner which ensures compliance with Web Address Registration's obligations under the Registrar Agreement, and which does not compromise the security and integrity of the .au domain name system.



2. It will conduct itself in good faith, including in its interactions with auDA and other stakeholders such as the registry operator, other registrars and registrants in performing its obligations under the Registrar Agreement.

### **Ensuring ongoing compliance**

auDA is committed to ensuring that registrars comply with their obligations under the Registrar Agreement and auDA Published Policies, and will actively monitor Web Address Registration's performance against its undertaking through a monthly review process.

### **Background**

The .au domain name system is part of Australia's critical infrastructure, and is an important service provided to Internet users to assist them to access people, organizations, and services connected to the Internet.

In 2022, auDA introduced the option for registrants to register domain names directly at the second level of .au (**.au direct**) (e.g. forexample.au). As part of introducing .au direct, auDA allowed existing registrants of domain names in the .au registry the opportunity to apply for their matching .au direct domain names during the Priority Application period, which ran from 24 March 2022 to 20 September 2022 (<https://www.auda.org.au/au-domain-names/au-direct/priority-allocation-process>).

Where there were multiple potential applications for a .au direct name, such as applications from the registrants of forexample.com.au and forexample.net.au for forexample.au, there was a process for applicants to resolve the contention. If the parties did not resolve the contention and wished to remain in contention for the .au direct domain name, they were required to renew their application on an annual basis.

When the contention was resolved, for example the other parties in contention did not renew their application, the matching .au direct name was automatically registered in the name of the successful registrant for an initial 12-month term. After the initial 12-month term expired, the registrant was free to renew the domain name for the term of their choice.

### **Contact**

Steph Viljoen

Manager Licencing Framework Compliance

steph.viljoen@auda.org.au