

# Proposed changes to the Domain Availability Checker

## Introduction

The Domain Availability Checker (DAC) is available to Nominet registrars who are also members. The service enables users to make high volumes of queries about the availability of domain names and costs £25 + VAT per year.

The DAC runs on secondary copies of the register that are updated by an immediate replication process. The DAC tool only returns information on .uk domain names operated by Nominet and not second level domains operated by other parties (eg. .ac.uk).

The real time DAC service operates in real time and returns a limited set of data about the domain name being queried. Access limits are set at a flat rate for all subscribers. The data currently returned is:

- Domain name
- Registered flag (Y/N only)
- Suspended flag
- Detagged flag
- Registration date
- Renewal date
- TAG

A number of registrars have been experiencing problems with the existing DAC service in terms of access limits. As a result of this Nominet proposed some changes to the DAC in March 2009 which were due to be implemented in April 2009. Following feedback from the PAB and some registrars Nominet decided to delay the introduction of any changes whilst carrying out a review.

## Background

The DAC acceptable use policy has the same maximum query rate for all users and was beginning to create genuine problems for a number of registrars. As a result, in January 2007, the PAB recommended the Access Limits Policy, which Nominet adopted to enable it to vary the “one size fits all” approach and deliver appropriate services to customers.

We have also received a series of complaints regarding DAC abuse. The majority of which have been domainers complaining about other domainers abusing the system and/or the DAC contract.

To deal with both of these issues and in order to ensure that we continue to provide a robust service, we have decided to split the DAC service into two. The real time DAC will be changed so that it returns a more limited set of data and the time delay DAC will be introduced which returns a larger set of query data (to include whether a domain name is suspended and the registration status) and has varying access limits.

There is also a real concern about protection of the .uk database: therefore we are also introducing an amended set of DAC Terms and Conditions which allow us to protect the integrity of the database effectively.

The time delay DAC is ideal for registrars with a large customer base that process a large volume of domain name queries for example when searching for suitable alternative or complimentary domain

names in response to customer requirements. Access limits are dependant on the subscriber's business levels (in accordance with the Access Limits Policy proposed by the PAB in January 2007).

The concern from some members over the proposed changes have been around the removal of the 'suspended flag' on the real time DAC (for performance reasons: it will be included in the time delay DAC) and the proposed differentiated access limits on the time delay DAC.

## Summary of changes

### Changes to the DAC

Due to operational requirements in providing service to our registrars the Board have taken the decision to go ahead with the changes to the real time DAC and to introduce the time delay DAC.

The proposed new real time DAC has the following changes:

- Available on dac.Nominet.org.uk on port 3043
- The registered flag to be limited to a Y/N response
- Removal of the suspended flag and the registration status field

The time delay DAC will include the suspended flag and the registration status of a domain name. Access to the time delay DAC will be based on business levels and capped at a maximum of 2.5 million daily lookups.

This will mean that some users will need to do some work to their systems. In addition users will have differentiated access levels to the time delay DAC based on the monthly registration figure for the user. The access limits have been set to provide registrars with an appropriate volume of lookups dependant on their size and requirements.

### Changes to the DAC standard terms and conditions

The changes to the DAC standard Terms and Conditions which were originally proposed were:

- Limit the number of domain names that could be compiled in a list to 1,000
- Limit the provision of part of the register to a third party or end user in any 24 hour period to no more than 100 registered domain names.

The actual changes to the DAC standard Terms and Conditions will be:

- *5.2.1. compile a list of .uk domain names together with their expiry date or other data from the DAC query and (optionally) use that list for providing services to your existing clients;*

The key change to this clause is that we are removing the limit of the number of domain names that can be compiled in a list that can be used to provide domain name registration services to your clients.

This maintains the status quo.

- *5.3.6. knowingly provide more than an insubstantial part of the register or a sub-database of it (e.g. a database containing information released under the whois or the DAC) to any one third party or end user in any 24 hour period. For the avoidance of doubt and as an example, more than 1000 registered domain names taken from the DAC would be more than an insubstantial part;*

The key change to this clause is the increase in size of list users are permitted to knowingly supply to a third party from 100 to 1000.

We envisage this to have little or no impact on the user.

- *5.3.7. retain (in any format) any information obtained from the DAC for a period of more than 7 days unless such information relates solely to domain names for which you are the registrant and/or registrar.*

This additional clause has been introduced to specify the length of time that it is permissible to hold details of domain names obtained from the DAC. This clause has been introduced to ensure that Nominet is able to protect the integrity of the register.

We envisage this to have little or no impact on the user.

## **Conclusion**

The changes to the real time DAC are necessary in order to enhance performance, relieve strain on the system and improve robustness of the system. Whilst certain query data fields are being removed from the real time DAC, they will be available on the time delay DAC. We have listened to feedback from members, the PAB and users of the service and have taken this feedback into account in the changes we have made to the DAC Terms and Conditions.

These changes have been communicated to members and will be implemented on 30th June at 12.00 midday.

The Board request the PAB review the policy on Domain Name Re-registration and is invited to add this issue to the PAB Work Programme 2009/2010.