

Urgent Concern — Unsustainable Water Use by Proposed Data Centres

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing as a concerned resident and advocate for responsible resource use. Recent documents show Greater Western Water is evaluating 19 proposed data centres in Melbourne's west and north, collectively requesting nearly 20 gigalitres of drinking water per year—equivalent to the consumption of 330,000 Melburnians in the 2024 financial year.

This is alarming when you consider that 13 existing data centres in the same area collectively consumed just 33.1 megalitres last year—making these new proposals nearly 600 times more intensive. One standalone proposal near Mt Cottrell alone could demand up to 3,926 ML/year, matching the usage of 66,000 people, with peak demand at 321 litres per second.

Australia's broader data centre industry already uses ~47 billion litres of water annually, and Google's own usage soared from 12.9 billion litres in 2019 to 21 billion in 2022. Looking nationally, data centre water consumption is forecast to hit 112 billion litres in 2025, rising to 220 billion litres by 2030, driven by digital and AI demands.

These figures underline that using precious drinking water to cool sprawling server farms is not a productive or sustainable use—especially while Melbourne and regional Victoria face constraints and housing pressures.

Sustainable alternatives exist:

- OVHcloud's Sydney centre uses just one cup of water to cool servers over 10 hours, thanks to direct-to-chip closed-loop cooling.
- Amazon Web Services (AWS) operates with minimal water in Australia—95.5% of the year, it uses no water, with a water usage effectiveness (WUE) of just 0.02 L/kWh in Melbourne.
- CDC saves 5 gigalitres/year across its ANZ data centres using closed-loop systems.

Given the looming water crisis and the scale of proposed demand, I urge:

1. Mandatory water efficiency standards for data centre developments.
2. Stronger oversight and transparent assessment of water permits.
3. Incentives or mandates for water-saving technologies—like closed-loop systems, rainwater capture, and wastewater reuse.
4. Prioritising water for essential uses such as housing, agriculture, and community needs over data processing.

Thank you for considering the urgency of this issue. We must act now to ensure our shared future isn't sacrificed for unsustainable development.

Sincerely,
Jacqui Star

Reference List

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