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auDA Name Policy Advisory Panel Submission
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Re: Establishment of an Indigenous 2LD.

Recommendation:

That a new 2LD be introduced to specify the web presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Secondly that the creation of this 2LD should be developed in consultation with existing Indigenous media groups such as NIMAA (The National Indigenous Media Association of Australia).

In considering the adoption of a new 2LD, economic, cultural, social and technological ramifications need to be taken into consideration. The reasons for adopting a new 2LD for Indigenous Australians are numerous and expressed in summary below.

(1) Creates conceptual diversity in the DNS: The ability to be 'recognised' or 'found', amongst the cacophony of voices in cyberspace is perhaps one of the hardest objectives to achieve. In acknowledging the unique role Indigenous media and communications initiatives have played in the Australian communications order, the recent *Productivity Commission into Broadcasting* (2000), suggested that Indigenous media not be subsumed within an 'ethnic' or 'community' category but rather be regarded as a distinctive communications sphere. There is no reason why this approach should not be extended to the emergent online media. An Indigenous 2LD would appropriately foster the development of this unique sector and recognise the special place of Indigenous languages and cultures, not only in Australia but also worldwide.

(2) Makes the DNS more useful for Internet users: Establishing a new 2LD to identify Indigenous organisation or individuals is a progressive step towards acknowledging the exceptional place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as one of the oldest continuing cultures. A new Indigenous 2LD would certainly enhance the directory function of the DNS by making it easier to locate a domain name by its type. Considering the enormous interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across the globe this would make perfect economic and cultural sense, enabling an already burgeoning Indigenous arts and culture industry greater market visibility and access.

(3) Self determination: In response to the new international domains to be introduced by ICANN this year, Indigenous Australians should be given the opportunity to find their own cultural, political and social identity online. Certainly this would not be antithetical to the trend of increasing differentiation and diversity on the net - perhaps its most valuable quality. This will not create harmful political divisions but would accurately represent the existence of an important and unique cultural group. This would reflect contemporary community attitudes towards Indigenous self-determination and the reconciliation process.

(4) Gives greater protection to Intellectual Property Rights: Australian Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights have never been properly recognised in Australian Copyright law. In response to these concerns the *Our Culture: Our Future Report* (1999) suggested that the Australian community support the development of codes or markers of authentic, indigenous content. This promotes trust and integrity in the web creation and allows global users to verify the legitimacy of the information they are accessing, the products they are purchasing online etc. The undesirability of Internet regulation and the relative ubiquity of information online produce an increased opportunity for Intellectual and cultural property rights abuses. The development of an Indigenous 2LD may make some steps towards verifying the authenticity of online content. Obviously the granting of these 2LD's would have to be carried out in consultation with a peak Indigenous body such as NIMAA or ATSIC.

(5) Encourages use: Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has already begun to adopt the Internet in education, commerce and many other communication purposes. There are now approximately 400 websites profiling different media associations, private businesses, educational groups, languages, socio-political groups, communities, histories etc. The introduction of an Indigenous 2LD would be a positive recognition of growth already under way and would encourage greater Indigenous participation in the future of communications.

In considering these debates it must be noted that there is a strongly held view amongst Indigenous people of their distinctiveness in terms of the broad tag 'ethnic' or 'multicultural'. The Indigenous 2LD is best appreciated if it is seen as recognition of the numerous Aboriginal Nations that existed prior to colonisation and continue to represent important markers of identity within the Indigenous community. An independent and distinct 2LD would be an overwhelmingly positive manoeuvre in maintaining the relevance of Indigenous languages, perspectives, histories, epistemologies etc.

Regards.

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