

**COMMUNITY SUBMISSION
GUIDE**

Senate Inquiry into AI and Data Centres

Senate Environment and Communications References Committee — how to raise the Moss Vale proposal as a case study

SUBMISSIONS CLOSE: MONDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2026

This federal inquiry is examining whether Australia's regulatory framework can keep pace with data centre growth — and whether the Australian Government's non-binding "Expectations" for developers mean anything in practice. The Moss Vale proposal is a live example the committee can draw on.

This inquiry covers AI and data centres broadly. Our focus below is the gas-fired power station built specifically to run this data centre — its power source drives most of the project's environmental and community impact, and no part of the data campus could operate without it.

MAKING YOUR SUBMISSION COUNT

1. **Tell them who you are.** A sentence or two on your connection to the Southern Highlands and why this matters to you.
2. **Pick 2–3 points** from those below — submissions don't need to cover everything.
3. **Reference the Southern Highlands Data Campus at 30 Douglas Road, Moss Vale as a case study**, not just as a local objection — the committee is looking for evidence the current framework doesn't work, and this project shows exactly that.
4. **Lodge before 1 September 2026** via the committee's online submission form.

POINTS YOU CAN RAISE

The inquiry's terms of reference (the topics it has been asked to examine) ask about (a) the effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks — including deals between the Australian Government and global AI companies — and (b) the impacts of AI and data centres on communities, industry, environment, water and energy. Points that speak to those terms:

- Federal Expectations Carry No Legal Force
- The Project Has Been Assessed in Pieces
- Agency Consultation Was Bypassed
- Public Health in an Inversion-Prone Valley
- Water Security in a Protected Catchment
- An Inconsistency in Energy Policy
- Government-to-AI-Company Deals Lack Follow-Through
- Ask the Committee to Reference the Site Directly

1 Federal Expectations Carry No Legal Force

IN SHORT

The Australian Government's March 2026 Expectations of Data Centres and AI Infrastructure Developers are voluntary. Nothing in Commonwealth or NSW law requires a proponent to show alignment with them before approval — and the Moss Vale proposal appears to fall short of each one.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

The gap. The federal Expectations set out principles on matters such as community benefit, grid alignment and environmental performance, but carry no statutory force. A proponent can proceed to approval without demonstrating alignment with any of them.

The disconnect. The Moss Vale precinct — a gas plant built solely to power a private data centre, with no public grid connection — appears inconsistent with the spirit of each Expectation, yet nothing in the current approval pathway tests this.

2 The Project Has Been Assessed in Pieces

IN SHORT

The Moss Vale precinct has proceeded as three separate gas-plant applications — 14 MW approved, 16.5 MW before the Land and Environment Court, and a 673 MW State Significant Development — alongside a growing number of data centre buildings, rather than as one combined project. This may mean cumulative impacts are never assessed together.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

The three gas stages. Stage 1 (14 MW) was approved in April 2024. Stage 2 (16.5 MW) is currently before the Land and Environment Court. Stage 3 (673.2 MW) has had Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements issued but no Environmental Impact Statement lodged yet. Combined, the precinct totals 703.2 MW across 21 generation halls.

The data centre buildings. Alongside the gas stages, the precinct includes Data Building 1 (built), Data Building 2 (approved but not yet built), and the proponent's own website alludes to further data centre buildings beyond these two, without specifying how many.

The assessment gap. Each stage and building has so far been assessed on its own footprint, not against the full combined build-out. Wingecarribee Shire Council's own assessment report has previously noted this cumulative-impact gap.

3 Agency Consultation Was Bypassed

IN SHORT

The NSW Planning Portal's project page for the largest stage does not list the EPA, NSW Health, Endeavour Energy or Wingecarribee Council as having been consulted before the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements were issued — confirmed directly with the Department by email.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

What the portal shows. The Planning Portal publishes the list of agencies consulted during the SEARs process for State Significant Development. For the 673 MW stage, no agencies are listed as having been consulted before the SEARs were issued.

Confirmed directly. The Department confirmed by email that consultation with these agencies did not occur before the SEARs were issued for this stage.

4 Public Health in an Inversion-Prone Valley

IN SHORT

Continuous emissions from a 24/7 gas plant, roughly 500 metres from homes, in a valley known for temperature inversions, don't appear to have been assessed cumulatively with existing industrial sources nearby.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

Proximity. Residential properties in Moss Vale and Burradoo sit approximately 500 metres from the proposed generation halls, which would run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Cumulative air quality. The site sits in a valley subject to temperature inversions, within a few kilometres of existing industrial emissions sources. A combined assessment of this cumulative air quality load does not appear to have been carried out.

A nearby sensitive receptor. The site is also less than 1 km from the Garvan Institute's Australian BioResources facility, a nationally funded medical research centre whose animal research programs depend on stable air and acoustic conditions.

5 Water Security in a Protected Catchment

IN SHORT

The site sits within the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment. The operator's own marketing describes groundwater cooling for "zero utility water" use — the cumulative effect of that extraction on the aquifer and the Wingecarribee River doesn't appear to have been independently modelled.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

Catchment status. The property lies entirely within the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment, which requires a Neutral or Beneficial Effect on water quality for any development under state planning policy.

The cooling claim. The operator's own public materials describe using groundwater cooling to achieve "zero utility water" use for the data campus. Independent modelling of what that extraction means for the local aquifer and the Wingecarribee River, particularly during drought, does not appear to have been published.

6 An Inconsistency in Energy Policy

IN SHORT

Households face restrictions on new gas connections, while a large-scale gas power station can apparently be approved to run a private data centre — worth asking the committee to reconcile.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

The inconsistency. State and federal policy increasingly restrict new household gas connections as part of the transition away from fossil fuels. At the same time, a 703 MW gas generation precinct — among the largest gas proposals in Australia — is proceeding through approval to power a private data centre with no public grid connection.

7 Government-to-AI-Company Deals Lack Follow-Through

IN SHORT

Commitments made in deals between government and AI companies don't appear to convert into binding conditions when that company's physical infrastructure is assessed at state level — and the physical location of government data processed by hyperscale platforms isn't always publicly disclosed.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

The enforceability gap. Where the Commonwealth negotiates investment, capacity, data or sustainability commitments with hyperscale AI operators, there is no clear mechanism that converts those undertakings into binding conditions at the point of state planning approval.

A further dimension. Government agencies routinely procure cloud computing services through hyperscale platforms whose physical infrastructure locations are not always publicly disclosed, making it difficult for the public or parliament to determine whether sensitive government data may be processed at facilities such as the one proposed at Moss Vale.

8 Ask the Committee to Reference the Site Directly

IN SHORT

You can ask that the Southern Highlands Data Campus at 30 Douglas Road, Moss Vale be cited in the committee's final report as a working case study of these regulatory gaps.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

Why this helps. Inquiries carry more weight when they can point to a live, documented example rather than a hypothetical one. Asking the committee to reference the Southern Highlands Data Campus by name in its findings helps ensure the case remains part of the public record shaping any future national framework.

HOW TO LODGE

Closing date for submissions: Monday 1 September 2026

You can lodge your submission with the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee online:

What to include

- Go to the inquiry's page on the Parliament of Australia website: [aph.gov.au – Environment and Communications References Committee, "Artificial intelligence and data centres."](https://aph.gov.au/Environment-and-Communications-References-Committee/Artificial-intelligence-and-data-centres)
- Use the "Make a submission" link on that page and follow the prompts.
- Your submission can be a short letter or a few paragraphs – a formal document isn't required.

A note on privacy: submissions are generally published on the committee's website unless you request confidentiality. If you'd prefer your submission not be made public, say so clearly at the top of your submission.

Include in your submission:

- Your full name
- Your suburb or town
- Your email address

Want the fully detailed version? Our own submission — lodged 26 June 2026 — is on the Submissions page at stopthegasplant.com/submissions for reference or to draw from directly.

Questions? Message us on Facebook (facebook.com/StopTheGasPlantSH) or email admin@stopthegasplant.com — we're glad to help.