

# Geographic Internet Addresses – Providing Online Homes for Australian Communities

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## SUMMARY

Community Geographic Domain Names (CGDNs) have been reserved for all of community use by the .au domain space regulators - .au Domain Name Administration (auDA). This is a world first initiative giving communities, from the very smallest, their own geographic home on the internet.

CGDNs take the form of [www.town/suburb.state/territory.au](http://www.town/suburb.state/territory.au) and are available for addressable localities as defined by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia (CGNA). The use of CGDNs are solely for the purpose of operating a community website for the benefit of the entire local community. Registrants need to be a legally registered not for profit organisation or a special committee of local council that broadly represent their community.

This paper gives an overview of the CGDN initiative including; how auDA's subsidiary .au Community Domains (auCD) have helped facilitate the development of the CGDNs, a summary of how this initiative has evolved in Australia and what benefits and initiatives they have provided for communities to date.

This paper will also discuss how some CGDN websites have provided much utilised, local relevant emergency information during the Victorian bushfires in 2009. As a result, auCD created 28 CGDN websites on behalf of those communities who were affected by the "Black Saturday" Victorian bushfires in February, 2009 to assist them in their rebuilding.

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## 1. OVERVIEW

In a world first, the .au Domain Name Administrators (auDA) - which is the .au domain space regulator, in August, 2006, created eight (8) new Geographic 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Domains (2LDs) which serve the needs of a community of users that weren't well served by the existing 2LDs. The aim is to provide an intuitive, standardised naming system to enable better access to local community, tourism and business information and to facilitate social and economic benefits to Australian Communities.

The 8 new 2LDs represent each State and Territory in Australia and all Community Geographic Domain Names (CGDNs) are to be registered as 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Domains (3LDs) in the simple form of town/suburb.state/territory.au (eg. broome.wa.au). Their use is restricted to community website portals that reflect community interests such as local business, tourism, historical information, culture, sporting groups, local events and news. The purpose is to preserve Australian geographic names for use by the relevant community.

Registrants may only license a domain name that is listed in the registry database. The registry database contains the names of all addressable localities (eg: suburbs, localities and towns) within each Australian State and Territory. The names basically cover all populated places and are defined by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia (CGNA) – the authority on geographic naming in Australia and New Zealand.

Addressable localities are defined as places or locations where populations reside. These include towns, cities, suburbs and rural localities. Any disputes regarding the names are referred to the CGNA for consideration by the appropriate state/territory geographic names authority.

Geographic names that are non-addressable localities and/or are regarded as names of cultural significance (such as the Great Barrier Reef, capital city names) are not included in the initial available registry.

Registrants need to be a legally registered not for profit organisation or a special committee of their local council that broadly represent their community.

## 2. FACILITATION

.au Community Domains (auCD) is a not-for-profit subsidiary of auDA and was set up to facilitate the development of CGDNs. In addition to processing CGDN applications, auCD

provide help and support for community groups to assist them in getting their geographical home on the internet.

Support services provided by auCD include a Content Management System (CMS) “Community Site in a Box”, that they designed as an option for use by people with no technical experience and also includes an RSS widget which enables local content syndication feeding directly into their community websites. The CMS was also recently enhanced to be compatible with mobile devices which can assist in providing emergency information to community members in need when they are unable to access a computer or when phone emergency authorities that have huge waiting times – for example, during bushfire disasters. auCD has been providing this CMS for free which includes hosting. Post 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2010, this service will be provided to communities at a very minimal cost-recovery fee.

### 3. OUTCOMES

Applications for CGDNs have been doubling from each previous year since they were released in the .au domain space in August, 2006. As at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2009, a total of 260 communities have applied for their CGDN and a further 500 communities have indicated they will be applying for theirs in the future.

There are approximately 3,000 towns and suburbs in Australia that have populations of 200 and more, about 1,800 (60%) are from rural and regional localities. 10% of these 1,800 regional and rural communities have applied for their CGDN. Overall, 85% of the CGDN applications received as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2009 have been from regional and rural Australia.

The types of community groups/organisations that have applied for their CGDNs are quite varied including Community Associations, Resident Action Groups, Progress Associations, Community Technology Centres, Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Associations.

Benefits of the CGDN initiative include:

- Easiest way for a community to be found on the internet through the domain name itself
- Provides communities the forum to “pull together” a variety of resources to a single unique location on-line
- Allows businesses and community organisations who can’t afford their own website a web presence in the community website’s directories
- A “community of communities” has grown across Australia where groups learn and share ideas

The CGDN websites have stimulated and facilitated some wonderful outcomes and initiatives, including:

- Community Fire Plan and Emergency Information
- Car Pooling

- Reuniting of long lost friends
- Driving for a community bank
- Rosters for community groups
- Promoting local economy
- Youth engagement
- Council involvement

#### 4. LOCALISED EMERGENCY INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS

Communities that had existing CGDN websites during the 2009 Victorian bushfire season, such as Mirboo North at [www.mirboonorth.vic.au](http://www.mirboonorth.vic.au), experienced hits to their local website **increased seven fold**. This explosion of web visits shows how important a community driven website is as a local source of news and information.

After the “Black Saturday” bushfire disasters in Victoria in February, 2009, auCD temporarily registered 28 CGDNs and created community websites, such as [www.marysville.vic.au](http://www.marysville.vic.au) for use by those communities to assist them in their rebuilding which has been much utilised. Some of the outcomes/benefits have been:

***One localised portal*** provides the forum for authorities to inform communities and provide links to rebuilding information.

***Collate information rather than duplicate it*** help community members understand what support is available for the clean-up and reconstruction.

***Help with the healing process*** allowing a forum for community members to remember people lost, share stories, thank people, look at what worked well in relation to the aftermath, evacuation, etc.

***Providing a “virtual” community for displaced members*** where they can network with their friends.

***Tourism and business*** – provides the tool to encourage visitors and the promotion of existing businesses to help facilitate the economic recovery.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

As the internet grows and becomes even more overloaded with information, it is envisaged that the CGDNs will become even more valuable as the “trusted and true” geographical online address due to the strict Policy Rules and Guidelines that protect and preserve these domain names for all of community use.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which is the global administrator of the internet’s naming and numbering systems are soon to open up the internet to new Generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs). This process will mean that there could be potentially hundreds of new domains such as .berlin, .car, etc. With the potential of global new geographic domain names, the CGDN system could be deemed as a model of world’s best practice.

## REFERENCES

.au Domain Name Administrators – more information on the .au domain space regulators can be found at [www.auda.org.au](http://www.auda.org.au)

CGDN Policy Rules and Guidelines: <http://www.aucd.org.au/policy/>

New gTLDs: <http://www.icann.org/en/tlds/select.htm>

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Leonie has solid experience in both the profit and not-for-profit sectors and is a strategic thinker who has a passion for enabling people and organisations in creating sustainable futures.

Leonie Dunbar is currently the General Manager of .au Community Domains (auCD) a not-for-profit organisation established by the .au Domain Name Administrators to facilitate the development of Community Geographic Domain Names which provides a communication tool to help strengthen communities sustainability.

Her background includes establishment of new businesses and working in new Technologies and Thinking. Whilst at the de Bono Institute Leonie facilitated New Thinking to a wide range of the community to assist designing their sustainable futures.

Leonie is also been a Director of "The Vital Planet" – a not-for-profit that provides a platform for outstanding people who demonstrate leadership and offer solutions that contribute to a more sustainable future or humanity and the natural world. Leonie has a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Psychology and Literature and is a graduate of the Committee for Melbourne's Future Focus Group.

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