



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Ireland's ccTLD Management Consultation

December 2024

Prepared by the Department of the Environment,
Climate & Communications
[gov.ie/DECC](https://www.gov.ie/DECC)

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Introduction

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) is seeking stakeholder views on Ireland's proposed management framework of the .ie country code top level domain (ccTLD).

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on a management framework for Ireland's designated manager of the .ie ccTLD, ensuring the .ie domain is serving the needs of the Irish internet community; and the ccTLD is managed in a manner consistent with Government and community expectations.

The consultation is seeking views on:

- the most appropriate framework for the management of the .ie top level domain
- how to ensure that Government and community expectations inform the .ie ccTLD manager's operation and decision-making
- mitigation strategies to address future risks to the security and stability of .ie.

The objective of this consultation is to establish terms and conditions for the domain name manager for Ireland's .ie domain registry, setting out the key requirements and principles that must be adopted by the managers of a crucial piece of telecommunications infrastructure.

1 General Information

1.1 Consultation Details

Issued: 17 December 2024

Respond by: 14 February 2025

Enquiries to: CyberConsult@decc.gov.ie

Cyber Security, Internet Policy, and Emergency Planning Division
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
Tom Johnson House
Haddington Road
Dublin D04 K7X4

Reference: Consultation of Ireland's ccTLD Management

Audiences: Ireland-based ccTLD registrars, users of the .ie domain name, industry bodies, cybersecurity organisations, trade associations, academia, civils society, state bodies and the general public.

Submissions: You can send responses in Microsoft Word or PDF formats to the email address below. Please include your name, or your organisation's name, in the subject line.

Email to: CyberConsult@decc.gov.ie

Write to: Cyber Security, Internet Policy, and Emergency Planning Division
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
Tom Johnson House
Haddington Road
Dublin D04 K7X4

When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

1.2 Confidentiality and Data Protection

This consultation has been carried out in accordance with the government's consultation guidance¹. We are committed to engaging with stakeholders in a clear, open, and transparent manner. Any person or organisation can make a submission in relation to this consultation. We will consider all submissions and feedback before we publish the final versions of the Future Framework Policy Statement.

Your response to this consultation is subject to:

- the Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI)
- the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations 2007-2018 (AIE)
- the Data Protection Act 2018

Publishing of responses

We intend to publish the contents of all submissions received to our consultations on our website. We will redact (remove) personal data before publication.

Please indicate any sensitive information

In responding to this consultation, clearly indicate where your response contains any information which you would not wish to be released under FOI, AIE or otherwise published.

This can include:

- personal information
- commercially sensitive information
- confidential information

Read our Data Privacy Notice

We would like to draw your attention to our [Data Privacy Notice](#) which explains:

- how and when we collect personal data
- why we do so
- how we treat this information
- your rights in relation to the collection of personal information

¹ [Irish government's consultation guidance](#)

- how you can exercise those rights

1.3 Structure of this paper

This paper will introduce the government's plans to establish a **Terms of Endorsement** for Ireland's ccTLD domain name manager. This endorsement agreement will aim to set out the core principles, shared by the parties, and provide safeguards around the management of the .ie registry.

In order to design and establish robust terms to be agreed by all parties, this paper explores four areas of discussion:

- The .ie ccTLD Manager's roles and responsibilities
- Governance and management of the .ie ccTLD
- Stakeholder engagement
- Future risks to the security and stability of .ie.

The Government is seeking views to help shape this endorsement agreement and ensure the perspectives, priorities and preferences of Irish stakeholders are captured and considered. Guiding questions are provided with each of the four discussion areas but submitters are invited to respond to this consultation however they deem appropriate.

In developing this paper, consideration has been given to international trends and developments and best practice guidelines.

2 Terms of Endorsement

The state is seeking to establish a Terms of Endorsement for Ireland's ccTLD domain name manager, setting out the core principles shared by the parties and providing safeguards around the management of the .ie registry. This agreement will be the chief oversight arrangement between DECC and the manager and aims to recognise the role and autonomy of the manager and the broader internet community in developing internet policy within Ireland. The terms of endorsement will be reviewed every 3 years.

Separately, the government is also proposing legislative amendments that will provide last-resort measures and powers for the state in the case of a serious failure of Ireland's .ie registry manager to perform their duties. Legislative amendments are required to clearly establish the terms of being an authority to manage Ireland's .ie domain, events that would constitute a serious failure, and what steps would be involved in the re-delegation of the manager.

Key Principles

To ensure the continued reliability and availability of the .ie domain name, DECC will recognise the manager of the .ie registry according to the conditions to be set out in the Terms of Endorsement.

It is currently anticipated the Terms of Endorsement will include the following required principles to be met by the .ie ccTLD manager:

- The .ie ccTLD Manager will develop .ie DNS policy in an open, collaborative manner that recognises the importance of the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.
- The .ie ccTLD Manager will advocate for policy that improves the utility of the .ie domain for all Irish citizens and continue to promote competition, fair trade, and consumer protection.
- The .ie ccTLD Manager will work closely with DECC as a significantly interested party in relation to management of the .ie ccTLD, to ensure that the .ie domain is managed consistent with community expectations.
- The .ie ccTLD Manager will maintain relationships and work collaboratively with other government departments and public agencies, including the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

- The .ie ccTLD Manager will be a member of and participate collaboratively with other ccTLD Registries at the Council of European National Top-Level Domain Registries
- The .ie ccTLD Manager will publish an annual report publicly and in a timely fashion, as well as other data and insights which may be of public value.

In addition, the following conditions are to be included in the Terms of Endorsement:

- No private intellectual or other property rights should inhere in the .ie ccTLD itself, nor accrue to the delegee as the result of delegation or to any entity as a result of the management, administration, or marketing of the ccTLD.
- Tradable goods and services may arise in the performance of other management and administrative functions attached to the .ie ccTLD.
- The .ie ccTLD manager and its administrative contact, should be resident or incorporated in Ireland.
- The .ie domain name markets should be competitive.
- Choice for registrants should be maintained and expanded.

Key Functions

In order to qualify for the Terms of Endorsement, the .ie ccTLD manager must:

- Ensure stable, secure, and reliable operation of the .ie registry and .ie DNS.
- Respond quickly to matters that compromise the security and integrity of the .ie registry.
- Maintain an up to date and accurate directory and comply with law enforcement as appropriate, as per the requirements of the National Cyber Security Bill 2024 and other relevant enactments of the Oireachtas or European Commission.
- Provide DNS services to Irish registrars in line with international best practices.
- Maintain appropriate dispute resolution policies that are consistent with Irish and international best practice.

3 Roles and Responsibilities Proposals

A starting point for the consultation is to understand and assess the primary roles and responsibilities of the Irish ccTLD Manager. This will help inform an appropriate framework for management of the .ie top level domain.

The Government's expectations of the manager of the .ie top level domain include:

- developing and reviewing .ie policies
- enabling and enforcing regulatory compliance
- maximising the security and technical stability of the .ie space
- facilitating competition and consumer choice through the accreditation of .ie registrars
- engaging .ie stakeholders and the broader community
- protecting consumer safeguards and providing effective dispute resolution mechanisms
- management of the form and manner in which:
 - an application for registration or renewal of registration of an '.ie' domain name is to be made.
 - the terms on which and the period for which an '.ie' domain name may be registered and or renewed.
 - an application for registration or renewal of registration of an '.ie' domain name can be refused.

Questions: Roles and Responsibilities

1. What do you believe are the primary roles and responsibilities of the Irish ccTLD Manager?
2. What do you expect of the manager of the .ie ccTLD?
3. What external trends and developments may affect the Irish ccTLD Manager's roles and responsibilities?

4 Governance and management

The consultation will consider best practice approaches and processes for the management of .ie to ensure that the governance structure is fit for purpose.

Good governance is central to the effective operation of the .ie domain; it is vitally important in effectively discharging the roles and responsibilities as described above. It ensures that a framework of structures, policies and processes are in place to deliver on these obligations, and it allows for an objective assessment of management and corporate performance.

Governance Principles can be described as follows:

1. Good governance supports a culture and ethos which ensures behaviour with integrity, a strong commitment to ethical values, and respect for the rule of law.
2. Good governance helps to define priorities and outcomes in terms of sustainable economic and societal benefits and to determine the policies and interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of these priorities and outcomes. It means implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, communications, audit, and scrutiny to deliver effective accountability.
3. Good governance means developing the organisation's capacity, including the capability of the leadership team, management, and staff.
4. Good governance means managing risks and performance through robust internal control systems and effective performance management practices.
5. Good governance ensures openness, effective consultation processes and comprehensive engagement with domestic and international stakeholders.

Questions: Governance and management

1. What best practice approaches and processes should be considered with regard to the corporate governance of the .ie ccTLD manager?
2. What does good corporate governance for the .ie ccTLD manager look like?
3. What arrangements should be in place to ensure the governing board of the .ie ccTLD can effectively deliver its roles and responsibilities?
4. What oversight and other governance arrangements should be put in place?

5 Stakeholder engagement

The Irish Government strongly supports the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.

The internet, as a successful, un-fragmented, resilient, shared global resource, can never be taken for granted. The success of this tool, that we have collectively enjoyed to date, must be attributed to its multi-stakeholder governance model. The internet of today is the product of academics, the technical community, civil society, the private sector, and nation states, working in concert towards a shared vision of an open and secure internet. The coming decades will present new opportunities and challenges for the internet and Ireland is confident that it will be through a continued and strengthened multi-stakeholder approach that we can address these to the greatest benefit of the global population.

This support of the multi-stakeholder approach must be evident in deed as well as word and so we must encourage meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement within Ireland on matter of Internet Governance to demonstrate our commitment and belief in the model.

The .ie ccTLD Manager is a trustee for the delegated ccTLD and has a duty to serve the Irish internet community as well as the global internet community. This consultation seeks to identify the .ie ccTLD stakeholders and to understand the best process for stakeholder engagement.

Questions: Stakeholder Engagement

1. Who are the .ie ccTLD stakeholders?
2. How should the .ie ccTLD manager engage with its stakeholders?
3. Are there guiding principles which should be considered?
4. Should the .ie ccTLD governance structure be reflective of the range of stakeholders that rely on, or interact with, the .ie domain?

6 Future risks to the security and stability of .ie.

The consultation will consider mitigation strategies to address future risks to the security and stability of the .ie domain.

In 2022, the Government set out the National Digital Strategy, **Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework**², presenting a clear framework to support our ambition for Ireland to be a digital leader, at the heart of European and global digital developments.

With this drive for a digital transformation and with greater integration of digital services we must acknowledge the associated set of risks and vulnerabilities digital technologies bring. As the use of internet-connected technologies becomes more integrated into our daily lives; into the operation of our businesses; and the operation of the State; the integrity of networks now underpins the operation of important services, from small online businesses, to connected critical infrastructure. While we all have a role to play in keeping our stakeholders secure and protected, the .ie ccTLD Manager has an important role in ensuring the stability and integrity of the DNS and the top-level .ie domain.

Questions: Future risks to the security and stability of .ie.

1. What emerging risks does the .ie ccTLD face in relation to the security and stability of the .ie domain?
2. What is best practice for DNS administration?
3. What appropriate mitigation strategies should the .ie ccTLD manager adopt?
4. How should these strategies be assessed?
5. How should the .ie ccTLD manager engage with the Government in its management of risks?

² [Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework](#)

7 Background Information

7.1 The .ie domain name

Ireland's .ie country code top-level domain (ccTLD) was first established in the 1980s by the Computer Services Department at University College Dublin (UCD). In early 1988, it was registered with the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA)³, with UCD acting as the "Sponsoring Organisation" for the registry. To date, UCD remain on record with IANA as Ireland's ccTLD manager.

In 1996, the UCD Computer Services Department established IE Domain Registry (.IE) as a separate division but managed by UCD personnel. .IE took over responsibility for maintaining the UCD database relating to the .ie registry.

Since that time .IE have been the chief technical managers of the .ie domain name. They are a non-profit company whose main function is to ensure the availability and reliability of the .ie DNS. The registry is a database of all the internet domains with a .ie address.

Among its key responsibilities, .IE provides name resolution services (connecting domain names with their associated IP addresses) and maintain the critical infrastructure needed to complete DNS queries.

.IE also provide registration services to registrars, which can include creating or cancelling domain names, updating a name server and more.

The manager of the .ie domain registry is designated as an Operator of Essential Services (OES) under S.I. No. 360 of 2018 which transposed EU Directive 2016/1148 (Measures for a High Common Level of Security of Network and Information Systems) and fulfils a pivotal role in maintaining the security and reliability of part of Ireland's digital infrastructure.

At the end of 2023, there were 328,248 registered .ie domain names. In Ireland, the .ie domain remains the name of choice for many businesses and institutions, with:

- 54.3% of all top-level domains hosted in Ireland being .ie domain names, followed by .com at 29.3%.

³ <https://www.iana.org/>

- The most common type of content on .ie websites is **Business & Industrial** (16.6%), with other major categories being Home & Garden (7.9%), Arts & Entertainment (5.8%), Health (5.4%), and Food & Drink (4.5%).
- 70% of content rich .ie websites are secured with a security certificate.
- 954 .ie domains are secured with DNSSEC (+26% Year on Year growth).

7.2 Internet Governance

The DNS is integral to information being found on the internet. Without DNS people would have to remember an Internet Protocol address—a string of numbers and dots—in order to access a website.

DNS is a hierarchical system with each ‘dot’ in a domain name representing a new level in the hierarchy. ICANN⁴, a United States-based non-profit organisation established in 1998, provides technical coordination of the internet and is responsible for DNS coordination at a global level.

ICANN delegates DNS administration within countries to separate entities. While the private sector owns and operates much of the global internet’s infrastructure, ICANN’s governance is based on a multi-stakeholder model. The private sector; the internet technical community; civil society and academia; members of the public; and governments contribute to discussions on the management of key internet resources.

7.3 What is IANA?

IANA is responsible for coordinating some of the key elements that keep the Internet running smoothly. Whilst the Internet is renowned for being a worldwide network free from central coordination, there is a technical need for some key parts of the Internet to be globally coordinated, and this coordination role is undertaken by IANA.

Specifically, IANA allocates and maintains unique codes and numbering systems that are used in the technical standards (“protocols”) that drive the Internet.

⁴ <https://www.icann.org/>

In the case of ccTLDs, responsibility for setting policy and managing a country's domain name is determined locally, ideally via the local internet community through a multi-stakeholder model of governance, subject to local laws and regulations.

7.4 What is the multi-stakeholder approach?

The multi-stakeholder model of internet governance calls for effective engagement of all stakeholders in identifying solutions to these complex problems, drawing on their specific relative perspectives, expertise, experience, insight, and functions in the internet governance eco-system. It means decisions are made by those who deeply understand the issues and can effectively implement outcomes once made.

Stakeholders concerned include:

- The technical community
- Academia
- Civil Society
- The private sector
- Governments
- Internet users

The multi-stakeholder approach sees governments, industry, the technical community, and civil society all participate in decisions about the future of the Internet, recognising that all stakeholders have a valuable contribution to make.

This approach remains a proven model for responding to the complex and dynamic policy and technical challenges that the internet has presented, such as security concerns, consumer protection and managing cross-border data flows.

The multi-stakeholder bodies responsible for decisions about the internet operate largely by consensus, with ideas and proposals debated on their merits. This leads to outcomes that have considered a full range of perspectives and have broad support.

7.5 What is the State's role?

7.5.1 The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications works to collaboratively deliver policies and programmes to empower people, communities, and businesses to continue the transition to a better quality of life for current and future generations. This includes continuing to develop a stable, innovative, and secure regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services infrastructure, enhancing Ireland's EU and international reputation, and delivering for Ireland at EU level on digital matters.

The Communications Division of the Department maximises opportunities for economic growth, competition, and social inclusion by promoting investment into communications networks and supports small Irish businesses trading online by enhancing citizen engagement with digital technology.

The Department is also responsible for overseeing matters relating to the governance of commercial and non-commercial State-sponsored bodies, including regulators. Corporate governance of State-sponsored bodies is governed by the provisions of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies which was revised and published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in August 2016. The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is one such Regulator that falls under the aegis of the Department, as mandated under the Communications Regulations Act 2002, Part 2.

As the Department with the lead mandate for Internet Policy and Governance, DECC is the lead Department in matters related to Ireland's ccTLD. DECC officials represent Ireland on the ICANN Government Advisory Committee (GAC).⁵

7.5.2 The Commission for Communications Regulation

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector (telecommunications, radio communications, broadcasting transmission and premium rate services) and the postal sector in Ireland.

⁵ <https://gac.icann.org/about/index>

ComReg have a wide range of responsibilities in electronic communications services and networks, posts, and spectrum management. ComReg operate under Irish and EU legislation in these areas.

ComReg are responsible for facilitating competition, for protecting consumers and for encouraging innovation. This role involves dealing with complex issues of law, economics, and technology, and ensuring that decisions are taken fairly and are clearly explained.

ComReg operates as a collegiate body, with decisions taken collectively by the Commissioners. This is seen as an important element in fulfilling the spirit of the Communications Regulation Act, 2002 (as amended), which established the Commission.

Section 32(4)(a) of the Communications Regulation (Amendment) Act 2007 authorises ComReg, with the consent of the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Employment, to “specify any entity as the authority authorised to register ‘.ie’ domain names” (this has yet to be exercised by ComReg).

Part 3 of the Communications Regulation (Amendment) Act 2007 looked to ensure continuity of services through safeguards and bestowing step-aside powers to ComReg:

If the Commission considers it necessary to do so, it may, with the consent of the Minister, designate a person on an interim basis as the registration authority for the purposes of regulations in force under section 32.

7.6 Other key stakeholders

While .IE are the technical stewards of the .ie domain name registry, other companies, termed **registrars**, work directly with customers when it comes to buying or selling domain names. Registrars often offer a suite of services and products typically required by businesses alongside domain names, such as webhosting and email services.

Registrars depend on the .ie registry manager (currently .IE) for the efficient and stable operation of the registry, including updating the registry, determining policies for naming conventions, etc.