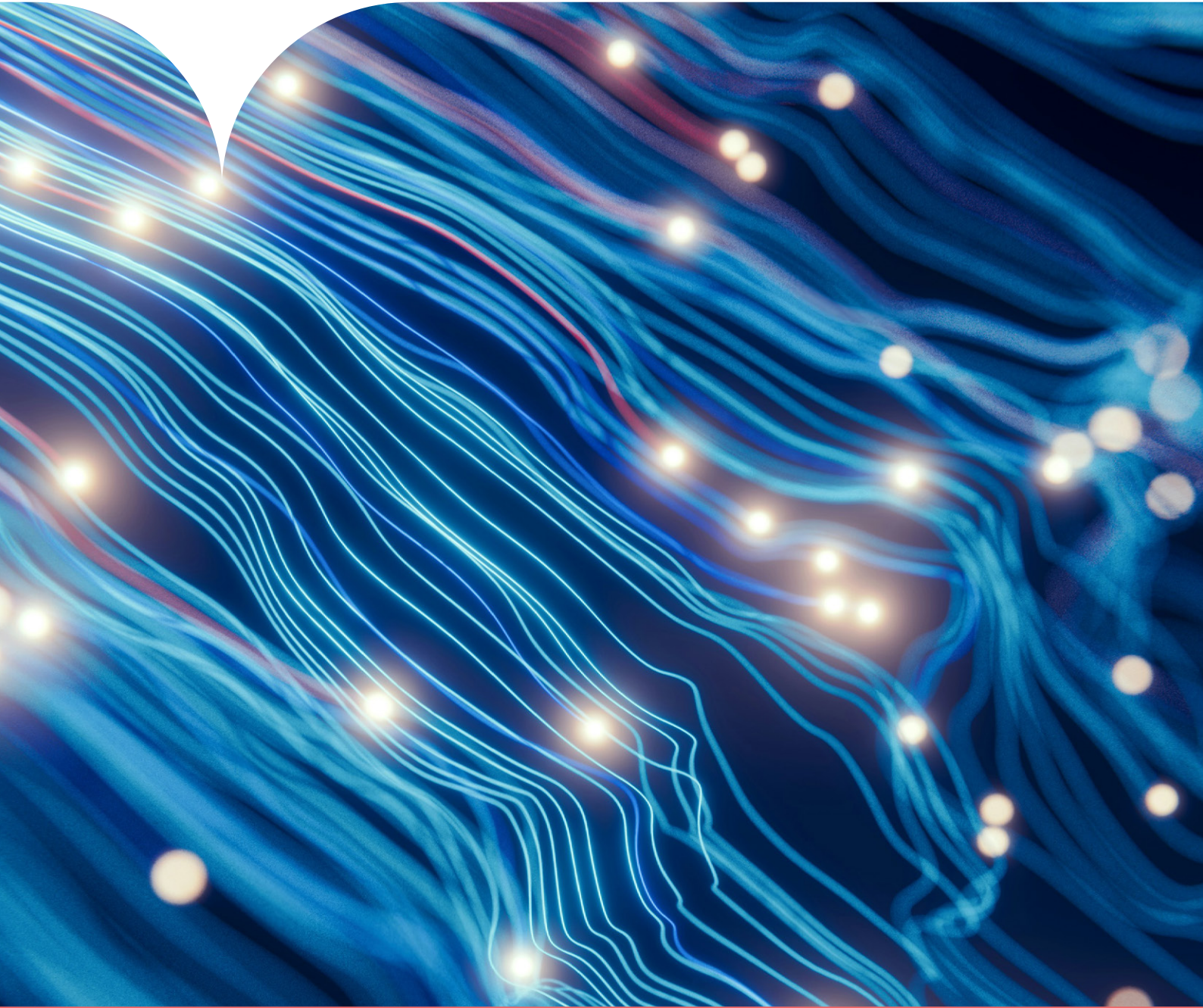


ON OUR TERMS

Artificial Intelligence in Bradfield



**Nicolette
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FEDERAL MEMBER
FOR BRADFIELD

WINTER 2026

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A report to the community

In the years before running for public office, my conversations about the digital economy centered around privacy protections, biases in machine learnings, and poor decisions in automated processes for human outcomes.

Then in the years between the 2022 and 2025 elections, artificial intelligence was largely still perceived to be a conversation about the future. People raised it with me as a forecast: what it might do to jobs, what it might do to the arts.

A year on, the landscape has changed completely.

The rise of data centres has made these abstract questions complete: how do decisions get made about us, how much water and power are we willing to commit, what is AI doing to our capacity to think for ourselves.

I now receive regular correspondence about the impacts of AI. A family whose Home Care decision appears to have been made by a system, with no human available to explain the outcome. A graduate watching entry-level roles disappear before they had a chance at one.

I know that people deserve a say in the decisions that will shape their working lives, their bills and their neighbourhoods. Right now, there is very little way into these discussions.

So this winter, I set out to change that. I asked the electorate what it thought, and took your answers to the floor of the House and to the Senate inquiry. I brought three of the country's clearest thinkers on AI back to Turramurra to answer your questions directly.



Nicolette

NICOLETTE BOELE MP
Independent Federal
Member for Bradfield

Three themes emerged, and they are the structure of this report:

- + **The infrastructure** — data centres arriving on the North Shore
- + **The decisions** — government using AI to automate the choices it makes about people
- + **The terms** — who ends up sharing in the benefits

Each section sets out what you told us, what I have taken to Canberra, and what we learned from the experts at our Town Hall event. Each ends with the solutions I have put to the Government.

Timeline of engagement and action

12 June — I launched a community survey on data centres. 750+ of you responded in two weeks, and two-thirds contributed comments too. (See the survey results on pages 4 & 5).

23 June — I lodged a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications' inquiry into Artificial Intelligence and Data Centres, built on your survey responses and your correspondence. I have offered to appear if the Committee holds hearings.

24 June — I took your views to Parliament: arguing that this build-out should happen on Australia's terms; that developers should fund the clean energy, transmission and water infrastructure they rely on; and that the benefits should be shared across society.

14 July — With the submission lodged and the argument on the record, we brought three experts back to Bradfield for a Town Hall event about what AI means for our community, our economy and our future. We filled the bowling club in Turrumurra. Everything we heard on the night is folded into the following sections.



Scan QR code to tell me what you think



Scan QR code to read Kate Chaney MP's AI Discussion Paper



Scan QR to watch my speech on artificial intelligence

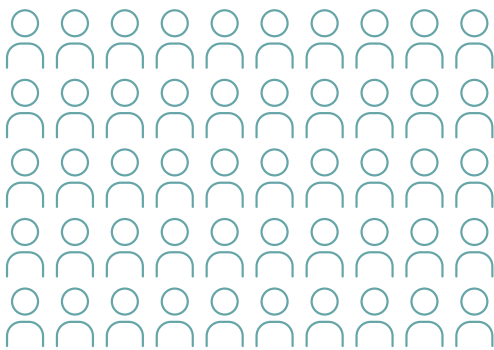


Thank you to Professor **Edward Santow** (former Human Rights Commissioner, now Director of Policy and Governance at the Human Technology Institute, UTS), **Dr Bronwyn Cumbo** (social researcher at the UTS TD School and Monash's Emerging Technologies Research Lab, whose work interrogates how AI infrastructures are shaping communities and environments) and **Michelle Lim** (strategic advisor on ethical decision-making and AI governance) for such a generous and clear-eyed panel — and to everyone who came and asked hard questions.

Bradfield may be leading the engagement on AI, but so are the smart folk of Curtin, in WA. Kate Chaney MP's work on an AI green paper is essential reading. You will see that our work in Bradfield so far covers just three of the 18 identified areas for government leadership.

Please write to me and tell me what you think: nicolette.boele.mp@aph.gov.au. All our work in Bradfield will be shared with other interested MPs and Senators as we lead cross-party and chamber engagement on this critical policy topic.





Results of June
2026 Data
Centre Survey

750
respondents

Q1. Which of the following
best describes you?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
Engaged in tech — use it daily and keep up	353	46.8%
Not very engaged — social media and search only	210	27.9%
Highly engaged — studied or work in the field	172	22.8%
Not at all engaged — avoid tech where I can	19	2.5%

Q2. How do you feel about
the growth of data
centres in NSW?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
Very negative	228	30.2%
Somewhat negative	178	23.6%
Neutral / mixed	143	19.0%
Somewhat positive	109	14.5%
Very positive	72	9.5%
Unsure / need more information	24	3.2%

Negative (very + somewhat): 53.8%. Positive (very + somewhat): 24.0%.

Q3. When it comes to data
centres being built
on the North Shore,
which of these matter
most to you?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
Impact on water supply, especially during drought	151	20.1%
Transparency about energy and water use	145	19.3%
Effect on renewable energy transition and climate targets	143	19.0%
Keeping Australian data stored in Australia	86	11.4%
Jobs and investment in the local economy	79	10.5%
Air quality and noise from backup diesel generators	64	8.5%
Proximity to homes, schools and hospitals	64	8.5%
Ozone, EMF or other human health concerns	21	2.8%

Q4. Most large data centres in Australia are built and owned by global technology companies. Which statement is closest to your view?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
I'm worried we'll repeat the gas experience — our resources used, profits sent offshore, and little return to Australian taxpayers	452	60.0%
Foreign investment is fine, provided these companies pay their fair share of tax and cover their own infrastructure costs	274	36.3%
Foreign investment is good for NSW — it brings jobs and money we wouldn't otherwise have	23	3.1%
No strong view	5	0.7%

Q5. The Australian Government has recently signed agreements with global technology companies to expand AI and data centre investment in Australia. How well do you feel the government has explained these decisions and consulted the community?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
Not well — heard about the deals but not the reasoning	228	30.2%
Not at all — first I'm hearing of it	178	23.6%
Reasonably well — but want more detail on trade-offs	143	19.0%
Very well — understand the case and feel informed	109	14.5%
Unsure	72	9.5%
"Not well" or "not at all": 84.9%.		

Q6. How confident are you in government to effectively regulate the growth and impact of data centres, including deals between the Government and global AI companies?

ANSWER	COUNT	%
Not at all confident — deals need far greater scrutiny	391	51.9%
Not confident — regulation isn't keeping pace	233	30.9%
Somewhat confident — but need stronger guardrails	102	13.5%
Very confident — industry and government can manage it	21	2.8%
Unsure	7	0.9%
"Not confident" or "not at all confident": 82.8%.		



The infrastructure —
data centres arriving on
the North Shore

The decisions —
government using AI to
automate the choices it
makes about people

The terms —
who ends up sharing in
the benefits



1. The Infrastructure

Data centres on the North Shore

Data centres are already part of the landscape here on the North Shore. Some sit within the boundaries of Bradfield, others just across our boundaries at Macquarie Park, Lane Cove West and along the M2 corridor. Many more are proposed. Several are being assessed through the NSW Government's state significant development pathway, which sits above local planning controls, and there is no single public register that tells a resident what is operating near them or what is coming.

What you told me

Of 750+ survey respondents, **53.8% felt negatively about data centre growth in NSW**. Seven in 10 respondents described themselves as daily technology users or people who work in the field so this can be read as educated scepticism.

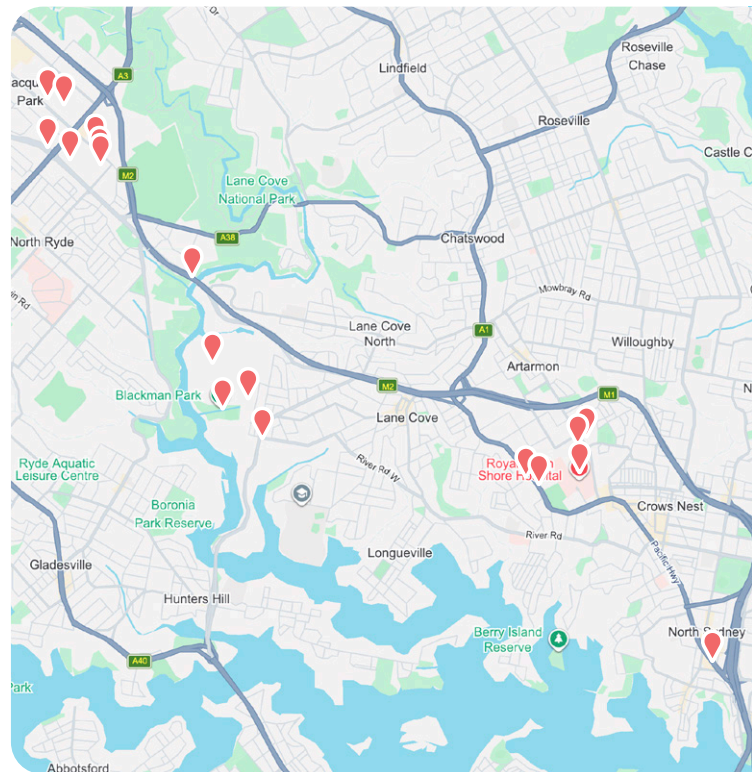
Your top three concerns were water supply, especially during **drought**, transparency about **energy and water use**, and the **effect on the renewables transition and climate**.

The most common single request in the comments was **self-sufficiency** – that **data centres should generate the renewable energy they use** and recycle or **close-loop their cooling water**, rather than drawing on the shared grid and potable supply.

Two other findings came through strongly.

On **infrastructure** siting, there was real frustration that these facilities are being placed in residential areas and competing for land we need for housing:

"We have a SEVERE HOUSING CRISIS, yet are offering up prime RESIDENTIAL areas like Lane Cove and Macquarie Park to data centres."



And on **employment**, the most confident view in the survey — often from people inside the industry — was that the jobs case is overstated. Construction employment is real and temporary; after that, these facilities are designed to run with almost nobody on site.

Not everyone agreed, and the disagreement was useful. Some see a genuine economic opportunity and want Australia to take it:

"This is a golden opportunity. If done right, everyone will benefit."

Others were sceptical of the boom itself, and industry insiders told us some of the local fears are overstated — that the backup generators people worry about may not run as frequently as they fear.



What I said in Canberra

The numbers are astounding. **A single large facility can use up to 40 million litres of water a day.** Australia's largest proposed data centre, in Western Sydney, would use as much energy as two million homes.

The only way this build-out supports rather than detracts from communities is if data centre proponents can guarantee water quantities and quality and **build more renewables than they use.**

The Government has published voluntary expectations of developers:

- + demonstrate **national interest**
- + support the **energy** transition
- + use **water** responsibly
- + create local **jobs**
- + engage meaningfully with **communities**

They are the right five things to ask for. These expectations are currently unenforceable.

The Government has recently committed to legislating binding standards, but the details are still unclear - and the legislation is only expected next year (2027). It is also unclear whether the Commonwealth will use its powers to override state decisions. **It'll be our job to keep them to stringent standards.**

Town hall event

Dr Bronwyn Cumbo put the local experience in to a national pattern. Her research shows that **communities currently have limited opportunities to meaningfully influence the development of new data centres or shape how the industry is evolving nationally.**

And, that this is problematic because these infrastructures require vast amounts of the same resources people need – land, energy and water.

Bronwyn describes the sequence of data centre development in NSW currently: the site is chosen and purchased by a developer, they seek to secure energy and water, apply through an established planning approval pathway, and only then does community consultation take place.

Her research has shown that this is contributing to **community distrust** and a sense of not being able to influence decisions that directly affect their neighborhood and experience living there.

There is an opportunity to shift planning processes and policy so that community knowledge and values can be incorporated into location decisions and data centre design from the outset – creating more of a collaborative rather than reactive relationship between industry and community.

Where to next

Develop a National Data Centre and AI Infrastructure Strategy

We need to build on the National AI Plan with nationally consistent planning and environmental standards for large-scale AI infrastructure, developed in partnership with the states and territories, as well as rigorous community participation requirements.

The Government's plan to legislate binding standards next year (2027) is promising, but the devil will be in the details: I will be holding them to account to ensure the rules work for communities, the economy and the environment.



2. The Decisions

Automation in government

I receive frequent correspondence on this issue — especially in relation to NDIS and Home Care package decisions that are increasingly made without human oversight, leading to perverse outcomes for participants.

What you told us

As government automates more of what it does — payments, eligibility, assessments — **the person on the receiving-end loses the ability to see how a decision about them was made, or to challenge the outcome.** Robodebt is the reference point for what happens when these processes go wrong, and people rightly do not accept that the underlying issues have been resolved.

Alongside it sat a broader set of concerns about AI itself, including surveillance, privacy, the reach of the US Cloud Act over data held in Australia, and the adequacy of safety guardrails.

“It’s not just data centres! AI brings the threat of enormous changes to society — to relationships, education, work, incomes, crime, inequality.”

What I said in Canberra

My submission put the existential and practical concerns side by side: **digital sovereignty, agentic AI, effective guardrails and industry regulation, alongside grid capacity, power prices and water.** The clear view from our community is that no level of government is currently regulating this at the scale and pace it demands.

Town hall event

Professor Ed Santow explained that **Robodebt was a governance failure, not a coding error.** The scheme ran for years, the reasoning was invisible to the people it affected, and when it collapsed, accountability was hard to locate. His warning is that **the door is still open for governments to make these mistakes again,** and his recent work argues the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the

NDIS for Future Generations) Act 2026 creates room for the same kind of automated decision-making with the same gaps in oversight.

Australia has no legislated or mandatory framework governing how government uses automated decision making. Existing protections are fragmented, limited and often voluntary — and the Robodebt Royal Commission recommended a legislative framework three years ago.

You should be told when an automated system is involved. You should be able to see the reasoning, reach a human, and have a real path to review.

Michelle Lim took it further. Some decisions should not be automated at all. Working out where that line sits, and who gets to draw it, is an ethical choice that should be made long before any system is built, and it should be transparent.

Where to next

Legislate a mandatory framework for automated decision-making in government

A new framework should include transparency requirements, so people can understand decisions that affect them; decision-level controls, so government gets the decisions right; and review and oversight provisions, so people can be confident the rules are being followed.

In practice, that means being told when an automated system was used, receiving a meaningful explanation of the outcome, and having a human who is accountable for it and able to override it.

The Member for Curtin, Kate Chaney, has developed a detailed proposal for exactly this framework, informed by her own community’s consultation. I support it, and I will work with her to see it legislated.

3. The Terms

Who shares in the benefits

What you told us

60% of you were worried we would repeat the gas exports experience — big promises at the start, profits offshore, and very little long-term benefit here. Another 36.3% were comfortable with foreign ownership provided the tax and energy supply settings are right. Only 3.1% saw it as a straightforward win. **"We need to get this right at the start."**



☹️ 60%

Worried

I'm worried we'll repeat the gas experience — our resources used, profits sent offshore, and little return to Australian taxpayers

😊 36.3%

Comfortable

Foreign investment is fine, provided these companies pay their fair share of tax and cover their own infrastructure costs

😊 3.1%

Straightforward win

Foreign investment is good for NSW — it brings jobs and money we wouldn't otherwise have

Confidence in the current arrangements is low. **84.9%** say these decisions have been explained poorly or not at all. **82.8%** are not confident government can regulate this growth in Australia's interests.

Two versions of the same concern ran through your comments. One is economic: that the upside leaves the country. The other is about capability: several of you pointed to June, when

Australians briefly lost access to advanced AI models because of export controls set by a foreign government, as the clearest possible case for building our own sovereign capability.

And underneath both, the question of future work. You raised job displacement across administration, customer service, legal support, software, accounting and the creative industries — the first wave of automation to arrive squarely in knowledge work.

"I support data centre investment, but only as part of a broader Sovereign AI strategy."

"I graduated during COVID and have not yet been able to find a job because all entry positions are being taken by AI."

Of the 150 federal electorates, Bradfield's workforce is the most exposed to AI. On this measure, we are ranked first in the country.

On 29 July, new work from the University of Sydney put a number on what many of you have been telling us. Professor Clinton Free and Lachlan Harris built an AI exposure index for every federal electorate, drawing on Census data and Jobs and Skills Australia figures.



Scan QR code to read the report

The 30 federal electorates most exposed to AI-driven task change

RANK	ELECTORATE	STATE	CLASSIFICATION	MEMBER	PARTY
1	Bradfield	NSW	Inner Metro	Nicolette Boele	IND (TEAL)
2	Wentworth	NSW	Inner Metro	Allegra Spender	CSA (TEAL)
3	Warringah	NSW	Inner Metro	Zali Steggall	CSA (TEAL)
4	Bennelong	NSW	Inner Metro	Jerome Laxale	ALP
5	Sydney	NSW	Inner Metro	Tanya Plibersek	ALP
6	Kooyong	VIC	Inner Metro	Monique Ryan	IND (TEAL)
7	Mitchell	NSW	Outer Metro	Alex Hawke	LIB
8	Canberra	ACT	Inner Metro	Alicia Payne	ALP
9	Macnamara	VIC	Inner Metro	Josh Burns	ALP
10	Goldstein	VIC	Inner Metro	Tim Wilson	LIB
11	Melbourne	VIC	Inner Metro	Sarah Witty	ALP
12	Grayndler	NSW	Inner Metro	Anthony Albanese	ALP
13	Berowra	NSW	Outer Metro	Julian Leeser	LIB
14	Chisholm	VIC	Inner Metro	Carina Garland	ALP
15	Parramatta	NSW	Inner Metro	Andrew Charlton	ALP
16	Reid	NSW	Inner Metro	Sally Sitou	ALP
17	Brisbane	QLD	Inner Metro	Madonna Jarrett	ALP
18	Ryan	QLD	Outer Metro	Elizabeth Watson-Brown	GRN
19	Menzies	VIC	Outer Metro	Gabriel Ng	ALP
20	Griffith	QLD	Inner Metro	Renee Coffey	ALP

The reason is simply who lives here. Analysts, administrators, finance professionals, marketers, programmers, writers, consultants and public servants — a highly educated workforce, in the kind of professional occupations this technology reaches first. The researchers describe a **“wired belt” emerging in well-off metropolitan seats**, and draw the comparison with what the decline of manufacturing and coal did to regional communities.

The evidence so far is in its early stages. Commonwealth departments have not yet found major employment effects, though they have picked up signs of weaker job growth in the most affected areas. The Prime Minister has said Australia should not settle for a short-term construction and capital boom, and the government has agreed to establish a Fair AI Taskforce to give workers and experts a say.



Bradfield is being asked to host the infrastructure and absorb the labour market consequences at the same time. That is precisely why the terms of AI development matter here more than almost anywhere else.

What I said in Canberra

For every \$100 invested here by a company like Amazon or Google, an estimated \$70–80 flows straight back offshore to buy equipment we don’t manufacture, such as semiconductors and servers. Building a data centre costs a great deal up front, and those costs can be claimed against tax for years afterwards. **A lot of the value in these businesses also sits with parent companies overseas. So people ask me a fair question: if these companies are building here on this scale, are they paying their fair share of tax?**

Australia does benefit from this investment, through infrastructure, cloud services and economic activity. **The policy question is whether those benefits outweigh the environmental, energy, water and strategic costs our communities carry.**

I also put the urgency argument on notice. We are told we have no time to lose or the investment will go elsewhere. **That is the gas lobby’s playbook being copied by data centre developers.** There is a reason these companies want to build here, and if the opportunity is as large as we are told, **then we have time to get this right for all of us.**



Town hall event

I closed the evening by asking each panellist to imagine 2030. Either we have learned nothing — a new iteration of Robodebt, data centres approved with no real community input — or we have done better. What is one thing the people in this room can demand right now to make the better version happen?

WHAT THE EXPERTS CALLED FOR

Bronwyn started with our ability to think big. In her own words: "Imagine alternative futures to the ones we are being told we must accept... To create equitable futures local communities need to be involved in policy and planning."

Michelle said accountability — and pointed out we already hold the tool for it. "Who is answerable for which decisions? What happens when a decision goes wrong? Whose voices are in the room when these systems are being shaped?" As she put it, we all have the power to demand that when we walk up to the ballot box.

Ed offered a practical action we can all take on board: in his work with elected representatives, the thing that surprises him most is how often MPs say AI simply isn't raised by voters. So if you care about it, tell them. Not only your federal member, but your state MPs too, because they are the ones deciding where data centres go and which environmental protections apply. They need to hear it from you directly.

WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US

No, we don't have to accept what we are told; we have the power to choose and create the future we want and deserve.

We can and should demand an accountability framework fit for the task of protecting and benefiting ALL community members, not just the powerful few.

Democracy isn't a spectator sport. Our democracy belongs to you. Engage with your elected members and let them know that this matters to you.





Where to next

**Develop a
Sovereign AI
Capability
Framework**



Formalise the existing expectations of developers in legislation, and set clear national objectives for compute access, sovereign capability, workforce development, infrastructure resilience and Australian economic participation.

**Resource
the AI Safety
Institute
properly**



Give it the funding and the powers it needs to assess and respond to a fast-moving environment, rather than reacting after the harm has landed. An oversight body needs the authority to compel information and act on what it finds.

**Secure a
fair share of
the upside**



Examine the taxation and economic mechanisms that would return long-term value to Australians, so the benefits of data centres outweigh the environmental, energy, water and strategic costs our communities carry.



The questions we should be asking

Who is this for?

Who do AI and data centre companies service? Who benefits, how, and when? What will these systems actually do to make Australia fairer, safer and more prosperous — and what are the downside risks?

Who is in charge?

Who is responsible for regulating them? Which government — federal, state or local — answers when something goes wrong?

What happens at the end?

Who is responsible for decommissioning them? What happens if the operator goes broke? Who picks up the bill?

And what do we actually get?

What does data sovereignty mean in practice, and what can Australia realistically expect to gain from it?

I have put versions of these to the government, to the Senate inquiry, and to the companies themselves. I have not had satisfying answers to any of them. Until we do, “trust us” is not a plan.

In closing

Given I asked the town hall panel to imagine 2030, and to tell us one thing people could demand right now to make the better version of it happen, it seems only fair that I answer my own question.

By 2030, I want a family whose Home Care Package is assessed to be told plainly how that decision was made, and to **be able to talk to a person about it**. I want a graduate in Wahroonga applying for **a job that exists because of this new technology rather than one that disappeared from it**. I want the standards for these data centre facilities written down and enforceable, so

a community learning about a proposal near their street already knows which protections apply – now and on decommissioning. And I want us to be able to **point to something Australians own, earn, and keep from all of this**.

It requires the terms to be set deliberately, and early, by people who will live with the results.

Seven in 10 of you use AI every day or are employed in the field. You see the opportunity in it, and are clear-eyed about what it will take to get right. It makes this community very useful to the national conversation.

Bradfield is at the forefront. **The exposure research says our workforce will feel this before most, and we already have a close view of the infrastructure being built to power it.** Seeing it first is an advantage if we use it — there is still time to shape the standards, the planning rules and the returns, rather than inherit them.

Thank you to everyone who completed my community survey, shared their views with my office, came along to the town hall, and is shaping this conversation on the national agenda.

I’ll continue to take your views to Canberra, and I’ll keep bringing what I learn back to Bradfield. **A year ago this was a conversation about the future. Now it’s a conversation we get to be part of, and I’m so proud to be part of the community that is asking the hard, important questions.**



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**FEDERAL MEMBER
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