

**Resolution of the Standing Committee on Government Administration A on
5 August 2026**

Submission to Tasmanian Parliamentary Inquiry into AI Data Centres

Submission prepared by Jennifer Moore



The Standing Committee on Government Administration A has resolved to inquire into and report upon the construction and operation of AI data centres in Tasmania, including recommending future legislation and regulations necessary to:

1. Protect public resources and the environment;

I wish to petition you, the State government of Tasmania, to take steps to prioritise environmental protection, human dignity, community wellbeing and long-term climate resilience over the speculative expansion of hyperscale AI facilities. There is an opportunity to develop AI facilities in Tasmania in a way that protects our public resources and the rich diversity of our natural environment. With careful planning, strong regulation and greater independent scrutiny, the operation of AI centres could occur whilst avoiding unacceptable harm.

Increasing evidence internationally is establishing data centre expansion, especially large ‘hyperscale’ or ‘AI factory’ data centres, as resource intensive, and carrying significant, multifaceted risks to environmental and human health. For our Tasmanian communities and environment there must be greater legislative and regulatory protection over energy consumption, water demands, land consumption, pollution risks, and impacts on biodiversity and human health.

In addition, AI centres present a real threat to the intellectual property and copyright resources we possess here in Tasmania. There is a great and urgent need for stronger legal protection of the intellectual property of writers, journalists, musicians and artists in our state. Every time a large language AI model uses human created material without acknowledgement, permission or compensation our entire community loses a piece of our collective human dignity. I am an artist and I would like for my creative self-expression to remain my property for the enjoyment of other humans in my community. I do not give permission for my ideas, creativity and creative works to be stolen from me by AI Companies for their financial benefit. Tasmania is recognised as a state that is rich in creative expression, in handing over our intellectual property and copyright to AI companies, we are risking tearing the very fabric of our community connectedness and sense of meaningful purpose. We must take steps to value our creativity and original intellectual property by regulating its abuse by AI companies.

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;

I have always understood the primary purpose of our planning laws here in Tasmania as managing land use and development in a way that balances environmental protection, community needs and economic growth. Having regards to the recent approval and development of three Firmus hyperscale AI data centres in Tasmania, I respectfully submit that the Tasmania’s Resource Management and Planning System is not fit for purpose in regulating the expansion of these facilities. I would even go so far as to say that the regulatory framework that is currently in place is out of date and lagging behind technological advancement.

The Firmus AI Data Centre at St Leonards, currently under construction, was approved without any examination of the cumulative, environmental and health impacts of the development. This constitutes a significant oversight under the current planning instruments with potential for far reaching and devastating harms to our community and our environment.

With direct reference to the Launceston City Council Special Council Meeting Minutes (1 September 2025), the Development Approval for the Firmus AI Data Centre at St Leonards

contains multiple legal errors under the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993 (LUPAA)*, the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994 (EMPCA)*, the *Tasmanian Planning Scheme*, and established administrative law principles. This development approval is vulnerable to legal challenge owing to a failure to consider mandatory environmental matters, insufficient or flawed evidence, legal unreasonableness and unlawful deferral of modelling.

Section 51 of the LUPAA requires Council to be “*satisfied*” that the development complies with all applicable planning scheme provisions at the time of decision. However, the minutes show that key environmental modelling was missing and not considered. The omitted environmental modelling includes:

- air emissions modelling
- stormwater quality modelling
- hydrological modelling
- hazard and fuel-risk modelling
- battery energy storage system (BESS) risk modelling
- cumulative impact modelling
- threatened species modelling

Not only does this constitute a legal error, vulnerable to review, it also speaks to a lack of transparency that erodes community confidence in the representative role of the Council. It appears that this Development was approved hastily, without environmental consideration, with minimal community consultation and little foresight into the damaging effects that its approval would have on our community.

An appropriate measure to avoid repeating this legal and planning error in AI Data centre development approvals of this scale would be to consider each application as a Major Project of State significance. To compel developers to provide full and comprehensive independently verified environmental modelling, whilst giving the Environmental Protection Authority regulatory power over the development, construction and operation of AI Data centres.

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

There must be National parliamentary oversight and regulation over the expansion of any and all AI Data centres in Tasmania and Nationally. Further, Tasmania should consider a moratorium on approval and construction of AI Data Centres until we have consistent, enforceable and sustainable standards for every data centre and associated infrastructure.

It has been deeply concerning to witness our local council and the State government hastily approve AI Data Centres with no meaningful transparency and clarity around planning or community consultation. There is a growing sense of dismay and concern at the lack of democratic engagement in the development of these AI data centres. Much of that concern stems from a complete lack of accountability, oversight and transparency.

The Firmus Data Centre at St Leonards was approved in September 2025 by the Launceston City Council. The approval was granted with inadequate environmental and impact modelling, with no consultation with schools and residences nearby. Community requests for transparency and engagement have been met with silence from the Launceston City Council, State Parliament

representatives and Firmus Technologies. There is a sense that our interests as community stakeholders are not being reflected by our elected leaders, rather that the interests of AI companies are being prioritised.

4. Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption;

There is a palpable sense amongst our community in Launceston and the broader Tasmanian community that our precious natural resources have been sold without our knowledge. Our water, energy, land and clean air have been compromised without proper and adequate scrutiny. No details have been made publicly available regarding the nature of the energy and water deals that Firmus has struck. It is deeply condescending and disempowering to be told that we, the communities most affected by the AI Data Centres are not entitled to disclosure relating to resource consumption. Hiding behind the excuse of commercial in confidence dealings appears to be a way of masking information that the community stakeholders deserve to have access to. The minutes of the development approval for the Firmus site at St Leonards refer to the a series of resource related errors and falsehoods. The development application was silent on air emissions, noise pollution and contained errors in the anticipated amount of days that Launceston temperatures rise above 26 degrees celcius. The science is speculative at best, based on flawed and untested modelling and wholly insufficient to warrant unfettered access to our resources, whilst also carrying the capacity to cause widespread harm.

Where Tasmanian government enter an agreement with an AI company that includes any safety, environmental, or “responsible AI” commitment, that commitment must be verified by independent third-party evaluation. It is not satisfactory to simply rely upon vendor self-attestation or vendor-run benchmarks. Please consider regulating resource allocation and consumption so that there is greater scrutiny and transparency around promising our most precious resources to global AI companies.

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

In February of this year, whilst attending the Penquite Campus of the Scotch Oakburn College I observed the initial earthworks of the Firmus Data Centre, St Leonards also known as Project Southgate (DA0273/2025). I was surprised at the time to observe a development of its size and scale, as I had not been aware that the development application for the Data Centre had been approved on 1 September 2025. I have been advised that Scotch Oakburn College has never been consulted directly on the proposal or operation of the Firmus Data Centre. Upon further inquiry and with reference to the published development application documents, I became aware that the development was approved by Council without sufficient community consultation and with some significant environmental modelling omissions

There must be regulations put in place to ensure that any AI company looking to build and operate an AI data centre in Tasmania is compelled to consult communities and other stakeholders that will be affected by the development. My children attend Scotch Oakburn College. Their school campus is a mere 1km from boundary to boundary from the Firmus Southgate site. The College has never been consulted on the construction and operation of the AI Centre at St Leonards. This is a devastating oversight by the Launceston City Council and by Firmus Technologies. The development approval was made without sufficient advertising or consultation with the residences and schools within the direct vicinity. Additionally, no party was

consulted regarding the health of the wetlands and North Esk River. The development sits directly upon the riparian zone of the North Esk River. I am advised by the staff at Launceston City Council that only 4 submissions were made prior to the approval of the development. The commencement of earthworks and construction of the facility were the first notice that residents and schools had regarding the facility. Our community is, understandably feeling shocked and betrayed at having a facility of this scale and impact on human health and the environment pushed through council with a no consultation and inadequate advertising/notice.

My understanding of the development is based on the documents that are publicly available regarding the development. It is my understanding that The Development sits directly on the North Esk River Corridor, with the property line bordering the riparian zone and river boundary on its northern and north-western edge. Additionally, the property boundary distance between the northern boundary edge of the Development across the North Esk River corridor to the boundary edge of the Scotch Oakburn College land parcel is approximated to be between 650 – 1000m. The proximity of the Development will have a significant impact on the ecology of the North Esk River and wetlands and the health and wellbeing of the residents and students that live and study in close proximity to the development. Personally, I hold grave concerns for the tonal and low frequency noise the Data Centre will emit, the air pollution caused by the diesel generators, the impact of thermal dispersion and water pollution on the ecology of the river and the decontamination of the site once it is decommissioned.

As Tasmanians, it is reasonable to have the expectation that any developer seeking to use our resources would engage in meaningful community engagement, especially relating to the environmental and human health impacts of a development.

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

Tasmania sits at a crossroads. It has the opportunity to become a leader nationally and internationally in truly responsible design and construction of AI data centres. Our State has the capacity to harness the technological and economic advantages that AI offers, whilst taking steps to mitigate serious risks to our environment and human dignity. At present, there are a number of AI data centres in the process of approval and construction in Tasmania. These are significant developments being pushed through with inadequate laws to ensure that they are expanded sustainably and with a focus on environmental and human health. The race to welcome global AI data Companies to our state must not be to the detriment of community, human dignity, ecological sustainability, environmental integrity and human rights protections. Additionally, benefits to our economy should never derail our efforts to tackle the climate crisis or the transition to renewable, non-fossil fuel energy. Tasmania will benefit from making considered and informed decisions, taking the time to get regulatory frameworks in place and developing AI data centres sustainably.

7. Any other matter incidental.

It is deeply disheartening and concerning to be witnessing such an exploitation of community trust in the interests of investment. I would like to advocate for the students of Scotch Oakburn College and Queechy High School, the residents of St Leonards and the biodiversity of the North Esk River. None of these stakeholders have been consulted or considered in the rush to approve and construct the AI Data Centre at St Leonards. But they have the most to lose and will be the most heavily impacted. My

children are fearful about the negative impact the AI Data Centre at St Leonards will have on their learning, on their play and on their health. They are frightened about what the development will do to their beloved wetlands, an environment that they have treasured exploring and discovering over the years. Although Firmus have largely been silent on the anticipated impacts of the operation of the centre, there is significant cause for concern for the ecology of the wetlands and river and the health and amenity of the communities that exist nearby. The Firmus AI Centre at St Leonards will emit noise, both audible and inaudible, it will emit air pollution from the backup diesel generators, it will damage the wetlands and river system with thermal output and stormwater run off. It will leave a heavily contaminated site when it is abandoned once the technology become outdated. It will consume enormous amounts of electricity and water. It will be harmful to the life and wellbeing of children, bringing with it minimal opportunity for employment.

It has been disappointing to seek transparency from our local council, the Tasmanian government and Firmus and to be met with silence. My trust in the institutions that are charged with the protection of our communities and environment has been eroded. It is compounded every time Firmus makes a spurious claim about their technology and it is left unchecked, or every time I hear that the company has purchased yet another sporting team in an effort to buy social licence. It appears that they have been given permission to buy off Tasmania.

I would like to request that the State government utilise its powers to prioritise people over profit and community over corporations. We abandon our most precious assets of our wilderness and people when we pursue progress to the exclusion of our humanity.

Please consider my request, if not for my own generation but for those to come.