‘Ironclad’ on AI hub

Bid ‘bypassed scrutiny’

Elise Kaine

A Wesley Vale resident has urged a parliamentary inquiry to impose “ironclad” rules on data centre developments, as local leaders warned poor consultation and weak planning were fuelling community concern across the North-West.

Zoe McFarlane, who lives near Wesley Vale, said corporate promises must not take priority over protecting residents, farmland and ecosystems.

She said community consultation should occur long before site selection. As a resident, she did not hear about proposed plans for AI centres in her back yard until earlier this year, through a social media group.

Referring to the development proposed by Firmus for a centre near Wesley Vale, Ms McFarlane said planning technicalities had allowed the project to gain a foothold without the level of scrutiny the community expected. Ms McFarlane said the proposal had bypassed public advertising, council votes and critical EPA oversight because it was framed as research and development.

Addressing the Liberal member of the committee, Mark Shelton, Ms McFarlane said it should not be left to the companies to inform and consult with stakeholders, including residents. “The government needs to take responsibility there too,” she said.

She argued any future framework must reflect how companies actually used planning systems, rather than relying on narrow technical definitions.

She said governments should not allow firms to exploit weak laws simply because projected income far outweighed council penalties. Her concerns included the site’s proximity to Andrews Creek Primary School, which sits less than 1.5km from the proposed site, as well as nearby homes and prime agricultural land.



Exeter Primary School’s mural has won the 2026 Paint Australia Beautiful National People's Choice Award. Picture: Exeter Primary School

Exeter’s student mural wins glory

Alison Foletta

An iconic Tasmanian ecosystem unfolds the more you look at this award-winning mural at Exeter Primary School.

The northern primary school’s Tamar/Kanamaluka-inspired mural won the 2026 Paint Australia Beautiful National People’s Choice Award thanks to the bright artwork filled with animals such as the school’s resident possum, wallabies, pademelons, green rosellas and plovers, plus underwater species inspired by Beneath the Tamar.

The mural was student-run with the 2025 year 6 leaders initiating the project and the 2026 team finishing it. Exeter teacher Amy Sims said while access to paint put the idea on hold, the idea did not disappear and Paint Australia Beautiful was the linchpin to finishing.

“This year’s peer leaders picked up where their predecessors left off and added new ideas inspired by the changes to waste management at our school, and the rich biodiversity that surrounds us,” she said.

“I’m so proud of how they’ve led it from start to finish. And we’re so grateful to Keep Australia Beautiful for awarding us as the state finalist, and to Dulux for supplying the paint we needed to complete it.”

Keep Australia Beautiful chief executive officer Val Southam said Paint Australia Beautiful was giving young Australians “a platform to share what they care about most”.

“Exeter’s students have used theirs brilliantly,” she said.

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