

To Whom It May Concern

I am providing this submission to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to express my strongly held concerns regarding the Project Ares proposal being considered by the Authority.

My concerns are as follows:

1. Impact on the natural environment

The location of the proposed data centre is remote and home to a number of threatened species. The size of the project would require substantial clearing of bushland and consequent disruption to the fauna and flora that call this area home.

2. Impact on Water Resources

The proposal to extract 4 GL of water each year from the underground aquifer is problematic. In an area subject to drought there is no indication that such a large allocation will not impact the supply of water to surrounding areas and residents of nearby communities who also rely on this aquifer for water. Climate change is making it increasingly difficult to forecast water supply so a stable supply of water cannot be guaranteed.

3. Energy Supply

The proposal appears to envisage use of both solar and battery as well as gas. The use of gas supplied through fracking is in itself a concern around potential pollution of water in aquifers. The building of a gas fired power station will also contribute to levels of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere at a time when all efforts need to be made to transition from fossil fuel generation to renewables.

In the United States, the Amazon owned Pecos Texas data centre is proposing a natural gas fired power plant that 'according to regulatory records reviewed by the New York Times will allow release of 33m tons of CO₂ a year'. This would make it the United States' largest single source of climate pollution. (The Guardian 13.8.26)

4. Lack of consultation with communities

Consultation has been limited which means that community views, concerns and knowledge have not yet been identified in relation to potential impacts of the Project. Given the uncertainty of many of the impacts of this project a comprehensive EIS should be carried out to ensure that those communities impacted understand the project impacts and have the opportunity to provide input and have their views considered by the EPA.

The concerns I have raised need to be the subject of a comprehensive assessment. The proposal details no mitigating factors around water and energy impacts nor around negative wider environmental impacts.

Additionally, the impact of the proposal on surrounding communities and the lack of clarity around what benefits would be provided by this project to the wider Northern Territory community, makes it difficult to see how this proposal can do anything but degrade the local environment and increase the cost of power and water.

I understand this project is the forerunner of future Data Centre proposals across the Northern Territory. Consideration of this proposal should therefore form the basis of assessment of any future applications. Given the deleterious impacts of Hyperscale Data Centres like Ares, being uncovered in the United States, Ireland and other countries it is vital that this project is comprehensively assessed in a transparent, evidence informed manner. The EPA needs to consider the impacts already being experienced where Data Centres are currently operating.

World-wide there is a race on to establish data centres to aid the introduction of AI to all aspects of our lives. The pressure to approve this new technology needs to be resisted and time given to ensuring that data centres, especially those of the magnitude of Ares, are not damaging our environment and producing long term deleterious impacts.

Yours Sincerely
Catherine Phillips

Mobile: [REDACTED]