From: Natalia Bennett
To: House of Assembly - GAA
Subject: Submission – Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania – Wesley Vale and cumulative statewide impacts
Date: Thursday, 27 August 2026 9:18:27 AM

You don't often get email from [redacted] Learn why this is important

Dear Committee Secretary and Members of Government Administration Committee A,

Please accept this email as my submission to the Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania.

I am making this submission in response to the proposed Firmus data centre at Wesley Vale and the broader expansion of large-scale AI and data-centre infrastructure in Tasmania.

I am deeply concerned that Tasmania risks making a series of individually assessed decisions whose combined consequences have never been adequately put before the public.

The Wesley Vale application is a useful and concerning case study.

The application documentation describes a later-stage IT load of approximately 50 MW and a standby generation system involving up to 40 diesel generators.

The project's own noise consultant states that the operational assessment relies upon preliminary layout and equipment information, that predicted combined noise sits very close to the adopted assessment criterion, and that the assessment should be updated as the design progresses.

EPA preliminary advice identifies potential emissions associated with the standby generation system, including nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and VOCs, and recommends further monitoring, modelling and operational controls.

Cooling represents the primary water requirement. The engineering documentation indicates that approximately 90% of cooling water would be lost through evaporation and proposes rainwater harvesting supplemented by trucked potable water. TasWater has advised that it cannot provide a water connection to the site.

These details demonstrate why Tasmania requires a specific statewide framework for data-centre development rather than relying predominantly upon project-by-project assessment.

I ask the Committee to consider recommending:

A statewide cumulative assessment of proposed data-centre electricity demand, including generation, transmission, storage, firming and system-security requirements.

Mandatory public disclosure of electricity arrangements, including expected maximum demand, demand-response obligations, curtailment arrangements, connection costs and any direct or indirect public financial support.

Protection against cost shifting, so households and existing Tasmanian businesses are not required to subsidise grid infrastructure primarily required by very large industrial consumers.

A statewide water-security policy for data centres, including mandatory disclosure of

annual and peak water demand, drought contingencies, source hierarchy and protections for potable and agricultural water.

Final not merely preliminary environmental information before approval where significant operational impacts depend on equipment specifications, particularly low-frequency noise, cooling systems and backup generation.

Independent air-quality assessment and enforceable operating limits for large diesel standby-generation installations.

Transparent community-benefit requirements, including permanent employment, local procurement, training and measurable economic benefit relative to the scale of public resources and infrastructure required.

Decommissioning and rehabilitation obligations, backed where appropriate by financial assurance, so communities are not left with obsolete industrial infrastructure.

A clear statewide planning framework for AI and data centres, developed before Tasmania commits to unrestricted expansion of this industry.

I also urge the Committee to examine the cumulative scale of proposed developments at Wesley Vale, St Leonards and Bell Bay rather than examining each project in isolation.

Tasmania is a small electricity system with finite infrastructure and finite resources. Decisions capable of materially altering the state's electricity demand deserve a corresponding level of democratic scrutiny.

My concern is not based upon opposition to AI or technology.

It is based upon a very basic principle of responsible government:

Tasmania should understand the total cost, total resource demand, total environmental impact and total public benefit before it commits itself to a new industry operating at this scale.

I am genuinely distressed that such fundamental questions appear to be emerging after individual developments have already advanced substantially through planning and infrastructure processes.

I ask the Committee to use this inquiry to establish safeguards that are proactive rather than retrospective, transparent rather than fragmented, and genuinely centred on Tasmania's long-term public interest.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Natalia Bennett
[redacted]