**25 June 2024**

Committee Secretariat
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Sent via submissions portal

**Subject:  Inquiry into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The .au Domain Administration Ltd (auDA) is endorsed by the Australian Government to administer the .au country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD).

As a critical part of the digital economy, auDA's role is to ensure the stable, secure and reliable operation of the .au ccTLD, administer a licensing regime for .au domains, and advocate for and actively participate in domestic and international multi-stakeholder internet governance processes.

auDA works with a range of stakeholders including industry, government and the Australian, regional and international community to administer a trusted .au for the benefit of all Australians, and champion an open, free, secure and global internet.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to the inquiry and offer the following high-level comments.

**The Pacific region should remain a focus for Australian development programs**

The internet and digital technologies offer transformative opportunities for innovation, economic growth and social wellbeing, and are recognised as a critical tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

auDA believes enabling prosperity and sustainable development across the Pacific through programs that support digital transformation and uplift cyber resilience should remain a key area for the Government's regional development budget.

We recognise the Australian Government's significant investment in the region through its support of initiatives including:

- Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific
- Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program
- Pacific Digital Economy Program
- Pacific Cyber Security Operations Network
- Cyber Safety Pasifika
- Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network cybercrime working group
- Targeted projects funded by Australia's Member State contribution to the International Telecommunication Union's development sector.

We also acknowledge the Australian Government's commitment to expanding regional connectivity, including through a $78 million investment in subsea connectivity in the Pacific.[1]

Affordable and reliable internet connectivity is essential for bridging digital divides and while expanding connectivity is welcome, it will not, on its own, be enough for Pacific communities to achieve the full potential of the digital economy.

Investing in digital literacy and building capacity in technical skills will also be necessary to enable Pacific communities to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks associated with the increased use of digital technologies.

In this context, we welcome Australia's endorsement of the 2023 Lagatoi Declaration on Digital Transformation of the Pacific, which charts a shared path towards digital transformation in the Pacific.

Advancing common goals such as those set out in the Lagatoi Declaration requires long term bipartisan commitment to building genuine and respectful relationships in the region. It is important to avoid Australia being perceived as transactional or focused on security at the expense of prosperity and sustainable development.

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[1] p54 2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy

**auDA's commitment to the Pacific**

auDA shares the Australian Government's commitment to being a good neighbour and partner to our counterparts in the Pacific region.

To this end, we are pleased to support initiatives that enable people and organisations in the Pacific to have their unique perspectives considered in regional and international internet governance and digital policy discussions.

For example, auDA hosted the 2023 Pacific Internet Governance Forum (PacIGF) alongside the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum, which was held in Brisbane on 29 – 31 August 2023. The Australian Government's financial contribution to this event was much appreciated, and we suggest ongoing support would be very welcome. auDA looks forward to supporting the 2024 PacIGF, to be held in New Zealand in Q3, including through funding fellowships that will contribute to regional capacity building.

Additionally, in collaboration with Pacific leaders, we are exploring opportunities to strengthen and support the region's multi-stakeholder community of ccTLDs. ccTLD managers play a vital role in any country's digital economy. Each ccTLD manager is responsible for:

- setting registration policies
- maintaining the registry for all domains registered
- providing name resolution services connecting domain names with their associated Internet Protocol addresses
- maintaining the infrastructure needed to perform these responsibilities.

auDA is currently supporting one ccTLD manager in the Pacific to modernise and improve its registry operations. Through this project, we hope over time to develop a common resource to share with all interested Pacific ccTLD managers. We are also exploring opportunities to enable ccTLD managers to come together to share knowledge and experience and to discuss priorities for the internet in the Pacific region.

We believe this work complements the work of the Australian Government and other stakeholders and will enable our Pacific counterparts to strengthen their ccTLDs and improve internet governance.

We would be pleased to further discuss any of the information in this submission. Please contact auDA's Internet Governance and Policy Director Jordan Carter at Jordan.Carter@auda.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Sinclair AM
Chief Executive Officer