



Connecting data centers – facilitating new High Voltage network investment in Tasmania

Ensuring new demand from data centres is balanced with new generation, and orchestrated around supply chain and physical network constraints. Effective facilitation of new high voltage network connections can optimise the opportunity of new clean energy and digital exports for the state.

PERSPECTIVE

Neutral high-voltage connection and enabling infrastructure

**SUBMITTED BY
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1. Purpose of this submission

Symphony develops and delivers the high-voltage assets that connects both generation and large loads to the transmission network. Symphony approaches this inquiry from the perspective of the high voltage connections to the TasNetworks regulated network. Symphony does not ask the Committee to prefer one data-centre operator, generator, energy technology or commercial structure over another.

The issue on which Symphony can contribute on is coordination. A single large data centre can require a network connection measured in hundreds of megawatts. Symphony is active in Tasmania connecting both large scale renewable energy generation and data centre projects to the grid.

The Australian Government's current expectations are directly relevant. They state that new data centres should secure new and additional clean generation and/or storage to offset demand, cover their share of transmission and distribution infrastructure costs, and improve grid security and stability through measures including demand flexibility.[2] In July 2026 the Commonwealth also announced an intention to introduce legal obligations for large data centres around new power supply, connection costs, demand reduction when required and water efficiency.[3]

2. Symphony's role in coordinating new network load/generation

Symphony partners with both load and generation developers to plan, permit and build the high voltage connection infrastructure that connects their projects to the regulated network. That position gives us visibility of coming demand, and of the connection challenges, from both sides of the equation.

If a new data centre is built, new generation is required alongside it, consistent with the Commonwealth expectations noted above. Symphony supports both. The data centre can source that supply through its retailer, a direct PPA, or a portfolio of PPAs and retail arrangements, and that commercial choice should remain open. The system concern is whether the physical infrastructure needed to move electricity from the new generation to the new load has been planned, developed and built effectively, and whether the milestones of each project are aligned so that both reach energisation together.

For that reason, Symphony considers staged energisation more useful than a binary approved or not approved approach. A project can be authorised for an ultimate connection capacity while its actual operating load increases through defined stages as generation, network works, commissioning and system security conditions are completed.

3. What neutrality means in practice

Symphony is a neutral infrastructure provider. In the context of the inquiry, neutrality provides significant advantages through the ability to support direct projects, but also facilitate optimal outcomes for market participants on both sides of the load/generation equation.

Generation technology neutral

The connection test should be about system outcomes: new supply, firmness, network capacity, security and cost allocation. It should not require a particular generation technology if the technical outcome can be achieved another way.

Ownership neutral

The data centre, generator, storage owner and network infrastructure provider may all be different parties. The framework should coordinate milestones without requiring common ownership.

Location neutral

Tasmania should allow supply and load to locate where their respective infrastructure is strongest, provided the network pathway and system impacts are properly addressed. It is increasingly Symphony's view that exploring physical co-location of data centres depending on their computational workload type and usage, will be increasingly viable.

4. Response to the Terms of Reference

1. Protect public resources and the environment

For Symphony, the principal electricity-system protection is to prevent new load from being energised in a way that shifts avoidable cost or reliability risk to existing users. A major project should have a defined pathway for supporting

supply, network capacity, connection infrastructure and demand flexibility. Water and other utilities should be addressed on the same incremental-impact basis.

2. Resource Management and Planning System

Planning assessment should identify the infrastructure consequences of a large facility early, but should not duplicate technical connection approvals. For projects above a material threshold, an infrastructure schedule can record maximum capacity, forecast demand by stage, target energisation dates, supporting energy arrangements, major network works, water requirements and cost responsibility.

3. Parliamentary oversight and accountability

Symphony favours clear rules and reporting rather than an idea or concept of case-by-case political approval of technical connections. Parliament can establish the policy tests and disclosure framework, with connection, system-security and commissioning decisions remaining with the competent technical and regulatory bodies operating under those rules currently.

4. Transparent public disclosure of resource consumption

Reporting should distinguish approved connection capacity, observed peak demand and annual energy consumption. Proportionate public reporting can also identify the stage of energisation, material new supporting generation or storage, major network augmentation, water consumption and material backup-generation use, all in line with current federal guidelines.

5. Community consultation

Consultation should explain the complete infrastructure pathway in plain language: how much load is proposed, when it ramps, what new network assets are required, what supporting supply is expected, which elements remain subject to approval, and who bears the associated infrastructure costs. ***In the case of Symphony projects, this investment is funded privately at no cost to taxpayers.***

6. Tangible benefits for Tasmania

The enabling infrastructure for a major data centre can create substantial construction work, electrical capability, apprenticeships, fibre investment and enduring high-voltage assets. Infrastructure expenditure should not however, be presented as a community benefit where the incremental cost to for example the regulated network is ultimately transferred to existing customers.

7. Any other matter: connection sequencing

The most important incidental issue is sequencing. A project's ultimate capacity can be approved in principle while material energisation is staged against objective prerequisites. This provides investment certainty without creating a large new system obligation before the supporting infrastructure is ready. No suggested changes are recommended to the current processes in place.

5. Alignment with Commonwealth and Tasmanian policy direction

The Commonwealth's March 2026 expectations call for new and additional clean generation and/or storage, payment of the data centre's share of transmission and distribution costs, efficiency, and contributions to grid security and demand flexibility.[2] The Tasmanian Government's draft expectations similarly state that new projects are expected to support additional renewable generation, meet their share of network and connection costs, and protect energy security and grid stability.[4]

6. Closing position

Grid connection processes are working and well understood by market participants. Ensuring connection timelines are coherent and the regulated network is capable and resourced to welcome both new load and generation, deserves increasing attention.

Symphony's position is deliberately neutral as to technology and proponent. Tasmania can accommodate large new digital loads while protecting existing users if the new load, the new supply and the required network infrastructure are treated as one coordinated delivery exercise connecting to a single network. The most practical expression of that approach is stage-gated energisation supported by transparent cost allocation and technical milestones.

Submitted by**Steven Butler**

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References

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2. **Australian Government, Expectations of data centres and AI infrastructure developers, 23 March 2026.**
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3. **Australian Government, AI in Australia's interests, 15 July 2026.** <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/charlton/media/ai-australias-interests>
4. **Tasmanian Government, Clear expectations for data centres and AI infrastructure, 7 September 2026.**
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