



Government Administration Committee A

Inquiry on AI Data Centres in Tasmania

The House of Assembly Standing Committee on Government Administration A has resolved to inquire into and report upon the construction and operation of AI data centres in Tasmania.

Members of the public may use this form as a template to provide comment on the Committee Inquiry Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference are set out below and comments should be limited to these areas.

Submissions become Committee documents that may be published on the Committee website and quoted in the Committee's report to Parliament. Should you not wish whole or parts of your submission to be published, please clearly indicate this in your submission. Persons making submissions must not release them without the approval of the Committee. Submissions are protected by parliamentary privilege but the unauthorised release of them is not.

Submissions should be received by the closing date of Monday, 21 September 2026 and should be emailed to assemblygaa@parliament.tas.gov.au, or posted to: Secretary, Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania, Parliament House Hobart, 7000.

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(The above information is used by the Secretariate to verify submissions and to contact the submitter should the Committee wish to seek further information. Should you not provide the above information, the Committee may not accept your submission to the Inquiry.)

Terms of Reference:

Inquire into and report upon the construction and operation of AI data centres (AIDC's) in Tasmania, including recommending future legislation and regulations necessary to:

1. Protect public resources and the environment.

Water consumption- This can be highly variable between sizes, locations and formats of AIDC's. We need expert recommendations and strong laws which prevent too much water being diverted to these centres at the risk of:

- water shortages to:
 - residents;
 - other businesses;
 - aquatic environments; and
- increased water costs to:
 - residents;
 - other businesses; and
- increased burden and critical outages (breakdowns, shutdowns, maintenance) on aging utility systems.

We cannot use our “Green State” image as evidence to extrapolate a water-rich future as climate change unpredictably affects weather patterns world-wide. Our country is experiencing decreased rainfall over the long term. From CSIRO's State of the Climate 2024 ([State of the Climate - CSIRO](#)),

- *In the south-west of Australia there has been a decrease of around 16% in April to October rainfall since 1970.*
- *In the south-east of Australia, there has been a decrease of around 9% in April to October rainfall since 1994.*
- *Heavy short-term rainfall events are becoming more intense.*
- *There has been a decrease in streamflow at most gauges across Australia since 1970.*

Decreased rainfall or more intense short-term rainfall (with increased runoff and lowered absorption and percolation to deep reserves) means water stores will be much lower than traditionally expected. Any consideration of licences for water consumption should use accurately modelled data with broad buffer estimates.

Carbon output- There is no doubt that fossil fuel-consuming industries contribute far more carbon dioxide to the climate change crisis than individual households and small businesses. High-energy industries like AIDC's MUST use renewable energy sources to power their systems if we are to avoid reaching “tipping points” at which climate change will accelerate catastrophically (Global Tipping Points Report 2023, [Global Tipping Points | Home](#)). We have the means for clean energy generation and storage. Large scale backing and investment by industry is crucial to hastening the transition at a level which is meaningful and should be core to new business agreements and permissions.

Air pollution- Globally-recognised as having some of the cleanest air on the planet, Tasmania stands to lose this reputation without careful planning and stringent laws for AIDC's and their power generation. The constant and broadscale burning of fossil fuels to run systems and backup equipment not only piles onto carbon emissions loads and climate-wrecking effects but also adds chemicals and particulates to the local air and environments where communities live. The damage to health is broad and insidious (*Short-term increases in air pollution linked to several new diseases*, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/03/right-now-air-pollution-systemic-effects>) affecting multiple human pathways- neurological, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine and digestive systems alike.

Evaporation from AIDC's cooling towers can also pose risks to human health as sources of airborne mould and pathogens such as antimicrobial resistant bacteria (*How to Manage Bacteria and Pathogen Growth in Cooling Towers*, <https://eaiwater.com/how-to-manage-bacteria-and-pathogen-growth-in-your-cooling-tower/>)

Water pollution- Closed circuit systems may have lower water consumption than open circuits which lose water through constant evaporation for cooling but to maintain the water's suitability for use with the sensitive infrastructure, it will be mixed with:

- Chemical coolants (glycols- low toxicity but significant effects on aquatic life)
- Corrosion inhibitors; and
- Scale-prevention agents.

Waste-water will also likely contain heavy metal contaminants and inorganic substances from industrial components which are particularly damaging in human water sources as well as wildlife natural environments. Ignoring the large probability of sedimentary loss and contaminants generated during large-scale construction, there will be hugely increased runoff amounts from large hard surfaces and possible toxins entering the waterway.

Heat pollution- Our local Tasmania climate is a huge drawback for the rest of the country seeking to escape summer heat and to experience cold weather attractions. Studies have shown that AIDC's have the potential to measurably increase the temperature of local communities (*The data heat island effect: quantifying the impact of AI data centers in a warming world*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2603.20897>). Researchers found an increased land surface temperature of 2°C on average followed the start of operations of AIDC's. This is huge considering the Paris Agreement was to limit changes in global average temperatures by just 1.5°C. This increase would affect communities and environments through increased energy demands for cooling, increased healthcare needs and changes in plant and animal health.

Noise pollution- Our local communities faced increased noise levels, causes of sleep disturbance and the associated health impacts such as tiredness, stress, increased blood pressure and anxiety (*Communities Are Raising Noise Pollution Concerns About Data Centers*, <https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/communities-are-raising-noise-pollution->

[concernsabout-data-centers](#)). Comparable industrial noise levels have been observed in our own Huon Valley due to always-on aquaculture activities near communities with numerous complaints and few resolutions to lessen the pollution.

Light pollution- Similarly, our communities face increased levels of artificial light and causes of sleep disturbance from always-on AIDC's with similar associated health risks and loss of enjoyment. Our status as a leading Dark Skies area and tourism destination could be placed at risk, lowering the drawcard of dark, uninterrupted viewing of the universe, particularly the Aurora Australis. Furthermore, the cultural significance of dark skies, planets, moons and constellations are huge for the palawa peoples of Tasmania, allowing for the continuation of cultural knowledge and storytelling.

E-waste pollution- Computer components and hardware, critical to the performance of AIDC's, are likely to need constant upkeep and upgrades and are projected to produce 5 million metric tons of hard to recycle, difficult to handle e-waste by 2030 (*AI will add to the e-waste problem. Here's what we can do about it.* | MIT Technology Review, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2024/10/28/1106316/ai-e-waste/>). That's a large and tricky addition to the waste stream of any community.

More deceptive is the hidden risk to communities in the event of a fold by the company, the technology itself or the industry as a whole. We need strong laws, written into any agreement about:

- what happens,
- who is responsible and
- who pays, should the worst-case scenario occur.

Just like aging oil platforms and dangerous disused mines, the remediation is often extortionate and difficult and cannot fall to the taxpayer due to the bluster of bravado or the lack of forethought. I realise that it seems unthinkable or cynical but may explain the rush for the technology to be immediately deployed on a huge scale, with secrecy and backroom deals to get it locked in before an alternative, better way comes along. Even AI companies this month agreeing that an AI-pause (Big AI wants to slow down AI research. Is it a safety pause or a strategic retreat?, <https://theconversation.com/big-ai-wants-to-slow-down-ai-research-is-it-a-safety-pause-or-a-strategic-retreat-291867>) while guard rails and principles are developed shows that the technology is not all set-in-stone and perhaps not the wonder it was touted to be?

Discontinued aesthetics- The changing of our natural area and beautiful outlooks for objectively stark and industrial AIDC's will impact the rest, disconnect and enjoyment of our communities.

Land clearing and availability- The building of AIDC's close to communities and existing utilities will create further pressure to deforest and destroy precious environments and potential food production land as well as suitable home sites close to amenities rather than

long commutes past industrial zones. We need stronger nature laws in place before developments are green-lit and the axe falls on irreplaceable nature. Our state must have improved foresight and planning opportunities to avoid mistakes. We require more-streamlined and better processes for releasing land to build homes and to strengthen food security ahead of AIDC's.

Wildlife- Last but certainly not the smallest environmental impact is that upon wildlife. AIDC's affect wildlife just as it does humans but probably more magnified through:

- water consumption- natural bodies of water are drained, locked down or altered to prevent use by wildlife, funnelled instead to AIDC's;
- air pollution- the same airborne chemicals and particulates that affect human health, generated by AIDC's from the burning of fossil fuels, are inhaled or ingested as contaminants on food;
- water pollution- used coolant, waste-water runoff, demineralised/filtered/alterd water from AIDC's returns to the environment changed and unhealthy for natural systems;
- heat pollution- wastewater and coolant heats water sources and waste heat from AIDC's directly warms environments nearby, affecting the health, breeding and enticement for wildlife in our areas;
- light pollution from always-on artificial sources such as AIDC's affects multiple animals in numerous ways (<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/campaign/light-pollution>, [Reducing the effect of light pollution on wildlife - DCCEEW](#)) such as:
 - distracting, repelling or killing essential pollinators;
 - disorienting migrating birds;
 - preventing fledging birds from taking their first flight;
 - disrupting food sources for nocturnal animals;
 - reducing nutrient-recycling by invertebrates and mammals;
 - exposing nocturnal animals to greater risk of predation.
- and noise pollution from always-on AIDC's (*Light and noise pollution impacts specialist wildlife species disproportionately*, [Light and noise pollution impacts specialist wildlife species disproportionately | bioRxiv](#))

Tragically, wildlife is also disrupted, displaced, excluded, maimed and killed directly by habitat fragmentation as AIDC's are built and proliferate. Increasingly sparse and dissected environments are devastating for all types of wildlife from delicate plants facing extinction and disappearing invertebrates through to top order predators and our iconic, globally recognisable animals.

2. Ensure Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System adequately recognises and addresses the specific impacts of the development and construction of AI and data facilities.

The decision to approve, green light, waive-through or turn a blind-eye to the obvious ramifications should not fall to a local council. The stakes for failure and penalties for not getting it exactly right are too high and the community complications are too great. Likewise, it should not fall solely to bureaucrats with skin-in-the-game, who stand to benefit through the political, financial or egotistical gain from securing investment without the balance of oversight and multiple checks and balances. These must be collaboratively regulated by a range of qualified experts in the field of business, resource management and environmental awareness, cognizance and integrity.

Decisions of this magnitude should fall to guesses by those inexperienced in large and complex undertakings or be based even upon new federal "guidelines" for nice, friendly AI investors. They must be grounded in mandates and guarantees to the state and the public, with rigorous oversight and crystal-clear transparency.

3. Provide Parliamentary oversight and accountability for new facility construction and resource allocation.

Of utmost importance, most critical and core to accountability is the process of listening to experts and embedding recommendations from those that know. You and I, A State Treasurer and a Premier do not, AI experts, make. Ignoring proposals and advice from multiple experts without thorough justification is not accountability or transparent in the least.

4. Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption.

Deals made based upon quoted energy, water and other resource consumption must be adhered to and not varied without community knowledge and approval.

5. Provide the Tasmanian community with adequate opportunities for consultation.

Community consultation must occur at the earliest possible opportunity and be both authentic and reasonable. Deals locked in behind closed doors with unseen agreements and handshakes are not in good faith and have no place in transparent community consultation. Sessions and content must be detailed and understandable to people and made available in various formats and with long lead times- people are time-poor, overstimulated and need processing time to form an opinion. Buying social licence through selective sponsorships,

product placement and glossy advertising is no substitute for consultation and detracts (distracts) from the process of open discussion.

6. Ensures the Tasmanian community receive tangible benefits from all AI and data facilities constructed in the state.

Tasmanians deserve a stake in the benefits and windfalls that AIDC's are promised to bring in return for our resources. We cannot be expected to give away our natural resources (water for cooling, cool climate for cooling, land for siting), hand over our utilities (hydroelectricity for power, water for cooling) and accept all the risk in terms of dwindling, overwhelmed and increasingly costlier supplies. Investment in our power and water infrastructure must benefit Tasmanians to bring about more-reliable, better services. Increased computing power should also support the wishes of Tasmanians with their desire for less or more surveillance respected, their digital and physical identities protected identities and their right to privacy valued.

7. Any other matter incidental.

Conflicts of interest during the application, approval and implementation process must be declared by AIDC companies and politicians alike. This requires a review and overhaul of the Tasmanian Integrity Commission to ensure that all conflicts are declared exhaustively and guardrails are in place to prevent unfairness and preferential treatment at all levels. Sponsoring sports teams while deals are being done is a conflict of interest- locking itself into a community makes tough decisions less likely to follow due process. Lobbying must be exposed and dealt with appropriately- no kickbacks, donations or schmoozing whatsoever.

Any agreement should also notify and outline a process for ending an agreement should the deal become untenable for either party. If a business seeks guarantees from a government, then a community should not be locked into dodgy deals if an industry is not community-performing.