

Government Administration Committee A: Inquiry on AI Data Centres in Tasmania

To:

Secretary

Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania

Parliament House Hobart, 7000

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Submission from

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I am providing this submission as a Tasmanian resident.

I am concerned about the pace at which data centres are being approved and built in Australia, specifically in Tasmania following the recent report of six new data centres being proposed in addition to the three already in various stages or progress or approval with Firmus (source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-09-09/six-new-confidential-data-centre-proposals-tasmania-revealed/107131974>). There seems to be very little oversight of these facilities and very little consideration given to longer term impacts on the environment and the implications for Tasmania more generally.

My comments in relation to the inquiry terms of reference follow.

1. Protect public resources and the environment

According to the ABC report above, the three Firmus projects already revealed will consume 444 MW of power and the un-named six proposals at least a further 500 MW. I do not believe that the amounts of electricity and water used by these facilities is compatible with what Tasmania can support, even with the push for more renewable energy.

A report by Greenpeace in 2025 (source: <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/greenpeace-reports/report-environmental-impacts-of-artificial-intelligence/>) into the environmental impacts of AI estimated that by 2030, the power demand of AI data centres is expected to be eleven times higher than it was in 2023. This report states

“in Ireland, data centres already account for more than 20% of total national electricity consumption, and in the capital Dublin, almost 80%. Figures between 30% and 40% can be found in cities like Amsterdam, London or Frankfurt/Main. These developments are pushing local grids to their limits.”

Without adequate regulation, this could happen here too.

Tasmania relies on hydroelectricity for much of our energy, which in turn relies on there being sufficient water. If water resources are depleted by drought and heatwaves, which are

becoming more likely in a changing climate, this will have a huge impact across the state. Households are constantly told that water is a precious resource—indeed, TasWater tells us we are heading for a “Super El Nino” (source <https://www.taswater.com.au/news/newsroom/news-articles/the-world-is-facing-a-super-el-ni-o-tasmania-needs-to-be-water-ready-for-it-now>) and there is already pressure on our water infrastructure and supply.

Data centres are known to be huge consumers of water, so the massive increase in the number of these facilities worldwide is baffling in what the United Nations calls the era of ‘global water bankruptcy’ (source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166800>).

One recent ABC report suggests that water would be ‘trucked in’ (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-27/firmus-truck-water-rainwater-cool-wesley-vale-ai-data-centre/107083230>), which seems astounding. We can truck in water to support data centres but not to support farmers who grow our food? In periods of drought? Is this where our priorities should be?

It is important to consider what measures these AI data centre proponents will be required to put into place to ensure that they don’t further deplete our resources. There should be guarantees that household prices will not increase as a result of any additional infrastructure needed, and that supplies to households are not interrupted by the massive power and water requirements of these centres.

Further, what capacity is there to ensure nearby residents are not subject to noise pollution from these factories? This goes to the quality of life that Tasmania is so proud of.

EPA Watch in the US reports

Noise emitted by data centers—the humming of cooling systems, the rumbling of diesel generators and the whirring of thousands of fans—can be heard and felt hundreds of feet away. According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI), noise levels can reach 96 decibels for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Sound exceeding 85 decibels is considered dangerous to human hearing. (source: <https://epawatch.org/2026-05-29-data-centers-infrasound-pollution-linked-to-nausea-insomnia.html>)

Here’s another example from Footscray:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2026/may/03/ai-datacentres-australia-opposition>

We need strong protections in place to ensure that Tasmania is protected from the environmental impacts of any projects like this. These need to be enforceable and built in from the start, not just set out as ‘expectations’.

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

In assessing an application from Firmus for a data centre at Wesley Vale, Latrobe Council stated that the planning laws are inadequate to assess the applications for AI data centres.

This is a critical step to get right. If the planning and approval processes do not cover elements and issues relating to data centres, the applications should not be assessed until the planning processes can be made fit for purpose. If not, there is a risk that proposals that would have been refused under future, appropriate, planning processes will be allowed to

proceed unchecked. If the correct checks were put in place at the planning and approval stages, centres that may cause unacceptable damage would be able to be refused.

We should not allow projects to be approved simply because they fall outside the scope of current planning processes and are unable to be properly assessed.

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

Approval of projects with such massive implications for the state should not rest with one person or with people who are not qualified to assess them. There needs to be rigorous assessment of the costs and benefits by people who are qualified to make these assessments, within a framework designed to enable thorough assessments to be made. If this needs to go through Parliament, then that's what should happen. But there needs to be community trust that Parliament will get this right and will make decisions based on advice from properly qualified experts. Everything should be transparent to the public.

4. Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption

As noted in point 1, resource consumption is a major concern, and this information should be made publicly available.

5. Provide the Tasmanian community with adequate opportunities for Consultation

Please take the concerns of Tasmanians seriously.

We will have to live with these facilities in our communities if they are approved. Consultation under the current planning arrangements is difficult and restricted, and submissions are required to address only allowable matters under the planning scheme. If this is too narrow, it does not allow for community concerns on other issues that affect them to be taken into consideration. In matters as significant as this, it is important for communities to be able to have their say and for their concerns to be addressed, whether or not they fall under the planning regulations and bureaucratic processes.

Please look at what is happening in communities around Australia and around the world, particularly the US. Many people are opposed to these facilities for valid reasons, as they are being rushed and forced into communities without adequate planning, consultation or consideration for the future.

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

I believe this is the question that has not been answered. Why do we need these facilities at all? What benefits will there be?

Will there be ongoing jobs in these facilities? My understanding is that there will be very few jobs created once the facilities are built, but there is very little information available on projected employment within and around these centres. Further, a construction job in building a data centre is a very different thing to a long-term position doing work within the facility.

The government's draft *Expectations for Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers* state that data centre proponents "should deliver secure and well-paid jobs for Tasmanians" and train Tasmanian workers to do these jobs. More detail is needed about what jobs these facilities will provide and how the proponents will make these positions available to Tasmanian workers. For example, how many are permanent positions and how many are short-term, such as those involved with the construction of the facility? A requirement to generate long-term employment should be part of the approval process.

I also have broader concerns about the use of AI itself, which I understand is outside the scope of this enquiry. However, I believe this is still relevant and that the committee should take this into consideration when considering the benefits to Tasmania. You may be aware that there is increasing evidence that the use of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT causes cognitive decline. E.g. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) found

"while LLMs offer immediate convenience, [there are] potential cognitive costs. Over four months, LLM users consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels. These results raise concerns about the long-term educational implications of LLM reliance." (source: <https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/your-brain-on-chatgpt/>)

Consequently, it is fair to question whether a tool such as this, when used irresponsibly or unnecessarily, justifies the enormous resources that go into producing it and, therefore, whether it does, on balance, benefit Tasmanians. This is, of course, a bigger debate, and one which I feel strongly about, even though it is outside the scope of your inquiry. There are so many reports about the harm this tool does, the way it is making some tech almost unusable, the false information it delivers, and the impacts on people's ability to think critically and use their brains, to name just a few concerns.

As an observer who does not use AI, it seems like any use of AI technology that may be of great benefit or is something that humans literally cannot do or cannot do safely (as opposed to not wanting to do, like replying to emails) is being overwhelmed by tech companies' rush to cram as much AI into as many products as possible, whether people want it or not. Added to this are the copyright breaches associated with the theft of the work of individuals to train LLMs. Approving massive data centres to do this work implicitly supports that theft.

I question whether saving money by replacing a person answering customer questions with an AI chatbot is worth however many litres of water is consumed in answering their questions. Is a job in a data centre worth the trade-off of other jobs shed by a company when they use AI to streamline their workflows?

Replacing entry level jobs with AI means that there is no pipeline of entry level staff to move into more senior roles. People, especially young people, need to start their career somewhere, and this is often in lower skilled jobs where "AI productivity" is being promoted. How will these young people get into the workforce if AI is doing these jobs?

Who makes these decisions? Who decides if that is a benefit to Tasmania? If Tasmania is serious about creating jobs for people, why is it not looking at the ethical considerations as well as any potential economic outcomes? We don't have to go down this path.

I also suggest you consider the potential for data centres to become military targets and whether we want this for Tasmania. This would clearly not be a benefit to our state.

7. Any other matter incidental

The government's draft *Expectations for Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers* appear to assume future centres will be approved. I question the purpose of these non-binding expectations if they can't be enforced. They outline a lot of things the government "expects" developers to do, but what power is in place to require them to do these things? How will they be enforced? I would like to see the committee examine this document in its inquiry.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



[signed]

