

Government Administration Committee

Inquiry on AI Data Centres in Tasmania - submission

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Terms of Reference: 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;

The public has a right to know how much of our resources are needed by the data centres and AI factories. We need standards and regulation. Standards and regulations should also cover noise, electronic waste and emissions. If, as the industry and government claim, there is no need to worry, neither should object to such standards.

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;

Noise and effect on human and animal well being.

Data centre's cooling system and back up generators have industrial scale noise emissions. Predicted aggregated dBA levels are not sufficient where final noise levels cannot be given. In addition a dBA filter mimics casual human hearing at low volumes and inherently discounts frequencies below 200 Hz. Data centres run continuously 24/7, they produce continuous low-frequency droning sound. Projects can mathematically comply with 35 DBA ceiling while still emitting an invasive physical pressure wave that is legally invisible (yet still damaging to quality of life, not to mention disturbing or damaging to wildlife) to standard testing meters. Standard acoustic drop-off modelling assumes flat, open terrain and is not applicable to the Tamar River valley and other locations where data centres are proposed. In the case of the Tamar River flat surfaces such as rivers, especially on still nights act as an acoustic mirror. This will impact a great number of residents on the more populated West Tamar side of the river. Furthermore, the valley walls will function as a wave guide, funnelling the low-frequency hum. At night, thermal inversions will trap this continuous 24/7 sound between the cold air over the river and the warmer air above, amplifying the drone during sleeping hours and causing internal structural resonance, for example, vibrating walls and windows in many residential homes. This development cannot be allowed to go ahead until further acoustic modelling is conducted simulating a river propagation path under night time inversion conditions.

Acoustic modelling needs to be conducted for all major residential areas in all directions of proposed data centre sites. Until comprehensive, low frequency specific acoustic modelling is undertaken, this projects represent an unacceptable threat to our local communities, to the health and wellbeing of both humans and animals.

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

Currently there are no guardrails or legislation regarding the development and construction of data centres. It is being left to councils to assess and approve (or not) the Development Applications. This is not acceptable. These are large scale developments and their impact on resources- electricity, water – effects all Tasmanians, not only those in the municipality in which they are being built.

Hydro Tasmania are presently considering whether or not to supply roughly 30% of the states energy to Firmus for their three presently proposed AI factories. This decision must not be made until the details on energy policies are clear to Tasmanians and the community have their say. What will happen to our energy bills? Where is there capacity in the system to cater for extreme conditions when energy requirements exceed what is produced. Who has priority – hospitals, aged care facilities, or a data centre!

4. Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption;

The figures for the use of resources such as power and water keep changing. Where is the independent modelling and monitoring?

Where will Firmus get its water from? Recently it was published in printed media that it would come from Tas Irrigation. This was subsequently retracted by the company. Our agricultural sector in Tasmania is extremely important, and our food production is of the highest quality. Why else has Launceston been awarded the status of City of Gastronomy. This is something we should be proud of , not something we put at risk because farmers and growers of our fine produce are not able to supply our fine restaurants.

The information on how much of our resources are needed can not be hidden behind commercial in confidence clauses. The public has a right to know.

We are currently in a cycle of extremely dry and hot conditions. The weekend before this submission was due, the weekend I am writing this temperatures are exceedingly high, there are also several fires burning. FIRMUS has said that they have ‘modelled’ no more than ten days per year of temperatures above 26 degrees. This is the temperature above which they will need to spray water to cool the pipes in their proposed ‘dry cooling mode’ system.

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

Currently there is little to no consultation. How can there be honest and open consultation if all the information is not presented to Tasmanians. We have not got clear and factual information about how much water, how much power, where is to come from. This is a vast and complex topic. The public, and those making decisions need the information and the time to digest and understand and come to informed decisions.

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

Firstly – we need facts about the employment opportunities post construction. What are positions available and professions that will be needed to operate the data centre and AI factory, and how many positions? All we have heard about so far are construction.

Secondly - Profits from data centres have been shown to not benefit the communities in which they are located.

“The majority of the money invested, and the profits made, will ultimately end up in the hands of overseas chip companies and investors.

For the [billions](#) of upcoming investments into Australian data centres, the majority ([up to 65%](#)) [goes towards computer equipment](#). Almost all of this money heads overseas to computing giants like Nvidia, which enjoys [70% gross margins](#) on its crucial AI chips.

While these facilities serve Australian businesses, their primary economic contribution is the short-term sugar hit during the construction phase.”

Information and references see [Data centres in Australia: your questions answered](#) *Data centres in Australia: your questions answered*

The Conversation. Published: September 14, 2026 6.10am AEST

7. Any other matter incidental.

Fire risk

George Town Council approved Firmus’ use of diesel generators during outages, testing, inspections and emergencies. But Firmus have labelled this “unreasonable” and wants to use the generators to augment the mains electricity supply. Firmus are now objecting to this condition and asking for use of more diesel generators that they need.

This is not acceptable that a company does not disclose the true amount of diesel generators they need. My concern here is a major one of fire risk.

Data centres incorporate substantial electrical infrastructure, back up power systems (in this case diesel generators), and battery systems. This all poses substantial fire risk due to electrical faults, battery failures, short circuits, and malfunctions. In addition the storage of fuel to power the diesel generators pose a risk should a fire take hold.