



PROJECT ARES HYPERSCALE DATACENTRE

Have Your Say **Closes August 20**

THE ISSUE

The Northern Territory Environmental Protection Authority (NTEPA) is seeking public feedback on the Project Ares Hyperscale Data Centre proposal on Murrniji Station to decide whether:

- 1) the proposal requires environmental impact assessment; and
- 2) if so the method of assessment.¹

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Ares' size is staggering. It includes [1]:

- Total information technology capacity of 1 gigawatt (more than three times the maximum demand of the Darwin-Katherine power system[2])
- Up to 4 billion litres /year of groundwater (enough for a town of 10,000 people)
- 7,000 hectare solar farm
- Gas fired power generation (using fracked gas from the Beetaloo Basin)
- Infrastructure including roads, airstrip, workers accommodation and waste management facilities
- Clearing up to 19,150 hectares (191.5 square kilometres) of native vegetation
- Construction workforce of 4,300 personnel and permanent workforce up to 500 full time equivalent workers.

Energy North also plans an Ammonia plant (Project Sol) on Murrniji Station. This plan is not included in the application.

CONCERNS WITH PROJECT ARES

General

- Because there are no NT or National laws or standards for hyperscale datacentres the risks are uncertain and best practice is unknown.
- Fossil fuels (Beetaloo Gas) should never be allowed to power data centres.
- The full plans for Murrniji Station are not considered. An ammonia plant (Project Sol) is also proposed = more greenhouse gases, groundwater, clearing & pollution.
- No regional plan for cumulative impacts of data centres, fracking operations, clearing and water use across the Barkly/NT.
- Georgina Wiso Water Allocation Plan lacks binding cultural and environmental water protections [5].
- Energy North has no track record for delivering datacentres, even small ones.
- We do not know who the end user is and how they minimise their data needs.

Environmental Factors

Land

- Ecosystems are threatened from land clearing and activities at the site.
- Clearing of native vegetation destroys habitat, damages soils and causes erosion from wind and water runoff.
- Impacts on animals
 - Threatened species at risk include mammals (e.g. the greater bilby - widespread in the area), reptiles (e.g. northern blue-tongued skink, yellow spotted monitor and plains death adder) and five bird species [13] are not properly described. The applicant relies mostly on desktop information rather than proper field surveys. Other threatened species may be at risk.
 - Insects with vital ecosystem sustaining roles are not considered.
- Solar precincts of this size cause massive harm to birds, bats and insects. This proposal could cause tens of thousands of bird deaths annually [14].

WHAT IS A HYPERSCALE DATA CENTRE

Large, centralised facilities designed to meet the needs of large cloud computing, IT and increasingly AI providers.

Either owned and operated directly by technology companies, or developed and managed by a data centre operator [8].

Data centres generate enormous amounts of heat, creating immense demand for energy and water for cooling.



[20]

THE APPLICANTS

Energy North (applicant)

A 'ten dollar company' (shell company) formed in 2023. Sole director and ultimate shareholder is Scott Criddle [11].

Viv Oldfield (Murrniji Station Leaseholder)

Recently acquired the pastoral lease. Viv Oldfield owns Silver City Drilling a beneficiary of fracking and irrigation drilling [12].

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Robyn Cahill, NT Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations boasted that the NT Government has signed **non-disclosure agreements** and plans with **12** companies [9].

The Minister is promoting this as an opportunity to extract Beetaloo gas and underground water [10].



Robyn Cahill claimed the NT had so much groundwater 'we need to use some of it otherwise we might find ourselves flipping the poles again'. Photograph: Lloyd Jones/AAP



1. <https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/consultation/project-ares>
2. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-13/data-centre-hyperscalers-target-northern-territory/106898282>
3. <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/expectations-data-centres-and-ai-infrastructure-developers>
4. https://australiasnorthernterritory.com.au/_resources/documents/invest/investment-opportunities/digital/hyper-scale-data-ai-centres-flyer.pdf
5. https://assets.pc.gov.au/2025-10/Water%20reform%20overview.pdf?VersionId=4HZvgnWAJvJDrFvylTepv1suFCHO6D&gl=1*v06kq*_gcl_au*NzQ1MzE1MTY4LjE3ODUxMjg3Njg.*_ga*MTMwODM2NDEyNy4xNzg1MTI4NzY4*_ga_XNW84J8HF8*_czE3ODUxMjg3NjckbzEkZzAkdE3ODUxMjg3NjckajYwJGwwJGww (p18)
6. <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/static/planet4-australiapacific-stateless/2026/05/1032fdf5-data-centres-report-greenpeace.pdf> (p6)
7. https://www.ecnt.org.au/dirty_dozen_data_centres_planned_for_the_nt
8. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/what-does-the-data-centre-boom-mean-for-australias-switch-to-renewables/>
9. https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/environment/2026/07/18/how-trump-linked-company-exploiting-data-centre-beetaloo?utm_campaign=SharedArticle&utm_source=the-guardian-au
10. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/jul/23/australia-politician-claims-northern-territory-water-could-flip-earths-magnetic-poles>
11. <https://theenergy.co/articles/ex-decmil-ceo-behind-massive-nt-data-centre-project>
12. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2025-09-15/viv-oldfield-buys-murrangji-station-expands-outback-cattle-empire/105763618>
13. https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/1622103/referral-report.pdf
14. P.A. Fleming (2025) All that glitters – Review of solar facility impacts on fauna, Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2025.115995>
15. <https://ketos.co/closed-loop-cooling-water-saver-or-chemical-time-bomb>
16. https://www.fwpcoa.org/content.aspx?page_id=5&club_id=859275&item_id=130961
17. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/data-centers-face-a-new-environmental-concern/>
18. Harrison, L., McGuire, L., Ward, S., Fisher, A., Pavey, C., Fegan, M. and Lynch, B. (2009) An inventory of sites of international and national significance for biodiversity values in the Northern Territory. Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts & Sport, Darwin, NT <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/622060>
19. <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/532083>
20. Stargate Project Data Center and xAI Data Center by Stephen Voss (@stephenvoss) https://www.instagram.com/p/DKPeLzKtN8C/?img_index=2&igsh=ZTBzbiJieHozNzK5



PROJECT ARES HYPERSCALE DATACENTRE

Have Your Say **Closes August 20**

ACTION REQUEST

Let the NTEPA know:

1. Hyperscale datacentres power using fossil fuels, including gas from the Beetaloo, should never be allowed.
2. You support a moratorium on hyperscale data centres until a plan and enforceable regulatory standards for these centres is in place.
3. Notwithstanding 1 and 2 this proposal needs the highest level of environmental impact assessment.

LETTER WRITING TIPS

To whom it may concern

SUBMISSION PROJECT ARES

Introduce yourself

Example - I live in the Northern Territory.

Identify the issue you are concerned about

Example - My priorities are healthy environments and communities
Rushing into enormous datacentres is putting these at risk.

Include some facts to support your concerns

Example - This location is a stronghold for the Greater Bilby and
in the catchment of Lake Woods, a wetland of international importance
for birds.

Explain in your own words why this issue is a concern

General concerns

I am opposed to the use of fossil fuels being used to power data centres.
There should be a public ban on hyperscale data centres while regulatory
standards for data centres are not in place.

Specific Environmental Themes

List any specific concerns, for example the impacts of land clearing, water extraction and risks to the Greater Bilby
(see case card concerns for more ideas).

Tip: The NTEPA weighs up environmental impacts using the following themes: land, air, sea, water and people.
Writing about your concerns using these headings can be a good way to get traction with your submission.

For more information see p7 <https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/your-business?external-uuid=046ebe2b-c1ca-465a-837a-63c1cc2a3471>

Tell the government what you want them to do

Pause this application until binding rules around hyperscale datacentres are in place and the proposal to use
fracked gas is withdrawn. Then assign this application the strongest level of environmental impact assessment.

Have Your Say

Opportunity for comment ends
20 August 2026

Remember - you are writing as a
community member, you do not
have to be an environmental or
energy expert, your comments do
not have to be long or technical,
feel free to speak from your heart!

<https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/consultation/project-ares>



Signed...