

4 May 2005

Office of the Domain Name Commissioner
InternetNZ
PO Box 11-881
Wellington

Application for a New Second Level Domain - .parliament.nz

I refer to your letter of 13 April 2005 addressed to the Hon Margaret Wilson, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the application for a new second level domain - .parliament.nz. The Speaker has asked that I reply on behalf of the Parliamentary Service Commission, which represents all parliamentary political parties and is chaired by the Speaker.

Two significant criteria that underlie this application are that it represents an identifiable community of interest and that it will create a unique identity that will not be confusing to the general public. Indeed the application seeks a clearer separation of the identity of "parliament" and its agencies from "executive government" and its agencies, while providing the basis for expanding a nascent but discrete community of interest that currently is not apparent to the general public.

The evolution of parliamentary political parties under the MMP electoral system, and the coincidental increase in the use of electronic media as a vital component of political processes is opening both the interest in and need for additional unique identities in the parliamentary electronic environment. Rightly or wrongly, the ".govt.nz" domain name has become strongly associated with executive government. Some non-government parliamentary parties and members of Parliament find that the ".parliament.govt.nz" domain associates them with the "Government" in the eyes of the public when their very purpose in being in Parliament is to oppose the government of the day, at least for the time being. The current arrangement is confusing in that respect.

As the ".govt.nz" domain has become so strongly identified with the government of the day, rather than the broader association with the three branches of government, there is confusion when the parliamentary political parties, which have a strong partisan political profile, become associated with the neutral public service profile associated with executive government and the ".govt.nz" domain name. In this respect, staff of the E-Government Unit of the State Services Commission, the

moderator of the “.govt.nz” has expressed a view that it is not appropriate for the names of parliamentary political parties to be associated with the “.govt.nz” domain name.

The second level domain name of “.parliament.nz” is intended to be used to create a presence for those agencies and organisations associated with Parliament that are part of the broader public service and yet not part of executive government and are covered by the definition “Offices of Parliament”. Whilst this would include the parliamentary departments (Office of the Clerk and the Parliamentary Service) it would extend to other parliamentary agencies such as Office of the Ombudsmen, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, and the Auditor General's Office.

In addition to these publicly funded bodies the parliamentary political parties will be eligible to use a domain name based on the parliamentary party, for example, “labour.parliament.nz”. This would distinguish the parliamentary presence and activities of the parliamentary political parties (recognised under the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives and funded by the taxpayer) from the purely political presence and activities of political parties (outside of Parliament and not funded by the taxpayer).

The creation of this domain will also provide unique identities for members of Parliament, for example “Joe_Bloggs.parliament.nz”, allowing them to create a web presence that identifies them as part of a larger community based on Parliament. The creation of separate identities for select committees is another possible development, for example, the Constitutional Arrangements Select Committee is currently using a fourth level domain name.

The second point to be made is that with the introduction of “.parliament.nz” the use of “.parliament.govt.nz” will be phased out thus reducing the possibility of confusion for the general public. The dropping of the “.govt” makes a clear distinction over the role and institution of Parliament in the democratic process, which will be reinforced by the introduction of a new web site towards the end of the year.

Yours sincerely

Joel M George
General Manager