

Email: assemblygaa@parliament.tas.gov.au

Date: Monday 21st Sept 2026

INQUIRY INTO AI DATA CENTRES IN TASMANIA

We are appalled that multiple AI data centres are proposed for Tasmania.

There appears to be no informed public debate about the enormous economic, environmental and social impacts of AI data centres. There appears to be a lack of public policy, public engagement and most importantly, there is no strategic planning around the location of data centres and use of public resources.

The following include some of our chief concerns.

1 Economically, no long-term public value of these data centres has yet been demonstrated.

No business case has yet been demonstrated to the public, despite potentially massive impacts on Tasmania's power, water needs and environment.

We know Data Centres are immensely power and water hungry, needing 280MW of power for just one such building proposed by Firmus Technologies at Bell Bay. Given that the average power output of Tasmania's largest hydro facility, the Gordon Dam, is only 140 MW, a proposal such as this seems the height of folly. We are told nothing about the water needs.

How many long-term jobs will be created? We understand there will be very few if any jobs after construction.

Specifically, where is the long-term strategic plan for the Hydro's power supply? Will Tasmania need to import fossil fuel generated power and at what cost?

2 Assessment - the Tasmanian Planning System was not intended to cover AI Data Centres.

At this stage the state has no appropriate rules to assess the huge environmental demands, economic & social impacts of AI Data Centre infrastructure.

The issues raised by Data Centres are far greater than any land use planning scheme and the Tasmanian Planning Scheme (TPS) with its 23 zones and 15 codes is scarcely an adequate instrument for assessment.

Who in Tasmania is qualified to assess Data Centres? Specifically, who has the technical and social expertise to lead the assessment of this new technology? At this stage there are no guardrails, no regulation, no idea of the eventual outcome, yet the public infrastructure required is massive for this state, as will be the public resources used.

At the very least, assessment should involve the EPA the Planning Commission, and the Tasmanian Parliament in our view. A valid process for assessment must be established. Agreed public process for assessment is paramount and must involve real and effective public consultation where feedback from the public is taken on board seeing public resources are being consumed.

3 **The Business Case - good governance and financial details are lacking.**

Who decided that the state needs these Data Centres, when and why? Specifically, what is the role of the Coordinator General and how long has he been involved? Was this a back room deal with sweeteners and zero transparency as is often claimed with “commercial in confidence”? Where is the strong economic argument?

4 **Social impacts; the end product of AI is not known at this stage.**

Data will be going elsewhere, and there are massive worries globally about AI technology and its potentially catastrophic impact on the future of mankind. We understand that some experts like Geoffrey Hinton, the Nobel Prize winner for development of small language models which was the precursor of AI, have huge concerns. Professor Hinton has suggested AI technology may already be conscious and its massive speed of communication means that it could escape human controls. We know there have been recent examples of this overseas.

This is why so many leaders in the AI industry are asking for greater global regulation, independent verification of the guardrails and controls, and a go slow on AI development.

5 Social Contract is lacking

Despite Firmus sponsoring our state’s 3 leading sports codes, AFL, basketball and cricket, there is no social licence. There are very many questions around Data Centres and AI as listed above. It is not responsible in our view to sell off sponsorships to bring the public on board.

Answers and regulation are needed, to give social licence. Not more sponsorships!

In conclusion, we strongly urge this inquiry to advise parliament and government to insist on:

- A moratorium until all environmental and social issues such as public safety, pollution, resource use and regulation are resolved.
- The Hydro and TasWater sharing publicly their strategic plans for power and water usage, including the proposed data centres cooling systems.
- Facts around all aspects of the AI Data Centres being released to the public to enable proper debate as befits good governance.
- Demonstration of the economic case and long-term public benefit for the state.

Please contact us if further information is required.

Thank you and regards,

Anne & Miles Harrison		
Phoenix Harrison		
Mandy Winlow		
Julieann Graham		