



## Inquiry: AI and data centres

I am Jessie Price; I am the Community Independent candidate for Bean, ACT.

This submission recognises the significant potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and associated data centre infrastructure to support productivity, economic growth, and innovation across Australia. AI technologies offer transformative benefits in areas including healthcare, environmental management, public administration, and national competitiveness. However, these opportunities are accompanied by risks of equal and greater magnitude, including national and personal security risks, systemic economic disruption, environmental strain that threatens our climate and energy targets, concentration of market power, and further entrenchment of Australia's dependence on a small number of global technology firms. Meanwhile the proportion of AI that is used for surveillance is of deep concern to many Australians, including myself. This week the Five Eyes cybersecurity agencies have issued a warning regarding real and imminent acceleration of cyber threats to security. The Government must explicitly recognise the dual-use nature of AI and autonomous weapons. Robust regulatory frameworks and safeguards must be implemented to protect human safety and rights.

At present, the pace of technological development is occurring mainly in the private sector with little to no oversight by governments or any other effective regulatory bodies. Any frameworks for environmental or ethical protections are not fit for purpose. The Commonwealth's current 'expectations' on data centres are voluntary and self-reported; we have no way to measure how effective these are. Australia's current policy framework is fragmented with insufficient coordination across jurisdictions and portfolios as evidenced by the [Australian AI Legislation Stress Test](#).

Beyond environmental concerns, we understand far less about the social and cognitive harms of sustained AI use than we do about social media use. What is not speculative is the business model: AI products increasingly optimise for engagement, dependence, or manipulation rather than user wellbeing, repeating the social media pattern of harm. We need to study and govern these harms before the technology is irreversible.

AI governance should be developed through open consultation, not left to industry self-regulation. A national framework is needed to address the consequences for jobs, decision-making, and human agency, while ensuring that the benefits of AI accrue to the Australian



community rather than being captured offshore. Australia should also be a strong advocate for global coordination on AI regulation, however that may be most appropriate, for example a body like the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Meanwhile, data centres use 2% of grid electricity today, projected to reach 6% by 2030 by the Climate Council. Without national standards, this growth could threaten energy security, our emissions targets, and stress local water supplies. Without national standards on energy efficiency, renewable sourcing, and water limits, plus strong community safeguards, in place **before** approvals are made, Australia risks locking in infrastructure that undermines climate goals, worsens regional inequities, and compromises our short- and long-term resource security.

Community consultation relating to data centre development and AI deployment are inconsistent and often inadequate. This undermines public trust - widespread social licence for what has been termed the next industrial revolution is contested.

I ask that the Committee consider the following minimum requirements as part of a precautionary and nationally consistent approach:

1. The Government must explicitly recognise the dual-use nature of AI and commission a rapid full assessment of the implications of AI for Australian sovereignty and security, including the growing role of global technology companies in critical digital infrastructure and decision-making.
2. Undertake public consultation on a national framework to govern AI's role in daily life, through robust regulatory frameworks with specific attention to jobs, workplace transition, privacy, and the impact of AI on human thinking and autonomy, and safeguards to protect human safety and rights.
3. Australia should become a staunch advocate for effective global regulation. Data centres are where frontier AI training compute is concentrated. Australia should require reporting of large-scale training runs on Australian compute above a defined threshold, and advocate for this as an international interoperable standard. This is a practical step toward an IAEA-style safeguards regime, with verification on trackable inputs rather than self-reported claims.



4. Pause approval of new data centres until comprehensive community consultation has occurred and a national planning framework is in place for the standards required for renewables and transparency.
5. Require all new data centres to fund additional, new renewable energy supplies that matches their demand, so their growth does not put further pressure on the energy transition or electricity prices.
6. Require best-practice cooling systems that minimise water use, avoid potable water where possible, and reduce noise and local amenity impacts, with the option to prohibit data centres in residential areas.
7. Ensure that profits generated in Australia are taxed onshore and that the economic value created here is not shifted offshore without fair return to the Australian community.
8. Require transparent reporting on ownership, energy use, water use, emissions, community impacts, and local employment outcomes as a condition of approval.

Yours sincerely,

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