

Name: Andrew Lamb

Email: [REDACTED]

Contact number: [REDACTED]

Secretary Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania Parliament House Hobart 7000 Email: assemblygaa@parliament.tas.gov.au

Date: 20 September 2026

Submission to the Standing Committee on Government Administration A

Inquiry into AI Data Centres in Tasmania

Introduction

I am writing to raise concerns about Firmus Technologies' rapidly expanding AI data-centre footprint across Tasmania. The company now has major proposals or approvals at **St Leonards (Launceston), Bell Bay, and Wesley Vale**, with a combined electricity request of **450 megawatts** — up to **30% of Tasmania's current energy use**.

The Committee's Terms of Reference ask you to consider how Tasmania can "*protect public resources and the environment*" and ensure "*transparent public disclosure of resource consumption*." These issues are directly relevant to Firmus's developments.

1. Protect public resources and the environment

Firmus Technologies is now pursuing three major AI data-centre projects in Tasmania:

- **St Leonards (Launceston)** – 104MW approved, expanding to 300MW
- **Bell Bay** – 288MW approved
- **Wesley Vale** – 52MW proposed

Hydro Tasmania has confirmed Firmus is seeking **450MW of electricity**, equivalent to **up to 30% of Tasmania's current energy use**. This is an unprecedented demand on the state's hydro-dominated grid.

The ABC reports that Firmus is appealing council restrictions on **276 diesel generators** at Bell Bay, arguing they should be allowed during "energy market stress" to maintain operations. This indicates Firmus expects periods where the grid cannot meet its needs.

If similar generator reliance occurs at St Leonards or Wesley Vale, the impacts on public resources include:

- Increased air pollution from diesel exhaust
- Higher electricity prices due to transmission upgrades
- Greater strain on Hydro's ability to serve households and essential services

- Potential curtailment of supply during peak periods

Firmus claims its cooling uses “99% less water,” but no independent modelling has been released. Large-scale AI cooling systems often increase water use during heatwaves — exactly when households and farms also need reliable supply.

Tasmania’s water and electricity systems are public assets. Before any further approvals, independent modelling must confirm that Firmus’s combined load will not compromise environmental flows, household supply, or agricultural reliability.

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

AI data centres operate continuously and rely on dense electrical and cooling infrastructure. The St Leonards campus alone includes:

- Two large data-centre buildings
- High-voltage transformers and UPS systems
- Liquid-cooling equipment
- Backup generators
- Industrial-scale lighting and security infrastructure

The RMPS does not currently address:

- Continuous 24/7 noise from cooling systems
- Generator testing schedules
- Visual impacts of large industrial buildings in semi-rural areas
- Water-use modelling for high-density cooling
- Cumulative impacts across multiple sites (St Leonards, Bell Bay, Wesley Vale)

A dedicated **AI and Data Infrastructure Code** is needed to ensure these facilities undergo proper environmental, noise, water, and visual-impact assessment.

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

Firmus’s combined electricity request is the largest in Tasmanian history. Decisions of this scale should not be left solely to council planning processes.

Parliament should have oversight of:

- Total electricity demand (MW and MWh)
- Water-use projections
- Generator reliance and emissions
- Transmission upgrades required by TasNetworks
- Any public subsidies or infrastructure contributions
- Long-term energy contracts with Hydro Tasmania

Given the statewide implications, all large AI data-centre proposals should be tabled in Parliament before approval.

4. Ensure transparent public disclosure of resource consumption

At present, Tasmanians have no access to:

- Water-use modelling
- Noise modelling
- Visual-impact assessments
- Generator testing schedules
- Expected peak electricity demand
- Emissions from diesel backup systems

The ABC article shows residents at Bell Bay are already concerned about “light and noise pollution,” diesel dust, and the effect on tourism and vineyards.

Transparency is essential. All AI data centres should be required to publish quarterly, independently audited reports covering:

- Electricity consumption
- Water extraction
- Generator use
- Noise measurements
- Emissions
- Heat-output management

5. Provide the Tasmanian community with adequate opportunities for consultation

Firmus's expansion has outpaced public information. Residents have had to rely on media reports and scattered council documents to understand what is being built.

At Bell Bay, five appeals have been lodged with TASCAT, including one from Firmus itself. Residents have expressed concerns about:

- Noise
- Light pollution
- Diesel emissions
- Impacts on tourism and wedding venues
- Air quality and health

St Leonards and Wesley Vale residents deserve the same opportunity to scrutinise proposals before construction begins.

Consultation should include:

- Pre-lodgement community information sessions
- Public access to all modelling
- A minimum 60-day consultation period
- Rights for communities to request independent expert review

6. Ensure the Tasmanian community receives tangible benefits from all AI and data facilities constructed in the state

AI data centres create very few long-term local jobs. Their primary impact is on electricity and water systems, not employment.

If Tasmania is to host multiple large-scale AI facilities, communities should receive:

- Local employment guarantees
- Funding for STEM and digital-skills programs
- Infrastructure contributions
- Community energy offsets
- Protections for nearby residents (noise, air quality, lighting)

Approvals should be conditional on legally binding community-benefit agreements.

7. Any other matter incidental

Firmus's statewide footprint raises broader concerns:

- **Energy sovereignty:** Tasmania must protect its renewable energy for residents and future industries.
- **Climate resilience:** Water-use and heat-management plans must be tested against drought and extreme-temperature scenarios.
- **Amenity:** Industrial lighting, noise, and visual impacts will change the character of St Leonards, Bell Bay, and Wesley Vale.
- **Cumulative impact:** Three large AI campuses operating simultaneously will reshape Tasmania's energy landscape.

As far as I am aware: **Verified from ABC reporting**

Confirmed facts:

- Firmus has not released consolidated environmental modelling.
- Residents have had to rely on media reporting and scattered council documents.
- Firmus's appeal at Bell Bay suggests it may seek similar generator flexibility at other sites.

Conclusion

Firmus's developments at St Leonards, Bell Bay and Wesley Vale represent a major industrial shift for Tasmania. These facilities will place significant pressure on the state's electricity and water systems, alter local landscapes, and affect the daily lives of nearby residents.

Tasmania needs strong protections, full transparency, and a planning process that puts community wellbeing first.

Andrew Lamb

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]