From: Ben Marshall
To: House of Assembly - GAA
Subject: Submission to Inquiry on AI data centres.
Date: Sunday, 13 September 2026 4:07:34 PM

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Submission on AI data centre development and construction inquiry from B.P. Marshall, [redacted]

Opening statement:

In regard the construction and operation of AI data centres in Tasmania, this inquiry should acknowledge there is currently no genuine intersectional planning mechanism in place to understand the industry or its consequences.

Government in Tasmania at all levels operates as an ad hoc, project-by-project approvals system, minus any systematic deep research or any genuine planning.

The current understanding and assumptions of decision-makers about AI data centres are currently skewed to serve corporate self-interest or political self-interest – there is no further or deeper analysis beyond what will benefit shareholders or politicians.

Without an independent non-partisan costs-benefits analysis that examines the incredibly high-risk context of the industry – the global and local economic aspects driving the current push to build AI data centres, and the likely real-world consequences - no equitable or beneficial outcomes will result.

Inquiry criteria:

1 Protect public resources and the environment;

Tasmania is a state governed and managed as 'resources for sale'. Corporate and political interests are prioritised over genuine planning or public need. Lip service is given to 'the environment' and costs are often socialised while profits remain private. Back-room deals and 'commercial in confidence' claims mean public are locked out of rooms where decisions occur, and are not privy to the real costs that they, the public, are paying. What will this Inquiry do to change that?

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;

Limiting approvals assessment to 'development and construction' issues completely ignores all the other significant issues around the use and risks of AI data centres.

Our so-called ‘planning systems’ are actually project-approvals systems; corporate lobbyists’ voices are the only ones heard until decisions and approvals are made, and then those talking-points are echoed by local and state politicians when the deal is finally made public.
The system is designed and managed to support corporate commercial interests over any other issues raised by communities or non-partisan expert insiders.
The current system, therefore, is completely undemocratic and broken, and does not serve the state or the people who live in it. Lip service will be given to issues, references to ‘mitigation’ will be used as defence against deeper discussion via actual costs-benefits analysis, and the same old project-by-project approvals assembly line will continue to ignore intersectional and long-term impacts and issues. Cumulative impacts will rarely be mentioned, let alone addressed in any genuine way.
How will this Inquiry change that?

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

There can be no genuine oversight when ‘commercial-in-confidence’ strategies are prioritised over public need to know. Both major parties will block any requests for transparency, and will aggressively protect corporate interests, relegating community concerns as unimportant or vexatious. How will this Inquiry change that?

4. *Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption;*

We’ve already seen corporate avoidance of full disclosure and political cover for this. We’ve already seen both major parties block transparency. We know that government will block any independent costs-benefits analysis that would bring transparency to this and other issues. How will this Inquiry change that?

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

It’s standard practice for politicians and corporate developers to avoid providing Tasmanian communities with any genuine consultation. Any ‘community consultation’ or ‘community engagement’ will occur *after* all essential planning and decisions are made, and take the form of imparting information, taking ‘questions on notice’, and be made by professional engagement PR companies. It’s a one-way flow of curated and cherry-picked information to assuage concerns rather than address them. Only by early inclusion of genuine consultation, and independent costs-benefits analysis, will the Tasmanians who ultimately pay for infrastructure projects have any kind of voice. What will this Inquiry do to address that?

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

Neither government nor corporate interests prioritise any but their own short-term interests, but disguise this with the standard PR strategy of 'community benefits programs', in which small grants are doled out to worthy recipients locally in order to divert and defuse community opposition – 'buying social licence'. The other strategy is the tokenistic 'local procurement' claim, which for the data centres will amount to earth-moving in the early construction phase, and a tiny number of local blue-collar jobs in grounds maintenance and security after. Jobs claims by investors and their political proxies are already being shown to be highly disingenuous and overstated.

It is critical for this Inquiry to realise that local, state and federal politicians do not understand the tech and AI sector, or the risks and impacts of the large-scale issues as well as the local. Tech lobbyists are the only voices being heard, and Inquiries such as this one have too narrow a focus and remit to be meaningful.

It is also not possible for AI data centres to provide 'tangible benefits' to ordinary Tasmanians when they provide almost no jobs post-construction, impose long-term costs on communities and the environment, and shift all their "product" and profits offshore. Pretending otherwise is dishonest. What will this Inquiry do to address this?

7. *Any other matter incidental*.

We need this Inquiry to hear expert, non-partisan voices to provide context on the global AI push for all local planning and decision-making. We need you to demand, as fundamental, an independent, non-partisan costs-benefits analysis, with the widest possible remit, to be undertaken in order to provide the basics of good planning prior to decision-making on *any* specific project.

Will this Inquiry be just another part of the project-approvals assembly line, or hear our voices and prioritise our concerns above the commercial and political?

I hope so.

Thanking you for your time,

Ben Marshall – [redacted]