

auDA Name Policy Advisory Panel Submission

Re: Establishment of an .ind (Indigenous) Domain

Date: 9 August 2000

Recommendation:

That an .ind.au sub domain be established in recognition of Aboriginal Australians as distinct Australian peoples and as a means of encouraging Aboriginal participation in the development of the Internet in Australia.

Background:

The Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) is responsible for allocating generic top level domains (such as .com, .net, and .edu) and country code top level domains (such as .au, .uk, and .nz).

When looking to divide up the World community into a series of top level domains, IANA could have adopted a number of different paradigms such as separating domains by language, religious affiliation or ethnic group. Instead it decided to divide the World by political geography. This was a fairly sensible step for ensuring ease of administration.

Of course the casting of a net does not always catch everything and we have seen IANA make a series of exceptions to the political geography paradigm to cover areas such as Antarctica, Puerto Rico, the Heard and McDonald Islands and Palestine.

It is within this context that we find that indigenous peoples do not sit smoothly within IANA's allocation system. Whilst not all Australian Aboriginals would argue that Australia is an occupied territory in a similar way to Palestine, most would agree that they should be recognised as a separate subsection of Australian society. Indeed, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's submission to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights earlier this year stated that,

". . . there is a continuing refusal to recognize indigenous peoples as distinct "peoples" and the original owners of their lands and resources.

. . . In the past decade a number of national investigations and reports have clearly identified the impediments faced by indigenous peoples. Whilst these have revealed situations of profound discrimination and suffering they have also presented significant opportunities for the Government and the broader community to redress past injustices and to take positive measures to recognize the distinct rights of indigenous peoples in Australia. Whilst some members of the Australian community have taken up this challenge, it is to Australia's shame that Australian governments continue to fail to adopt appropriate special measures to address systematic discrimination against the indigenous population."

Australia's Aboriginal community has already begun to embrace the Internet. A quick search reveals numerous web sites devoted to Aboriginal history, art, culture, stories and language. However at present Aboriginal groups can only be allocated domain names within the traditional domains such as .org or .com.

There is no doubt that over the next decade the Internet will have a more and more profound effect upon Aboriginal communities. As such positive steps should be taken to ensure that Aboriginals have a place in that development.

The use of the .ind domain could easily be extended to other countries with minority indigenous peoples. It would give Aboriginal Australians a greater degree of control over the Internet and would allow Internet users to verify that the information that they are accessing is from bona fide Aboriginal communities, organisations and individuals.

It would be left to the Aboriginal community to administer the .ind domain as they felt appropriate and it may well be that after 10 years only a handful of people have taken up the option of publishing within the .ind domain. On the other hand, the establishment of the domain could be a catalyst for encouraging greater Aboriginal participation in an area of technology which is destined to have a large impact upon their communities.

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