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auDA



Submitted by Tim Herring on Tue, 22/05/2018 - 16:38

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There are a number of issues being debated in the realm of Internet Authority which affect Telecommunications and IT in Australia; as such they are of interest to TelSoc Members.

Laurie Patton has written a number of articles and I am attaching one here for your interest and any (polite) commentary:

LAURIE PATTON. Consultation group to help reshape Internet domain names management.

18 May 2018

With three months to develop new processes to redress historical weaknesses the company managing Australia's Internet domain names has created a broad-based consultative group to guide the process.

This week saw the first meeting of what .au Domain Administration Limited, commonly known as auDA, calls its Consultation Model Working Group. auDA is the organisation charged with overseeing the Internet domain name space in Australia. If you have a website you'll have dealt with one of the numerous companies that sell domain names to the public. They all operate under the authority and supervision of auDA.

The 16-member consultative group has been formed to help ensure community-wide consultation for changes to the .au namespace?, according to auDA's announcement to members.

auDA exists under a delegation from the federal government. Similar organisations run the domain names system in most countries. Apart from monitoring the sale of domain names, auDA is responsible for ensuring the overall integrity of the process. So it plays an essential role in how the Internet functions in this country.

The organisation has been mired in controversy in recent years. For a long time it was seen as a tightly held fiefdom under the control of a board of directors elected from within the industry. Several years ago there was an abrupt changing of the guard with long time chairman and former Coalition communications minister, Tony Staley, making way for a new chair Ballarat businessman Stuart Benjamin.

As Benjamin came in, out went long time CEO Chris Disspain. His replacement, Cameron Boardman, brought in a new team and this, of course, meant other long timers left the organisation.

Benjamin was subsequently replaced by current chair Chris Leptos AM, who was recruited via a nationwide search process. Leptos, who a Professorial Fellow at Monash University's Business School, is regarded as a steady hand from the corporate world.

Change inevitably brings controversy, and so it has at auDA. A group of former directors and members are now seeking to dislodge the current administration and have them replaced with some of the old guard. The charge is being led by industry veteran Josh Rowe who was on the auDA board for 14 years. Another leader of this group is former auDA staff member Paul Szyndler.

Rowe and Szyndler, along with auDA member Jim Stewart, have created a blog site called 'Grumpier' and called for the removal of three independent auDA board members chairman Leptos and directors Sandra Hook and Suzanne Ewart. A special general meeting is scheduled for 27 July 2018. Members will be asked to vote on a resolution to oust the three board members.

Meanwhile, the registry operations carried out by a third party has been put up for tender, with a global firm specialising in domain administration, Afiliast, about to take over on 1 July this year. Dispassionate observers might think this is a time for unity not further internal strife.

The machinations at auDA have naturally not gone unnoticed in Canberra. The federal government has given the company three months to prove it has improved governance processes in place. Last week auDA appointed three new directors to the board as part of the renewal process, including Nigel Phair who heads up the Centre for Internet Safety at the University of Canberra.

Leptos believes that with an expanded board auDA is in a good position to deliver the outcomes required by the Government. The director appointments were announced in a letter to members, along with a description of the skills the board believes they bring to auDA. The new directors were also recruited via a nationwide process with 30 candidates offering their services.

The 'grumpies' don't appear to have the numbers in the battle for control at this point, but they are working hard to influence the 300-odd auDA members. However, their activities will doubtless only add difficulty to the task of auDA meeting the Government's demands for stability and reform. It's hard to see how any further controversy is going to help soothe the nerves of a clearly concerned Minister, Senator Mitch Fifield. In fact, further board turmoil is more likely to hasten the potential demise of auDA and a mooted government takeover one thing both sides would presumably prefer not to see happen.

Shortly after assuming the chair's role Leptos and the board referred an independent report on the group's past financial and administrative practices to the police, with reported rumours of possible criminal charges being considered. This garnered the interest of mainstream media of course and has industry participants wondering what else made the Department of Communications and the Arts recommend a clean-up of past practices.

auDA is a member-based organisation that employs a 'multi-stakeholder' model as part of its governance arrangements. Such models have their strengths and their weaknesses. Right now we're arguably seeing the weaknesses on public display.

Laurie Patton is a member of auDA and a former CEO / Executive Director of Internet Australia. He is currently advising Afiliis Australia, the company appointed to provide registry services for auDA from 1 July 2018. This article first appeared in Independent Australia.

Related

LAURIE PATTON. What's going on at auDA' The battle over Internet domain names.

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auDA membership grows as reform process takes shape ^[4]

Tim Herring

- 18/06/2018 at 15:46

.au Domain Administration Limited, commonly known as auDA, has announced a significant growth in membership, with a record 955 new members being admitted at a board meeting earlier today.

auDA is charged with overseeing domain names allocation in Australia. If you have a website you'll have dealt with one of the numerous companies that sell domain names to the public. They all operate under the authority and supervision of auDA.

The organisation was recently the subject of a report from the Department of Communications and the Arts that called for major governance reform. As I've previously written, auDA has been mired in controversy in recent years. For some time it had been seen as a tightly held fiefdom under the control of a board of directors elected from within the industry, but subject to "capture" by vested interests.

Recommendation 11 of the government review, released in April 2018, requires auDA to "diversify its membership base in the short-term with a focus on extending membership to stakeholders that are underrepresented".

According to auDA CEO, Cameron Boardman, membership has quadrupled in the last month.

“This is a very positive move for the .au domain space and will further strengthen the operations of auDA by broadening the membership base”, Boardman said.

In a statement to members auDA said it had accepted all of the review recommendations, and is working on modernising its operations “for the benefit of all stakeholders and ultimately the consumers who rely on Australia’s safe and stable top-level domain”.

Recently, a group of former directors and members demanded a Special General Meeting – scheduled for 27 July 2018 – and called for the removal of three independent auDA board members: chairman Chris Leptos and directors Sandra Hook and Suzanne Ewart.

The campaign is led by industry veteran Josh Rowe, who was on the auDA board for 14 years, along with member Jim Stewart and former staffer Paul Szyndler. Known as the Grumpies, it is not thought they have the numbers to succeed in ousting the three directors.

While the new auDA members will not be eligible to vote at the July meeting they will be entitled to vote at the auDA annual general meeting later in the year, arguably making any decisions made next month potentially redundant.

Given three months by the Government to develop new processes to redress the historical weaknesses identified in the DCA report, auDA has created a broad-based consultative group to guide the process.

The 16-member Consultation Model Working Group has met four times in recent weeks and according to Boardman is working on ways to better involve members and stakeholders in the management of Australia’s domain names space.

auDA exists under a delegation from the federal government. Similar organisations run the domain names system in many countries. Apart from monitoring the sale of domain names, auDA is responsible for ensuring the overall integrity of the process. So it plays an essential role in how the Internet functions in this country.

The physical operation of the registry is carried out by a third party – with Afiliis, a global firm specialising in domain name management, about to take over on 1 July this year. Afiliis is well advanced in its preparations for the changeover. (ref:

(Laurie Patton is a member of auDA. He is currently advising Afiliis Australia. However, the views expressed here are his own and have not been endorsed by Afiliis.)

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