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Subject: NTEPA Consultation - Project Ares
Date: Thursday, 20 August 2026 1:36:07 PM

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Are you making this submission on behalf of an organisation: No

If yes, please enter the name of the organisation:

Submission contents

Submission details:

1. Executive Summary This submission strongly opposes proposals to construct large-scale AI and hyperscale data centres in the Northern Territory powered by onshore fracked gas —such as from the Beetaloo Sub-basin—and reliant on local groundwater extraction. The convergence of emissions-heavy fossil fuel extraction with water-intensive digital infrastructure presents unacceptable risks to the Territory's climate targets, fragile groundwater ecosystems, and local communities.

2. Key Objections Threat to Groundwater and Water Security • Massive Depletion Risk: Data centres require billions of litres of water annually for evaporative cooling systems, placing an unsustainable demand on vulnerable aquifers like the Wiso and Cambrian Limestone Aquifers. Over 90% of the Northern Territory relies on groundwater for drinking, agriculture, and local ecosystems. • Contamination Risks: Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) poses severe risks of chemical contamination to regional groundwater via well integrity failure and surface spills. Once an underground aquifer is contaminated, remediation is nearly impossible. • Ecosystem Impacts: Over-extraction risks reducing base flows to vital river systems (such as the Roper and Daly Rivers) and damaging Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs). Unacceptable Climate and Emissions Burden • Carbon Expansion: Sourcing multi-gigawatt power for hyperscale data centres using fracked gas locks in fossil fuel infrastructure for decades. • Undermining Net-Zero Goals: Gas extraction and processing release significant volumes of methane and greenhouse gases. Using gas to power data computing contradicts broader national efforts to transition toward clean energy. Social, Cultural, and Long-Term Economic Impacts • First Nations Rights: Water holds deep cultural and spiritual significance for Traditional Owners. Depleting or contaminating aquifers threatens sacred sites, cultural heritage, and country. • Economic Misalignment: Diverting scarce water resources to data centre cooling threatens established local industries, including pastoralism, tourism, and horticulture.

3. Key Recommendations • Mandate 100% Renewable Energy: Implement strict regulatory frameworks prohibiting any new data centre operations that rely on fossil fuels, requiring developers to match 100% of their operational energy with new, firm renewable capacity (solar, wind, and storage). • Enforce Closed-Loop Cooling: Prohibit raw groundwater extraction for evaporative cooling, mandating dry-cooling or closed-loop water recycled systems for industrial data infrastructure. • Apply the Precautionary Principle: Pause approval for all

fracked-gas and hyperscale data proposals until comprehensive, site-specific, independent scientific assessments on groundwater impacts are fully completed.

Submission files

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