

To whom it may concern,

I would like to start by personally thanking the committee for the opportunity to comment on this matter as part of its Inquiry on AI Data Centres in Tasmania.

As a professional writer working in a creative industry, I am currently on the front lines of the damage being done to this sector by the unchecked rise and proliferation of Generative AI: the job insecurity, the devaluing of my skills, and the relentless pressure to use a technology that is of no benefit to my work.

And as a former journalist of nearly 20 years' experience, I feel devastating grief and anger at the way this new technology has managed to almost completely erode our trust in anything we see or read, while simultaneously becoming the world's most powerful tool for creating social division, in the space of only a couple of years.

As a professional, as an artist, as a creator, as a human, to say that I have a deep personal stake in this issue is an understatement. This is an existential issue for our entire species and our planet, from a human perspective, a societal perspective, and an environmental perspective. And the frustration of feeling unheard is getting exhausting.

The environmental cost of this technology alone should be reason enough for every person, every industry, and every government to condemn it completely. Or at least put widespread uptake on hold until the technology becomes more sustainable.

August 2026 was the [hottest month, globally, on record](#). This past northern hemisphere summer, [rivers in Europe evaporated](#), and [North America suffered a catastrophic wildfire season](#).

Just last month a [glacial collapse in Nepal](#), caused by global-warming, killed hundreds of people when it caused devastating flash floods.

[Pacific Islands are already flooding](#) as sea levels rise, displacing Indigenous people from their ancestral homes forever. And even the canal city of [Venice](#) is at risk of destruction as sea levels rise.

And this summer, Australia is staring down the barrel of the [fastest-growing El Nino weather event on record](#), which could mean months of drought, heatwaves, and devastating bushfires ahead.

A report from the UN has just warned us that the world is unlikely to keep global warming below 1.8C, predicting that global temperatures would likely pass 1.5C above pre-industrial levels by 2030. Scientists have repeatedly advised us that the only way to "significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change" is to keep temperatures at or below the 1.5C target.

We've passed this tipping point now. And we're already seeing the effects.

To deny the reality of anthropogenic climate change, to ignore the overwhelming body of scientific evidence, takes a gargantuan effort of wilful ignorance at this point in human history. And in the last few years, we, as a planet, finally started taking these risks seriously, taking tentative steps (much too tentative, and much too late) towards a transition to sustainable energy sources.

Yet, now, instead of trying to wind back our fossil fuel reliance, we're suddenly committing vast resources to an industry that's set to exponentially increase greenhouse gas emissions and generate up to 2.5 million tonnes of electronic waste each year by 2030 according to the UN's [Environmental Cost of AI's Energy Use](#) report.

The speed with which we've abandoned all pretences of a clean energy transition, based on the "invest now or be left behind" sales pitch of the AI industry, is utterly shameful. Repeated concerns about the environmental impact are being dismissively handwaved by a government who are clearly more interested in currying favour with big industries than actually looking into these potential dangers.

When we know the damage that's been done, and continues to be done, by fossil fuel-powered energy generation, and when the environmental stakes are so high, why have we been so quick to jump on this particular bandwagon?

Ostensibly, it's based on the promise by Firmus that their data centres and AI factories are low emission, low water consumption, and entirely powered by clean, renewable energy.

But should we even trust that promise?

We already know Tasmania's energy grid cannot sustain the energy consumption demands of the planned number of data centres. Going by the power demands disclosed by Firmus, their three data centres alone will consume as much power as all the domestic homes in the state combined.

And, as it stands, this state already has to occasionally import fossil fuel-powered energy from the mainland time to shore up demand.

To keep up with the additional demands of three – or potentially nine – data centres, we will most likely need to continuously import coal or gas-powered energy from interstate, a possibility that has been loudly foreshadowed by Firmus agreeing to fund another Bass Strait power link.

Alternatively, we may need to establish a number of new fossil fuel-powered generators here in Tasmania, because traditional fossil fuel power generation is the only option that would be able to deliver the amount of additional electricity needed, reliably and quickly.

Both of these options would immediately negate the company's assertions that their facilities would be sustainable and relying on clean, renewable power.

Further, the fact that [Firmus is appealing](#) the George Town Council's regulations about diesel generator use at its proposed Bell Bay facility, clearly suggests they are planning to rely on them more frequently than stipulated by council, and more than they publicly admitted.

Firmus's suggested amendments to

"allow the operation of the backup diesel generators for limited augmentation of the mains electricity supply to offset curtailment, manage energy security and maintain operational reliability during periods of energy market stress"

also clearly indicate that they anticipate periods of "energy market stress" and issues with "energy security" during operation, which is completely at odds with their previous assurances that their operations will not put a strain on the energy grid.

It also highlights their suspiciously vague promises of ["creating new baseload so that our AI factories are a grid asset, not grid strain"](#). Even when questioned directly about what this very non-specific promise even means, Firmus never goes into any detail, other than making more vague promises to fund new renewable energy initiatives in Tasmania, which is still not an actual commitment to build or utilise any such infrastructure themselves.

And the location of the George Town facility, in close proximity to the gas-fired [Tamar Valley Power Station](#), is also an ominous sign that they're conveniently positioning themselves close to a large fossil fuel-powered generator to help augment their power consumption needs at some point when there's "no other option".

Yet, we still have no firm answers to any of these questions. And any attempt to raise these questions results in brazen dodging from Firmus, and even more brazen division-stoking tactics from the Tasmanian Government, who almost invariably resort to painting sceptics as NIMBYs, Luddites, and anti-everything instead of just addressing the problem. These are not empty niggling quibbles. They are informed, heartfelt, justified concerns.

Even when Firmus was publicly, unambiguously caught [lying about planning to use irrigation scheme water](#) to cool its George Town facility, the government still didn't re-visit the project, and the George Town Council still approved the development application. And this occurred during the hastily convened community consultation period for the town. This mockery of an exercise in "community consultation" clearly demonstrates the contempt with which Firmus and the government treat public concerns and opinions.

Firmus once attempted to defend their St Leonards data centre by saying it would use less water per year than an average restaurant. I personally feel this wasn't quite the flex it was intended to be, because this is still a very high amount of water consumption. And in the case of an average Tasmanian restaurant, that water consumption is the result of preparing, cooking and serving meals for tens of thousands of customers every year, washing glasses and dishes, hands being washed, toilets being flushed, and so on.

Tasmania's restaurants and cafes employ around [4000 people and pay over \\$40 million in wages every year](#), as opposed to the dozen or so people who would be employed at one data centre, or the maybe 200 who would be employed by nine data centres.

If I had to choose between using the same volume of water to cool a data centre for a year, or to provide food and drinks for around 80,000 people, I'd pick the restaurant. That one restaurant would also employ more staff than two data centres.

So, Firmus's claims to be clean and renewable in relation to power use don't hold up under even the most casual scrutiny. And neither Firmus, nor the government, appear to be concerned or embarrassed that Firmus was caught lying about their projected water needs as well. So why should we trust anything else they have promised? And why should we have any remaining confidence in the Tasmanian Government to actually hold the industry to account when they're already turning a blind eye to the company's deliberate deception, and the unquestionable environmental costs?

Put simply, we shouldn't.

And this is only the discussion in relation to the carbon footprint and water consumption of these facilities. According to the UN's [Environmental Cost of AI's Energy Use](#) report, focusing on these two issues alone often masks other (sometimes greater) environmental costs, such as land use, land degradation, e-waste, and accelerated critical mineral mining.

Yet we continue to simply trust the word of a Firmus co-CEO, a former stockbroker who was [sentenced to two years' jail in 2016 for conspiring to commit insider trading](#), sharing in \$1.4 million of illegal profits after using confidential information between May 2007 and June 2008.

With that record of dishonesty, "trust me bro" is NOT an adequate assurance of anything.

It's very clear that these developments have been stamped "MUST GO AHEAD AT ANY COST".

We're already watching tech companies speed-run the development of their data centres globally, getting them built faster than governments can formulate guidelines or bans, and the same pattern is emerging in Australia.

And any regulations eventually passed at a government level will most likely *not* be retrospective. So, a shrug of the shoulders and an "oh well, we've already built it, can't change it now" will be considered enough of an excuse to just carry on as normal.

And just like the recent plague of AI-powered "anti-crime" surveillance projects, these data centres seem to pop up almost exclusively in lower socioeconomic areas, where people are less politically engaged, lack the means to mount a protest/campaign, less educated about the risks, more likely to only get their news from Facebook, and less likely to be listened to when they're concerned.

There are significant industrial zones all around Hobart, but I strongly suspect there will be very few data centres springing up close to our capital city. The further away they are from the most densely populated part of the state, the better (for election outcomes).

This industry is confidently predicted to not just tip us over the edge into irreversible global climate disaster, but to see us speed off the top of that cliff at full speed.

And this desperate rush towards the rapid, large-scale construction of AI infrastructure, to fuel an environmentally suicidal industry, is all happening at the behest of a handful of tech companies who are promising improvements that haven't happened, [profits that aren't flowing](#), and sustainability plans that are objectively garbage.

It's an industry built on promising the rich they will be able to make even more money by replacing humans with unpaid AI programs that never get tired, never take a sick day, never join a union, and never ask for a pay rise. The promise of untold wealth and "productivity" for the few, at the expense of our planet's (very near) future.

Which is probably an attractive proposition for the kind of people who are able to build their own bunkers, hoard resources and build rockets to Mars. But not a very good deal for the other 99% of the planet's population.

I keep hearing that the process has been open and transparent, but it has been anything but.

I live in Newstead, and the St Leonards facility is clearly visible from my house, across the North Esk valley. The first I knew about the project was a [news story from the ABC in July 2025](#) announcing it was underway.

This isn't to say that there weren't previous calls for public submissions, or other earlier news reports. But whatever coverage or announcements there were, they were certainly not prominent enough to catch the attention of an avid news-reader and former journalist who lives close enough to the site to be able to see and hear the construction from his kitchen window.

And then we had the recent announcement that there are six more AI factories/data centres being planned. But details are all confidential. How is that transparent? Just

announcing this will happen, but not letting anyone know where or when, is the thinnest illusion of consultation and transparency. And full details will most likely be kept very quiet until it's very close to approval time. Because once construction is started, apparently, it can't be stopped. We just need to "get it done!"

And that announcement was closely followed by announcing Firmus as the main sponsor of the Tasmania Devils – an insidiously clever way of stacking the deck and manipulating public discourse.

Any attack on Firmus now will be directly conflated with an attack on the Devils and the stadium, effectively pulling the AI debate into the same culture war already raging about the Macquarie Point Stadium project.

The football fervour and tribalism of Devils supporters will compel them to defend the sponsorship decision (especially after the sponsor-logoed jerseys are rushed into market for people to buy), and it will immediately marry them to the idea of supporting Firmus. Because Firmus supports our team, they're supporting our community, they're supporting the sport I love...you don't hate sport and community, do you?

Stymying public debate by ensuring we can't even discuss one controversial development project without being forced into a discussion about another controversial development project is a whole new level of Machiavellian cynicism, even by Tasmanian Government standards.

At this point it wouldn't even shock me to discover that members of Parliament have been offered preferential investment opportunities ahead of Firmus's upcoming stock market float, to give them an added incentive to ensure the project's success.

And what is this orgy of self-destructive investment and development all in aid of, anyway? Who actually benefits from it?

We keep being told that this new technology will lead to huge advances for humanity in terms of health, medicine, creativity, quality of life, and leisure time.

And to be fair, AI has helped us achieve some remarkable breakthroughs in various forms of scientific research, largely thanks to its ability to process immense volumes of data quickly, and to model huge numbers of variables and outcomes for given situations.

But, so far, the most significant, widespread, and life-altering developments are much less positive and much more numerous.

We got:

- Deepfake videos of politicians and prominent figures
- the new crime of deepfake porn

- rising fossil fuel emissions
- job losses
- rogue AI systems hacking into other systems
- educational institutions unable to tell when students are getting AI to write all their assignments for them
- sophisticated facial-recognition and surveillance systems gathering personal information and biometric data from non-consenting customers at Bunnings and Coles
- police phone/seatbelt cameras incorrectly fining drivers
- Meta's "pervert glasses"
- social media algorithms designed to instigate politically exploitable culture wars by polarising people into echo chambers of online rage-bait
- More bots than people on social media
- an internet where nobody can trust the truth of anything they see or read any more
- people withdrawing from society and finding solace in AI chatbots instead of other humans
- more sophisticated cybercrime and scamming

The list goes on.

And who is benefiting from the AI revolution?

Not the workers in creative industries who have seen their jobs vanish in the past 12 months.

Not the artists whose work has been used to train AI without their consent in the biggest global breach of copyright we've ever seen.

Not the call centre staff who are unemployed after being replaced by chatbots.

Not the manual labourers who are blissfully unaware that their jobs will disappear just as quickly the moment robotic technology catches up.

Not the people who have hulking data centres built in their neighbourhoods, using up power and water and generating enough noise to frighten wildlife away and stop people from sleeping.

Not the Indigenous communities being disproportionately targeted by AI facial recognition surveillance by police in WA.

Not the teenage girls who are being traumatised by other students making AI porn with their faces.

Not the users of mobile phones, gaming consoles, home computers and other electronic devices that are becoming more expensive because the [AI industry has sent processor and RAM prices skyrocketing](#).

Not the Indigenous peoples who are seeing their art and culture appropriated by generative AI and experiencing the pain of a new kind of colonisation.

Not the people who are having their perspectives and choices manipulated by social media algorithms.

At work, we're constantly being pushed to incorporate AI into everything we do – whether we need to or not – solely to ensure the demand remains high enough to prevent the collapse of an industry we didn't ask for in the first place. I've never seen the tail wag the dog so confidently.

And still the most common use of AI in my workplace is for people who don't want to write their own emails any more, resulting in chains of messages going back and forth between different AI agents, and not a word of actual human communication in the whole interaction.

My job has gone from writing profile stories and marketing copy, to spending the majority of my time editing content “produced” by AI. Meanwhile, the people who instruct their AI agent to vomit out half a dozen stories in five minutes, crow loudly about how much time they're saving, while my workload spirals out of control as I take entire days trying to turn each computer-generated document into something actually worth reading.

It's quicker to just write from scratch. And the quality is immeasurably better. But nobody wants to hear that, because now I'm not considered to be doing my job properly unless I'm “embracing AI”. Even though there's no part of my process that would benefit from incorporating AI. And every time someone uses it to save time for themselves, all they're doing is passing that cost on somewhere else, either in the form of wasting someone else's time, or in environmental damage.

The emperor is naked. And nobody wants to say it.

The way generative AI has so swiftly devalued all forms of art and artistic skill is absolutely heartbreaking, and is the sort of cultural disaster that will be studied intensely in the future – provided anyone still remembers how to read or write by then.

While the terms of reference for this particular inquiry mean that this isn't the place to have that discussion in depth, it is important to point out that these bigger, broader, and more existential questions and issues should not be ignored at our local levels. They should still be part of the decision-making process, because even all the way down here in Tasmania, the moment we build an AI factory, we are buying into the entire global web of consequences as well.

The heads of Anthropic, Grok/X, and OpenAI are all [calling for a slowdown in AI development](#) for fear of it advancing too quickly and beyond our ability to control it, yet none of them are actually doing anything to stop the rollout of data centres and other infrastructure.

Even [China](#) – whose relentless industrialism is making them a force to be reckoned with in the field of AI – has publicly aired its concerns about the unrestricted growth of the industry. They have cited issues like deepfakes, global power structures, governance, military use, propaganda proliferation and social cohesion among their concerns.

And the concerns of artists, writers, musicians, actors and other creative professions are very well known.

These global issues are not “above our pay grade” for consideration here at a Tasmanian level. This isn’t some can to be kicked down the road for someone higher up the governmental chain of command to deal with, as we plough onward blindly.

As we weigh up the consequences of our investments in this technology and its infrastructure, we should also be asking ourselves these bigger questions about why we’re doing it, what the cost will be, and how these decisions are changing the world we live in.

We are not separate from these issues here. Every data centre adds to the global power consumption tally and adds to already excessive greenhouse gas emissions. Every prompt we type costs water, energy and mineral resources. And we can’t expect other states or nations to be more responsible in their developments if we’re not also willing to pause and ask ourselves “should we really be doing this?”

The environmental cost of this technology is currently too high. And even fears of falling behind in national security terms should be dwarfed by the prospect of the total climate collapse we are facing if we keep going the way we’re going.

What’s the point of trying to keep up when the whole world is on fire and all our water has evaporated?

The social cost of this technology is too high. AI proliferation is directly responsible for the social media-led fracturing of societies and the widening of existing gaps. Jobs are already being lost, and the promised new ones aren’t appearing fast enough.

The intellectual cost is too high. People are increasingly outsourcing thought and imagination to this technology, taking the humanity out of some of the most human occupations and pursuits we have. Art is fundamentally the communication of emotions, feelings and ideas from one human to another, a conduit that allows one human to experience something felt by someone else. When the human is removed from the process of “creating art”, the art is meaningless.

The Industrial Revolution is often cited by AI proponents as an example of why we need to move with the times, as proof that this kind of upheaval has happened before and there was upheaval, fear, people were angry, jobs were lost, but we survived and everything worked out ok.

But this weirdly rose-tinted view of the Industrial Revolution fails to acknowledge the fact that things categorically *weren't* all fine.

People died. They died of hunger because they lost their livelihoods, they died while using unsafe machinery because human lives were cheap, unemployed labourers were plentiful, and only productivity and money mattered.

Incarceration rates went up as the impoverished unemployed resorted to theft to survive. People were imprisoned, hanged or transported to penal colonies on the other side of the world for their crimes.

The coal-powered Industrial Revolution saw the start of the rapid rise in anthropogenic carbon pollution that continues to increase to this day.

It caused a widening of the gap between the poor and the wealthy.

Child labour increased and literacy rates dropped as more children were taken out of school and made to work instead.

Homelessness and overcrowded housing increased. Living standards fell. Rivers and waterways were polluted and poisoned by floods of industrial effluent and human sewage.

Humanity survived this period, of course. But not unscathed. And the Industrial Revolution unarguably led to a great many beneficial social, economic and scientific advances as well. But those steam engines burned masses of coal, and the flourishing of capitalism was built on the backs of child labour, inhumane working conditions, and widespread poverty.

There's a reason it was this same period that gave rise to such revolutionary ideals as communism, socialism and anarchism, as people found themselves needing to push back against a system that reduced them to little more than an expendable resource to be exploited for the purpose of operating machines on an insufficient wage.

This new AI Revolution is no different. Once again we are faced with weighing up the costs and benefits of a transformative new technology. But once again it is the wealthy who stand to benefit, while the rest of us suffer the greater weight of the cost.

Once again there are big promises of prosperity and utopia, but once again the reality is pollution, unemployment and social division.

Once again it is the most vulnerable and marginalised who are being the most heavily exploited, but those higher up the socioeconomic ladder are willing to turn a blind eye to it as long as it doesn't affect them and they still get their shiny baubles.

And once again we have an opportunity to pause, take a look at the road we're choosing, and ask ourselves "is it worth it?" We have the lessons learned from history to guide us at this moment. All we have to do is listen to them. And it is the job of our leaders to have all of our interests at heart in this moment, not just their own.

And as I've watched that AI factory being built from my kitchen window, I've seen construction staff on site seven days a week, starting before sunrise during the winter and working into the dusk, ensuring it gets built *fast*.

And I can't help but notice the way that those conservative political slogans "get the job done" and "get it built" only ever seem to apply to building things like football stadiums and environmentally questionable industrial sites.

It never seems to apply to building things like affordable housing or new sustainable energy infrastructure, or to supporting creative industry training courses at TAFE.

Imagine if we could take the level of industriousness I'm seeing at the Firmus construction site, and apply that to building affordable housing.

And imagine if we could take the fawning, unwavering devotion the state government is showing towards the AI industry, and apply that willpower to enabling the construction of thousands of new tiny homes, or ensuring our hospitals are fully staffed.

The AI data centre boom has proven one thing to me: there's no such thing as "too hard."

Just a lack of willpower and empathy.

I will not accept any of these arguments along the lines of "oh well, it's already here now", "AI is here to stay", "we need to adapt or be left behind". Even the world's worst gambler will be able to tell you there's no point throwing good money after bad.

All that is required for the whole industry to collapse, and for the resource-hungry insanity to stop, is for people to stop using AI.

That's it. And that's really easy.

All the things we were perfectly capable of doing two years ago, before we had AI, we will still be capable of doing. The world won't end. The global economy won't die. Businesses will survive.

All that will happen is that a handful of tech companies might go bankrupt, a lot of rich investors will lose some of their stock portfolio, and a bunch of hyper-expensive data centres will suddenly become inert money-pits that pollute a lot less.

There shouldn't be any more hand-wringing about "oh well, we can't stop it now". All you need to do to stop it is...nothing. Just don't use it. That's why the AI companies are working so hard to convince every CEO of every big business in the world to force AI tools into every single employee's workflow, whether they need it or not.

It's a pyramid scheme with 99% of the world's population – and global environmental devastation – at the bottom. And we don't need to buy in. We should be standing with the rapidly growing number of communities around the world who are rejecting these centres, who are saying no to using the technology, and putting the welfare of all above the extravagance of the few.

We might not be able to put the genie back in the bottle, but we CAN turn our backs on it, and only let it back into our lives once it's changed its ways and improved its carbon footprint.

Tim Martain

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