

**To: Government Administration Committee A**

**Regarding: Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania**

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## **AI Development and Tasmania's Long-Term Interests**

AI and data centres may provide investment, employment and economic diversification. However, large facilities can also place substantial demands on electricity, water, land and public infrastructure.

Tasmania's existing industries—including agriculture, tourism and food production—already depend on these resources. Its natural environment, agricultural land, renewable energy and relatively unspoilt character are also valuable economic assets.

The overarching question for this inquiry should be:

**Are large-scale AI and data-centre developments genuinely compatible with Tasmania's existing economic, environmental and community character, or should greater priority be given to preserving the qualities that make Tasmania unique and underpin many of its existing industries?**

Where AI investment proceeds, it should complement Tasmania's existing strengths, pay its fair share of infrastructure costs, protect existing users and provide measurable community benefits.

### **1. Protect Public Resources and the Environment**

Major AI facilities and associated energy infrastructure should be assessed for their direct and cumulative impacts on electricity, water, agriculture, prime agricultural land, biodiversity, pollinators, landscapes, tourism and existing communities.

Relevant Australian and international evidence should inform policy. The University of Sydney's *Digital Climate Footprint* report by Dr Rob Nicholls is relevant to the environmental impacts associated with increasing data-centre demand.

Tasmania's "clean and green" reputation is itself an economic asset and should be considered in major project assessments.

### **2. Planning and Separation Requirements**

AI facilities are potentially continuous, high-demand industrial developments and should be specifically recognised within Tasmania's planning framework.

Assessment should address electricity, water, noise, lighting, visual impacts, traffic, transmission infrastructure, future expansion and cumulative impacts.

Evidence-based minimum separation distances should apply from homes, schools, childcare facilities, prime agricultural land and other sensitive uses.

### 3. Parliamentary Oversight and Infrastructure Costs

A **beneficiary-pays principle** should apply.

Developers should make an **upfront contribution towards existing infrastructure from which their project will benefit**, as well as paying the full cost of new or upgraded infrastructure required specifically for the project.

Where additional electricity generation or network capacity is required, it should be funded, constructed, connected and commissioned **before the facility commences material electricity consumption**.

Existing electricity users should not bear disproportionate costs or face reduced reliability.

### 4. Transparent Public Disclosure

A public **Tasmanian AI and Data Facilities Register** should disclose facility ownership, location, approved capacity, actual and peak electricity consumption, water allocation and consumption, Government assistance, public infrastructure commitments, employment and local procurement.

Actual resource consumption should be publicly reported rather than relying solely on forecasts.

### 5. Community Consultation

Consultation should occur before major decisions are effectively settled.

Proponent information sessions should not be the sole mechanism for consultation. Affected residents, farmers, tourism operators, councils, Traditional Owners and environmental organisations should have access to comprehensive information and, where necessary, independent technical advice.

### 6. Tangible Benefits for Tasmania

Major facilities should provide measurable and enforceable benefits, including Tasmanian employment and training, local procurement, education and research partnerships, regional investment and community benefits.

These benefits should be additional to infrastructure contributions.

### 7. Other Matters

Water should be treated as a strategic public resource, with consideration of drought, agricultural requirements and cumulative demand.

Facilities should have enforceable lifecycle, decommissioning and rehabilitation obligations backed by appropriate financial security.

Tasmania should also undertake a strategic assessment of the total scale of AI and data-centre development that can reasonably be accommodated while maintaining energy security, agricultural productivity, environmental values and the interests of existing users.

### **Recommended Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

I respectfully recommend that the Committee consider legislation and regulation to:

1. Establish a specific planning framework for major AI and data facilities.
2. Require cumulative assessment of electricity, water, agricultural, environmental and infrastructure impacts.
3. Protect prime agricultural land, pollinators and significant landscapes.
4. Establish evidence-based minimum separation distances from homes, schools and other sensitive uses.
5. Require developers to make **upfront contributions towards existing infrastructure from which they benefit**, as well as paying the full cost of new infrastructure required for their projects.
6. Require additional electricity generation and network capacity to be fully commissioned before major facilities commence material operations.
7. Establish a public register requiring disclosure of actual electricity and water consumption and significant Government assistance.
8. Provide Parliamentary oversight of major projects and public infrastructure commitments.
9. Establish meaningful statutory community consultation requirements.
10. Make employment, procurement, training and community benefits measurable and enforceable.
11. Require relevant Australian and international evidence, including environmental and pollinator research, to inform major project assessments.
12. Require lifecycle, decommissioning and financial-security arrangements.
13. Undertake a statewide strategic assessment of whether, and at what scale and locations, AI and data infrastructure is compatible with Tasmania's long-term environmental, agricultural, economic and community interests.

### **Final Consideration**

Tasmania should welcome appropriate innovation and investment, but the value of new investment should be assessed alongside the value of what Tasmania already has.

**AI investment should add to Tasmania's existing strengths—not come at their expense.**