POLICY SUBMISSION 1 OF 2 · TIER 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Data centres: A second life for mines

A framework for resilient, revenue-positive national infrastructure

A policy submission for the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments

Handle My Complaint

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FOREWORD

Australia enters its next nation-building era

Data centres, and the **energy and fibre infrastructure** that power them, will be among the **largest investments of the coming decades**.

This build must lift productivity, raise government revenue **without adding to debt,** and ease the housing squeeze **without asking homeowners to absorb falling property prices**.

THE ECONOMY TODAY

Australia starts this build under pressure

$1 trillion
Gross government debt, passed for the first time in August 2026

–0.2%
Change in labour productivity in the year to June 2026; its level is barely 1% above the 2015–2019 average

6 months
Of consecutive falls in capital city home values (to September 2026)

$1,100,400
Average Australian home still costs this (June quarter 2026)

928%
Household wealth as a share of household income

178%
Household debt as a share of household income

Sources: ABC News, 21 August 2026; Productivity Commission, Productivity update, 3 September 2026; Cotality, 1 October 2026; Australian Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Australia, Composition of the Australian Economy snapshot, 30 September 2026.

Today most data centres go on **private land** and connect through **private networks**, often beside homes and schools, and most of the **long-term value flows elsewhere**.

There is a better way, and it starts with the **land we have already dug**.

Today there are more than **80,000 inactive mine sites in Australia**. Few have been rehabilitated, and many are a **public liability**.[1]

THE PROPOSAL

Give Australia's disused mines a second life

Turn former mine sites into secure underground locations for data centres. Connect them to **publicly owned fibre** and put their **waste heat to productive use**. Governments **lease the sites rather than sell them, so the public collects the rent** and **NBN Co earns new revenue** from its existing fibre network.

The returns fund:

- Infrastructure that lifts productivity, innovation and living standards
- Affordable homes close to jobs and services
- Measures that ease cost-of-living pressures

Because the public keeps the land and the fibre, **critical digital infrastructure serves the national interest.**

[1] Monash University, 'Unearthing a gold standard for rehabilitating 80,000 mines in Australia', 25 September 2020.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This plan costs little to set up, earns revenue for federal and state governments, and shrinks a liability the states already carry.

The costs are set out in Chapter 5, the revenue in Element 3, and the mine liabilities in Elements 1 and 3.

AUSTRALIA'S ADVANTAGE

Few developed nations combine:

- **Tens of thousands of disused mine sites,** already excavated
- **Naturally stable underground conditions** that cut the energy needed for cooling
- **Power connections** already built for mining
- **Extensive public fibre** that already reaches many regional towns
- **A skilled workforce** experienced in underground construction and operations
- **A resources economy:** mining is 9.9 percent of national output, and resources are 58.9 percent of exports[2]

Infrastructure policy is social policy

This proposal is also about something less tangible but equally important: **confidence in the future**.

Many Australians no longer believe their children will be better off than they are.[3]

Social cohesion is strongest where people can afford a home, take part in their community and feel part of a shared future. It weakens when financial pressure builds and regions lose economic opportunity.

Where the next generation of industry is located, and who owns it, will shape where people can afford to live, where investment flows, and whether regional communities thrive or turn into ghost towns.

New jobs in the regions create demand for existing homes and room for new ones, built where land costs less. That adds to existing supply for first-home buyers **without relying on property prices falling** for people who already own a home, and it brings people, services and community back to regional towns.

Where this submission fits

Our submission of 21 September 2026, *Build data centres underground*, explained the engineering proposition: underground by default, with disused mines as first preference.[4]

This submission, the first of two companion papers, answers the next questions: who should own and control this infrastructure, and who should benefit.

The second paper, *Build trusted national capability*, demonstrates how Australia can build on these foundations as a trusted supplier to the world.

[2] Reserve Bank of Australia, 'Composition of the Australian Economy', snapshot, 30 September 2026.

[3] N. Biddle, 'The erosion of hope and the federal election', Australian National University, 17 March 2025. For the first time in ANU's tracking, more Australians expected children's lives to be worse than the current generation's.

[4] Handle My Complaint, *Build data centres underground: a net-positive framework for data centres in Australia*, submission, 21 September 2026.

Vision

Together, these submissions show how **Australia can turn liabilities into long-term national assets,** strengthen regional communities, lift productivity, innovation and living standards, and share the benefits of the digital economy more widely.

Decisions in the next year will shape Australia's economic and social landscape for decades.

This submission sets out how to ensure they serve the national interest.

Jo Ucukalo
Founder and Chief Executive
Handle My Complaint

The plan on one page

IN SHORT

Put data centres underground, in disused mines the public controls. Connect them to publicly owned fibre. The **public becomes landlord and carrier**. It collects the rent, holds tenants to their promises, and **reinvests the return** in **productivity, housing, infrastructure and cost of living**.

Where we are now

The data centre boom is arriving on private terms: the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) expects data centres to use 34 terawatt-hours a year by 2036, nearly as much as every home in New South Wales and Victoria. There are 165 facilities operating in the National Electricity Market and 225 in the pipeline.[5] In most current arrangements, the rent and connectivity revenue flows to private owners, while the grid, water and amenity costs fall on households and neighbours.

Disused mines are public liabilities: state and territory governments require companies to provide some form of financial surety (bond) before mining can begin. However, only about 4 percent of the more than 80,000 inactive sites have been rehabilitated.[6] When the bond falls short or the operator is gone, the rehabilitation bill falls on the state.

The rules are being written now: National Cabinet agreed on 26 August 2026 to set mandatory standards for data centre energy, water and land use.[7] Nothing proposed so far says who owns the underlying freehold sites, who connects them, or who benefits.

What we propose

ELEMENT 1 · RECS 1–6

Reuse inactive mine voids

Put data centres underground, starting with the voids the state already controls.

ELEMENT 2 · REC 7

Connect to existing public fibre

Ensure public fibre is available to every site, with NBN Co as a wholesale supplier.

ELEMENT 3 · RECS 8–11

Collect revenue from rent and fibre

Lease, don't sell. Rent, fibre and heat revenue go to the public purse; operators pay full grid and water costs.

ELEMENT 4 · RECS 12–14

Reinvest in housing and infrastructure

Establish a Regional Renewal Fund for roads and water, and homes near the new jobs.

ELEMENT 5 · REC 15

Reuse heat generated

Ensure there is a heat reuse plan in every lease and every large approval.

THE COMPACT · REC 16

Make it happen

A Mine Life-Cycle Compact through National Cabinet, with three demonstration sites.

[5] AEMO forecasts, reported in 'Data centres to consume nearly as much power as every home in NSW and Victoria by 2036', ABC News, 25 August 2026.

[6] Monash University, 25 September 2020; M. Yellishetty and P. M. Bach, *The Conversation*, 22 October 2023.

[7] Prime Minister of Australia, 'Meeting of National Cabinet', communiqué, 26 August 2026.

What's in it for governments

Costs, savings, returns and the three decisions required

THE COST

Little to set up

The voids are already dug and the fibre is already laid.

No public capital:
Private operators build, run and carry the risk.

Limited public costs:
A void register, site checks and loan guarantees (Chapter 5).

THE SAVING

A smaller mine liability

Existing liabilities reduced:
Each conversion discharges part of a rehabilitation bill that state and territory governments already carry (Element 1).

THE RETURN

Revenue for governments

Rent, fibre and heat revenue:
About $116–$231 million a year per gigawatt from rent alone on public land (Element 3).

WHAT GOVERNMENTS CAN DO IN THE FIRST YEAR

Three decisions that give mining voids a second life as data centres

- **Agree the Mine Life-Cycle Compact** through National Cabinet, with three demonstration sites (Rec 16)
- **Publish the register** of state-controlled voids, assessed and ready to offer (Rec 3)
- **Direct NBN Co** to offer data centre connectivity on published wholesale terms (Rec 7)

The first decision: A **Mine Life-Cycle Compact** agreed through National Cabinet. It sets out how ownership, connectivity, heat and public return are handled, so each government can carry it into its own legislation. (Recommendation 16).

Why it works, whatever your priority

The plan answers the questions every member of Parliament is asked: jobs, bills, homes, roads and security.

CREATE JOBS IN THE REGIONS

Work where the mines were

Jobs, rent and heat in the towns that carried generations of extraction, and a Regional Renewal Fund for their roads and water (Recs 1, 12)

LOW COST TO THE BUDGET

Largely self-funding

Rent, fibre revenue and heat sales flow to the public, and each conversion reduces a rehabilitation liability the states already carry (Recs 4, 8, 10)

COST OF LIVING ADDRESSED

Lower bills, cheaper homes

Operators pay the full cost of the grid and water they use, fibre revenue lowers NBN wholesale prices, and new regional homes target about $220,000, one-fifth of the average price (Recs 9, 10, 13, 14)

SECURITY AS TOP PRIORITY

Critical data on public ground

Secure sites, on public fibre, with the state as landlord able to inspect, step in and terminate (Recs 7, 8)

BETTER FOR NEIGHBOURS AND ENVIRONMENT

Less noise, more land

No fans or generators beside homes, above-ground land returned to farming, solar or parks, heat put to work and recycled water used for cooling (Recs 4, 5, 9, 15)

FIRST NATIONS INCLUDED

Ensuring a fair share

Agreement with Traditional Owners before any listing, and an equity or revenue share in every conversion (Rec 6)

MORE HOMES, IN THE RIGHT PLACES

A housing plan that first-home buyers and homeowners can both support

- **First-home buyers** get new, well-made homes near secure new jobs, with a price target of about $220,000, one-fifth of today's average home price.
- **People who already own a home** aren't hit with falling prices. New supply is added in the regions, where land is cheaper and the jobs are new, rather than relying on values falling in the cities.
- **Regional towns** gain residents, and with them the jobs, schools, sport, shops and services that make a place a community where people want to live.

Regional values rose 5.6 percent in the year to September 2026, while capital city values fell 1.8 percent.[8] More supply where it is cheapest to build eases housing pressure and brings the regions back to life.

[8] Cotality, Home Value Index, 1 October 2026.

PART ONE

The case

Why the decision must be made now, and why **Australia's 80,000 disused mines** are the natural home for its next generation of infrastructure.

1 Pending national framework
2 A second life for mines
3 Already working elsewhere

CHAPTER 1

Pending national framework

The data centre boom is upon Australia, while the community pressure and bills for inactive mines continue to mount.

Hundreds of new data centres will be built over the next decade for artificial intelligence, cloud computing and digital services. At the same time, governments are **inheriting thousands of inactive mine sites**, many with **rehabilitation bills that fall to taxpayers**.

The question is not whether this infrastructure will be built. It is whether its **value flows to the public**, or whether the **public keeps paying for the past while also funding future infrastructure**.

34 TWh
Data centre electricity demand forecast by 2036, up from about 3% to 13% of the National Electricity Market.

165 + 225
Data centres operating, and in the pipeline, in the National Electricity Market.

≈ 4%
Share of 80,000+ inactive mine sites rehabilitated

$811m
NBN Co's loss before tax in 2025–2026, after a $963m loss in 2024–2025

Sources: AEMO forecasts via ABC News, 25 August 2026; Monash University, 2020; NBN Co FY26 results.

1.1 The boom is arriving

Data centres cluster where power and fibre already exist: in established suburbs such as Lane Cove, Macquarie Park, Kemps Creek and West Footscray, and now Clyde North in Melbourne's south-east, where a 488 MW, $1.1 billion campus is under assessment.[9]

Under the current model, **most of the value flows away from the public**.

- **Private land:** Rent, if any, goes to a private landlord. The same facility in a state-controlled void would pay the public for decades.
- **Private fibre:** Facilities connect through private networks. Data centre connectivity is a growing market, and connecting these facilities to NBN Co, the public's own network, would give a loss-making public company substantial new revenue (Element 2).

[9] C. Lucas, *The Age*, 26 September 2026; *DatacenterDynamics*, 22 July 2026; *Cranbourne Star News*, 30 September 2026. The campus has two data centres, with IT capacity rising from 125 MW in 2028 to 488 MW by 2034.

1.2 Rehabilitation costs for disused mines

When a rehabilitation bond falls short, or the operator no longer exists, the land and the liability revert to state and territory governments. That is where the mining industry's responsibility ends and the public's begins. Taxpayers should not have to foot the bill. This proposal turns a liability into an asset: **a disused void becomes revenue-earning infrastructure**.

THE GAP BETWEEN BONDS AND BILLS

$3.5bn	Rehabilitation bonds held by New South Wales across every mine in the state in 2022
$11.5–$25.3bn	The Australia Institute's estimate to fill the Upper Hunter's voids alone
$12m vs $215m	Bond held at Russell Vale colliery compared with the operator's own 2020 clean-up estimate
$361m	Possible shortfall in Victoria's $813 million in bonds, according to the Auditor-General (2020)

Sources: Resources Regulator NSW; The Australia Institute, 4 May 2021; Illawarra Mercury, 9 February 2024; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2020.

Queensland has allocated $70.6 million over four years to the management of abandoned mines, while New South Wales committed a further $108 million in 2021.[10]

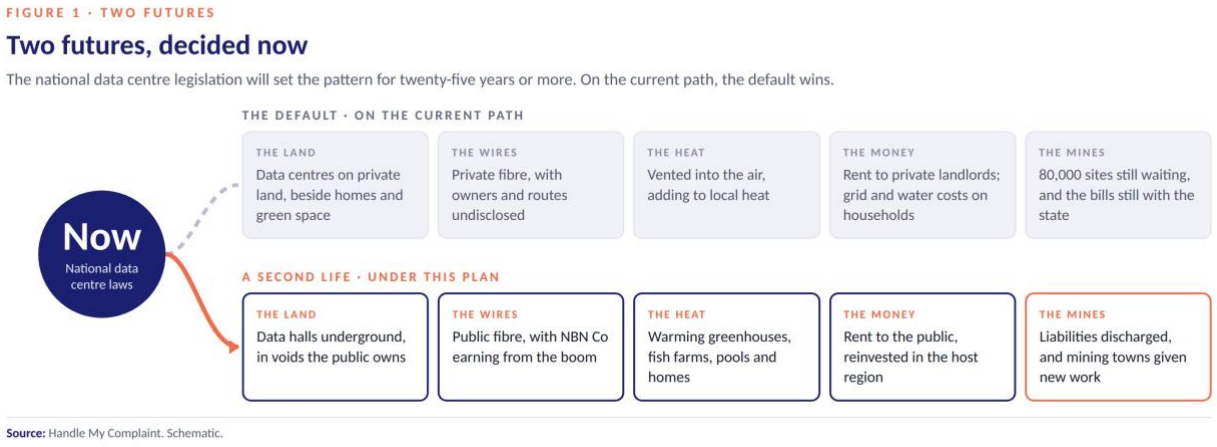


Figure 1. Two potential futures, decided now.

[10] Queensland Government, ministerial statement, 11 June 2024; ABC News, 'NSW mine rehabilitation fund set for $108m budget top up', 15 June 2021.

1.3 The framework timeframe

Governments have started to respond to concerns over the rollout of data centres:

- **26 August 2026:** National Cabinet agreed to develop consistent mandatory standards for data centre energy, water and land use.[11]
- **17 September 2026:** The Australian Government released *Getting it right: Building AI infrastructure that works for Australia*. It asks how data centres should handle energy, water, land use and community impact, and proposes tougher requirements above 30 MW and 100 MW. Submissions closed on 9 October 2026, and legislation is expected to follow.[12]
- **New South Wales:** Released a Data Centre Policy Framework (17 August 2026) offering compliant projects assessment within 75 days.[13]
- **Victoria:** A Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan (22 September 2026) bans data centres in residential zones.[14]

These are important steps, but they deal with how data centres operate, not who shares in the value they create. None of the proposals addresses four key questions:

- Who owns the land?
- Who owns the fibre?
- How is waste heat reused?
- What does the public get in return for hosting nationally significant infrastructure?

> Data centres built in the next few years will run for 25 years or more. If these questions are not answered now, today's model will be locked in for a generation.

[11] Prime Minister of Australia, 'Meeting of National Cabinet', communiqué, 26 August 2026; Clayton Utz, 'Nine governments, one rulebook', August 2026.

[12] Australian Government, *Getting it right: Building AI infrastructure that works for Australia*, consultation paper, 17 September 2026.

[13] NSW Government, *Data Centre Policy Framework*, 17 August 2026; ABC News, 17 August 2026.

[14] Premier of Victoria, 'We need data centres but we set the rules', media release, 22 September 2026.

1.4 What building data centres beside people costs

When large data centre infrastructure is built beside homes and businesses, impacts don't stay inside the property boundary. Communities live with noise, diesel fumes, visual intrusion, construction disruption and pressure on shared services.

- **Bigger poles in the suburbs:** Residents in Melbourne's inner west have protested against larger power infrastructure linked to data centre expansion.[15]



Recently installed power poles in Melbourne. The power levels required for data centres mean old 7-metre wooden poles have to be replaced. *(ABC News)*

- **Costs spread unfairly:** Network and water upgrades are recovered from all customers unless developers are made to pay the full cost.
- **Trades pulled from housing:** Industry groups have warned that data centre construction is competing with home building for electricians and specialist trades.[16]

These are the predictable result of putting large industrial facilities next to established communities. And **when the disruption lasts for years, governments themselves can be held liable**, as the Sydney light rail shows.

[15] ABC News, 'Suburban residents protest 15-metre power poles linked to data centre expansion', 27 September 2026.

[16] Housing Industry Association and National Electrical and Communications Association, 'Data centre boom deepening Australia's construction skills crisis', media release, 3 September 2026.

CASE STUDY 1

The Sydney light rail: What building beside people costs

≈ 3,500	$18.9m	10+ years
Businesses along George Street and Anzac Parade in the potential class for the nuisance class action	Legal costs reported by the plaintiffs alone	Since construction began, with most claims still unresolved

What happened: Construction of Sydney's CBD and South East Light Rail ran well beyond its expected timeline. The trial judge found that a significant cause was the discovery of many previously unknown underground utilities during construction, and that agreements with utility providers had not been reached before work began.

Businesses along the route operated for extended periods beside hoardings, barricades, noise, dust and road closures. A nuisance class action against Transport for NSW was brought on behalf of up to 3,500 businesses along the route.

The ruling: On 17 December 2025, the High Court restored the trial judge's finding that Transport for NSW was liable in private nuisance to the two lead plaintiffs. Transport for NSW had failed to show that it planned and procured the work in a way that reasonably minimised the interference with their businesses.

In April 2026, the court ordered the parties to mediation. The trial judge warned that without a settlement "we will be seeing a lot of each other over the next couple of years".

The contractors, Acciona and ALTRAC, had separately settled their own claims against Transport for NSW for $576 million in June 2019.

The lesson: Large infrastructure projects built beside homes and businesses create risks that extend well beyond construction budgets.

A public authority that approves or procures years of disruptive work beside homes and businesses can be liable, and the claims can take a decade to resolve. An above-ground data centre beside homes, with staged construction, generator testing and cooling noise, carries a similar kind of exposure. An underground data centre carries substantially less.

That is the logic behind Recommendation 11.

Sources: *Hunt Leather Pty Ltd v Transport for NSW* [2025] HCA 53, 17 December 2025; Lawyerly reporting, 7 November 2022 to 14 July 2026

CHAPTER 2

A second life for mines

A mine does not have to end as an ugly hole that is a liability on the public balance sheet. It can be given a second life as valuable infrastructure.

A VISION FOR AUSTRALIA IN THE 2040s

Imagine a coal town 20 years from now. The pit that fed the power station for half a century is quiet on the surface: just grazing land, native bush and rows of solar panels.

Below, in workings carved by generations of miners, secure data halls hold the nation's health records, research models and critical systems, cooled by rock that is the same temperature in January as in July. Their heat warms a nearby greenhouse, a fish farm and the public pool. Their data travels on fibre the public owns.

Every quarter, the operator pays rent to the state, and a fixed share of the revenue flows back to the community: resurfaced roads, new water mains, homes young families can afford. Nobody had to dig a new hole.

Most of this already exists overseas. Australia can be the first in the world to bring it together at scale.

2.1 The idea

A data centre is really two buildings: a small one for people, and a much larger **data hall** (or halls) of servers, cooling, power and network equipment. The data hall does not need windows, street frontage or fresh air. It needs reliable power, security, fibre and a stable temperature, ideally somewhere nobody can hear its fans.

A disused mine already provides most of that. The excavation, the most costly and disruptive part of construction, is done. The heavy transmission lines and publicly funded fibre are often already there. And the towns that carried the economic and environmental costs of extraction are ready to secure jobs, investment and revenue.

2.2 Australians have already paid for the hardest parts

VOIDS

80,000+ inactive mine sites

Excavated at significant cost, and often now a liability that rests with the public.

FIBRE

A national public network

NBN Co's transit backbone runs more than 60,000 km, and the Regional Backbone Blackspots Program added 6,000+ km of public fibre infrastructure.

GRID

Transmission built for mining and coal

Retiring coal generation in the Hunter and Latrobe Valley frees capacity where the mines are.

WORKFORCE

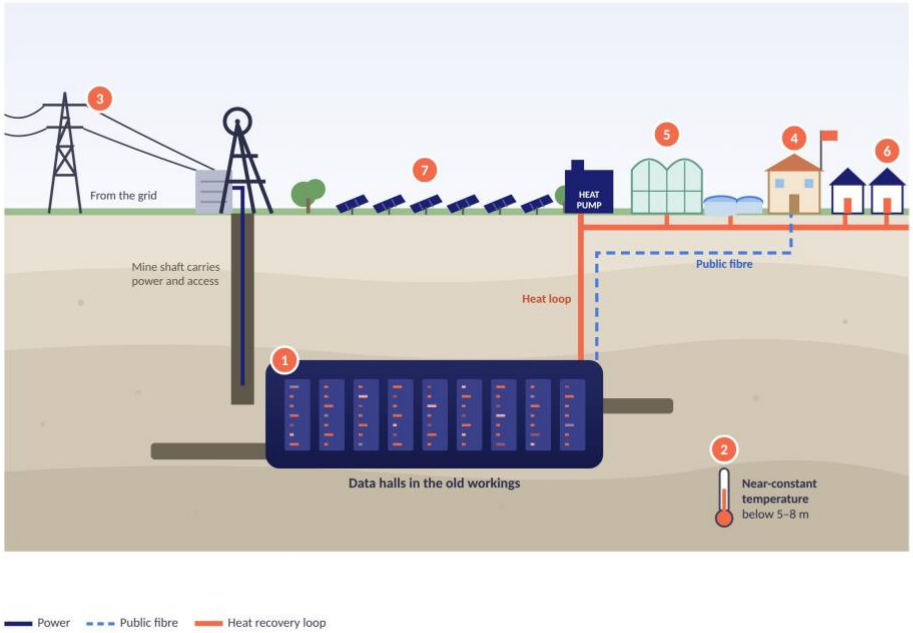
World-class underground expertise

The people who built Sydney Metro, WestConnex, Melbourne's Metro Tunnel and Cross River Rail will need new work as those projects finish.

FIGURE 2 · ANATOMY OF A SECOND LIFE

Everything a data centre needs is already at a disused mine

The hole, the cool rock, the power line, the fibre, and a town that can use the heat. Only the decision is missing.



WHAT A MINE ALREADY HAS

1. **The void** — Dug once, used again. Data halls sit in the old workings, out of sight and out of earshot.
2. **The rock** — Below 5–8 metres the ground holds a near-constant temperature, so the rock does much of the cooling.
3. **The power** — Mining regions have heavy transmission, and retiring coal generation frees grid capacity.
4. **The fibre** — Public fibre already reaches the town's school. Often only a few kilometres of cable are missing.
5. **The heat** — Captured in a sealed loop, lifted by a heat pump and piped to greenhouses, fish farms, pools and homes.
6. **The return** — The state is the landlord. A fixed share of the rent pays for the town's roads, water and homes.
7. **The surface** — Restored for grazing, solar generation or conservation.

Source: Handle My Complaint. Schematic, not to scale.

Figure 2. Anatomy of a second life. Schematic only, not to scale.

2.3 It is better for the operator, too

- **More efficient:** About five to eight metres below ground, the temperature barely changes through the year.[17] Rock gives an underground facility that stability for free, where an above-ground facility requires large amounts of electricity, and often drinking water, to create the right conditions. Norway's Lefdal Mine Datacenter runs at a power usage effectiveness (PUE) of about 1.08 to 1.15 and uses minimal water (Chapter 3).[18] PUE compares a facility's total energy use with the energy that reaches its IT equipment. A score of 1.0 is the theoretical ideal, meaning every watt goes to computing and none to cooling, lighting or other overheads.

[17] I. Johnston, 'Geothermal energy: shallow sources', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, 126(2), 2014.

[18] Lefdal Mine Datacenter, published specifications; *DatacenterDynamics*, 'Supercomputing goes underground at Norway's Lefdal Mine Datacenter'.

- **Safer:** The site is protected from extreme weather, bushfire and physical attack, which is important for health, financial and government data.
- **Greater community acceptance:** No fan noise over back fences and no generator testing beside homes. Underground sites avoid the visual, noise and land-use impacts that drive community opposition, planning delays and nuisance claims (Chapter 1).

CHAPTER 3

Already working elsewhere

Australia would not be initiating untried ideas. Underground data centres have run for more than two decades, and data centre heat already warms homes and whole towns.

Governments, critical infrastructure providers and high-security industries already keep data in mines, tunnels and bunkers.

> The technology exists. The business model exists. What is missing is a framework that connects them to Australia's inactive mines and public infrastructure.

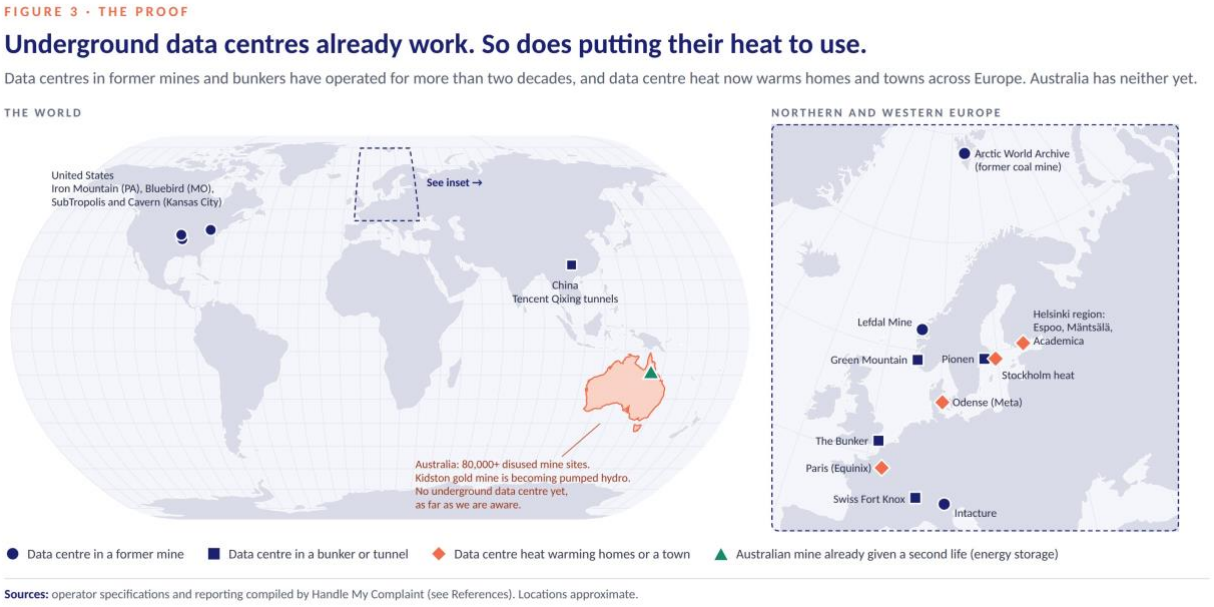


Figure 3. Underground data centres and data centre heat reuse around the world.

3.1 Data centres in former (and current) mines

FACILITY	WHERE	WHAT IT SHOWS
Lefdal Mine Datacenter	Nordfjordeid, Norway	Located inside a former olivine mine, 60 metres below sea level and 700 metres into a mountain. Covers 120,000 m² across multiple levels, cooled with 8°C fjord water and powered by hydro and wind. Power usage effectiveness of 1.08–1.15. Operating since 2017. No community complaints. Around 37 MW operating and a further 43 MW under construction (2026), using only one of six mine levels. Grid connection reinforced to 200 MW. 10% of capacity reserved for the Norwegian government.
Intacture	Val di Non, Trentino, Italy	Opened in June 2026 inside an active dolomite mine, up to 100 metres underground, alongside ongoing extraction and long-standing cold storage for apples, wine and cheese. Built by Trentino DataMine, a public-private partnership 49% owned by the University of Trento, for about €50 million, including €18.4 million from Italy's national recovery plan. The rock stays at a constant 12°C, so chillers are expected to run only about three months a year, with a target PUE below 1.25. Cooling is closed-loop and consumes no water, and the facility runs on 100% renewable energy. It hosts the University of Trento's supercomputer and offers colocation, AI and high-performance computing, with data kept under Italian and EU jurisdiction.
Iron Mountain WPA-1	Boyers, Pennsylvania, USA	Operates approximately 67 metres underground in a former limestone mine. Provides highly secure data storage and meets stringent US government security requirements. A 127 ha campus with 30,000 m² of space, cooled by an underground reservoir.
Bluebird Underground	Springfield, Missouri, USA	Located in a decommissioned limestone mine about 26 metres underground. Opened in 2003 by the city's publicly owned utility and sold to Bluebird in 2014. A steady 18–20°C year-round.
SubTropolis and Cavern	Kansas City and Lenexa, USA	Data centre facilities operating within large limestone mine and cave complexes, demonstrating the scalability of underground hosting environments. Cavern sits about 38 metres below the surface.
Arctic World Archive	Svalbard, Norway	A data archive about 300 metres inside a former coal mine, opened in 2017. Norway, Brazil and Mexico have deposited national records there for long-term preservation.

3.2 Data centres in bunkers and tunnels

FACILITY	WHERE	WHAT IT SHOWS
Scaleway fr-par-3	Paris, France	A 1930s civil defence shelter 26 metres beneath Paris, less than 5 km from the Eiffel Tower. It began storing data in 2016 and became one of Scaleway's three Paris availability zones in 2021.
Tencent Qixing	Gui'an, Guizhou, China	Built by Tencent, one of China's largest cloud providers, with more than 30,000 m² of tunnels drilled into hills. Trial operations from 2018, completed in 2020. Holds Tencent's most critical data and serves as a disaster-recovery site.
Green Mountain	Rennesøy, Norway	A Tier III data centre in mountain halls that once housed a high-security NATO ammunition store, cooled with fjord water. Operating since 2013.
The Bunker (Cyberfort)	Sandwich, Kent, UK	A Cold War Ministry of Defence radar bunker built to withstand a nuclear blast, now a secure 3 MW data centre serving National Health Service (NHS) trusts and other critical services.
Swiss Fort Knox, Pionen, Academica	Switzerland, Stockholm, Helsinki	Military and civil defence shelters in rock converted into secure data centres. Swiss Fort Knox has operated in former Swiss Army bunkers since 1996, under the first joint venture between the Swiss military and a private company. Pionen, 30 metres beneath Stockholm granite, opened in 2008. From 2010, Helsinki's facility beneath Uspenski Cathedral fed its waste heat into the city's district heating network.

Sources: operator specifications; Scaleway; Light Reading; Data Center Knowledge; DataSpan; DatacenterDynamics; WHTop; Business Norway; Mount10; InformationWeek; ABB; Capacity; Data Centre Review. See References.

WHAT THESE FACILITIES SHOW

- **Underground facilities are proven infrastructure:** Former mines, caves, tunnels and military facilities have hosted data centres for more than 20 years.
- **Governments and high-security customers trust them:** Facilities such as Iron Mountain, Green Mountain and The Bunker host government records, healthcare systems and other high-security workloads. Three national governments hold records in the Svalbard mine.
- **Heat is no longer waste:** Data centre heat increasingly supplies district heating, public facilities, industry and food production.
- **Public ownership has precedent:** Springfield's facility was built by a city-owned utility before it was sold. Our proposal extends that principle by retaining public ownership of the mine asset and leasing access to operators.

THE SHIFT IS UNDER WAY

Australia's mines are already getting a second life

- **Energy storage:** The Kidston project in north Queensland is turning a disused gold mine into 250 MW of pumped hydro storage. Green Gravity is developing gravity storage in disused mine shafts.[19]
- **Data centres beside mines:** In June 2026, Akaysha Energy and coal miner Malabar Resources announced the Mayfield Energy Precinct near Denman in the Upper Hunter. It proposes up to 1 GW of data centre capacity and up to 2 GW of batteries beside existing mines, with spending of up to $10 billion.[20]
- **Miners moving into computing:** Fortescue has been reported to be seeking changes to Western Australian mining law to allow data centres linked to its Pilbara operations.[21]

The transition has begun. The question is whether Australia captures the value for the communities and governments that inherit these sites, or watches others do so.

[19] Australian Renewable Energy Agency, Kidston Pumped Storage Hydro Project; Green Gravity, company material.

[20] altenergy.com.au, 'Akaysha and Malabar planning to bring the data to the supply in regional NSW', 25 June 2026.

[21] N. Evans and J. Stensholt, 'Fortescue pushes to change WA mining law for audacious data centre pivot', *The Australian*, 29–30 July 2026.

PART TWO

Five elements

Five elements that turn a **public liability into public infrastructure**, each built on something Australians have already paid for.

Element 1 Reuse inactive mine voids

Element 2 Connect to existing public fibre

Element 3 Collect revenue from rent and fibre

Element 4 Reinvest in housing and infrastructure

Element 5 Reuse heat generated

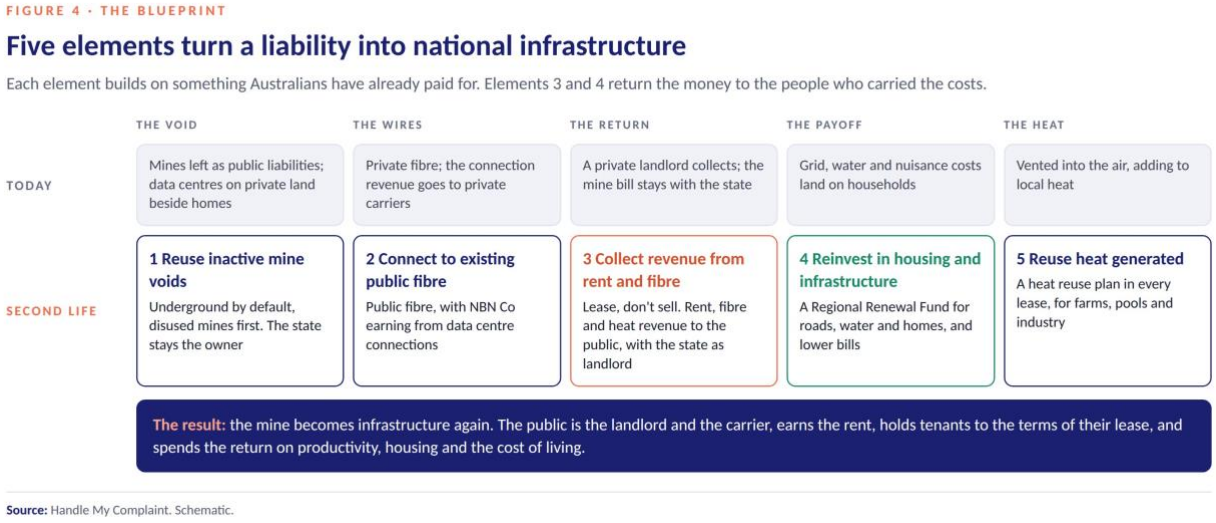


Figure 4. The five elements: today, and under this plan.

Most of these elements use powers governments already hold. Together they change who hosts the next generation of infrastructure, who earns from it, who holds its operators to account, and who benefits from the value it creates.

ELEMENT 1 OF 5

Reuse inactive mine voids

Underground by default, activate disused mines first, starting with the voids the public already controls. Where a data centre must be in a city, build it underground and keep the surface for people.

WHAT WE ASK

Rec 1 Underground by default, disused mines first, as the national siting rule

Rec 2 Require every mine closure plan to assess a second life for the void

Rec 3 Establish a public register of state-controlled mine voids and offer them to operators first

Rec 4 Recognise cut-and-cover conversions as eligible rehabilitation works

Rec 5 Require metropolitan data centres to be built underground

Rec 6 Traditional Owners first, with an equity or revenue share

Full text of each recommendation in Chapter 7.

A.1 Mines first

Mines are the best underground sites, and the national siting rule should say so (Recommendation 1). The excavation is done. Roads, transmission and water are often already in place. And in many cases the site will end up with government anyway as a liability.

Converting a void and putting a long-term tenant in it does more than reduce a liability, however. It creates a productive asset, earns ongoing revenue and brings jobs back to mining communities. Industry already sees the opportunity (Chapter 3). But if mining land is converted on purely private terms, the value flows away from the public.

Every mine closure plan should assess whether the void, and the site's power, water, roads and telecommunications, can support a second life before final rehabilitation is approved (Recommendation 2).

A.2 The state's own voids come first

The first tranche should be the voids the state already controls: abandoned and legacy sites that have reverted to the Crown, relinquished tenements, and former state mines such as the Leigh Creek coalfield in South Australia, back under full state control since 1 January 2024.[22]

These sites should be prioritised because government:

1. Can offer secure tenure quickly
2. Already carries the liability, meaning conversion directly reduces a public cost
3. Can select the tenant and set the conditions of use, something it cannot do on private land

Before listing, each site should be assessed for geotechnical stability, groundwater, flood risk, power, fibre, water and heat-reuse potential, and the results published on a public register (Recommendation 3).

[22] Government of South Australia, Department for Energy and Mining, 'Leigh Creek Coal Mine'.

A.3 Traditional Owners

Many mines were developed before native title was meaningfully recognised in law. A second life for our mines should not repeat the mistakes of the first.

In May 2026, the Federal Court found Fortescue liable to pay the Yindjibarndi people about $150 million for cultural loss, for mines built on their land without consent. In July it set economic loss at $136,757, plus interest.[23] Both the native title holders and the Western Australian Government have appealed, and Fortescue has cross-appealed.[24]

Agreement with Traditional Owners should be secured before any public void is leased. Every conversion should give them a direct share in the value created: via equity, a revenue share, or a similar arrangement (Recommendation 6). People excluded from the benefits of initial extraction should not be excluded from the benefits of what comes next.

A.4 Open pits: cut, build and cover

Open-cut mines are a particularly strong opportunity. Their open access from above means data halls can be built with the same cut-and-cover methods used for rail stations and road tunnels, then buried under the overburden already stockpiled on site.

The result is infrastructure below and productive land above, returned to farming, solar, conservation or community use. Because the work stabilises and rehabilitates the site, it should count toward mine closure obligations (Recommendation 4). Conversion should be assessed as an option in each closure plan, not a substitute for rehabilitation. Where a void is better suited to a pit lake or another use, the closure plan decides.

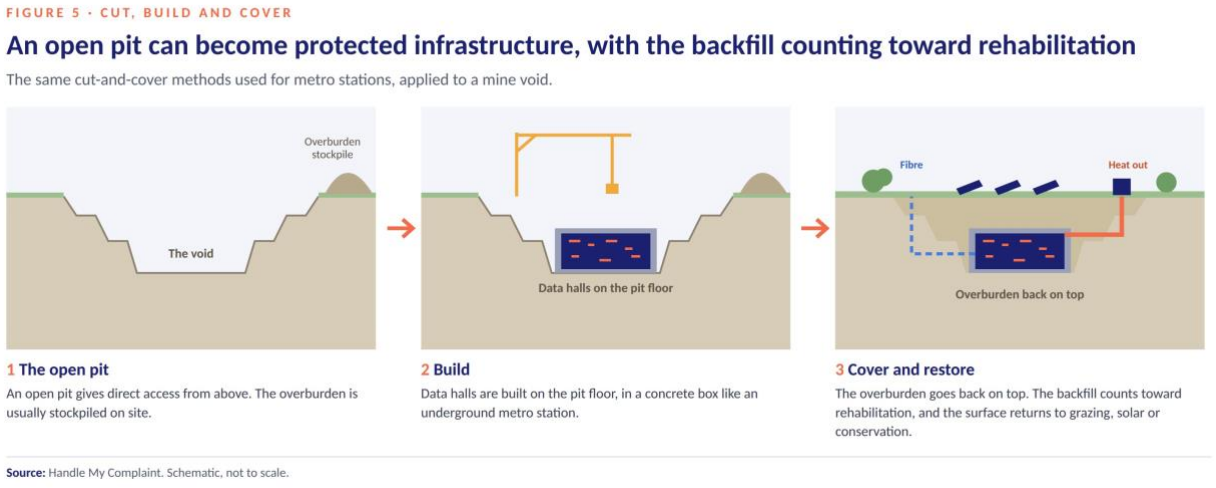


Figure 5. Cut, build and cover. Schematic, not to scale.

A.5 In the cities: Build underground, retain above ground for human use

Not every computing workload can go to a regional mine. Some need to be close to customers and telecommunications exchanges. There the principle is the same: build underground and keep the land above ground for housing, parks, community or commercial use, instead of taking over scarce urban land.

[23] ABC News, 12 May 2026; *Yindjibarndi Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC v State of Western Australia (No 2)* [2026] FCA 585, 1 July 2026, which also awarded $217,152 in compound interest.

[24] ABC News, 16 September 2026.

Australia has the workforce to do it. The tunnelling teams described in Chapter 2 have spent more than a decade building complex underground infrastructure in dense cities. That capability should now be applied to digital infrastructure (Recommendation 5).

CASE STUDY 2

Kogarah Golf Club: The data centre underground, the green space above

32 ha	$2.6–$3.5bn	593 vs 3
Former Kogarah Golf Club site on Marsh Street, beside the Cooks River	Estimated value of the precinct proposed by Stockland	Objections, compared with letters of support

What is proposed: The golf course ceased operations in March 2025. Stockland and John Boyd Properties have proposed a mixed-use redevelopment including logistics facilities, offices and a hotel. Their concept plan shows a data centre of about 25,400 square metres as an alternative use on one block, although that use is not confirmed.

What could be built instead: The location has many of the characteristics data centre operators seek – proximity to Sydney Airport, fibre infrastructure, power supply and customers.

Under this proposal, however, any data halls would be put underground, preserving the surface as accessible green space.

The community retains open space. The operator gains a cooler, more secure facility. Both objectives are achieved.

The opportunity: Urban communities should not have to choose between digital infrastructure and public space. The better option is to place the infrastructure underground and put the golf course to better use above ground. Building data centres underground allows the community to enjoy the land above it. That is Recommendation 5.

Sources: news.com.au, 4 August 2026; St George & Sutherland Shire Leader, 30 June and 8 October 2026; The Urban Developer, 22 June 2026; NSW Planning Portal, SSD-84467726. The underground option is Handle My Complaint's proposal.

ELEMENT 2 OF 5

Connect to existing public fibre

Public fibre already reaches many mining towns. Connect the data centres and let NBN Co earn revenue from the connections.

WHAT WE ASK

Rec 7 Connection to federally owned fibre, with NBN Co as a supplier on published wholesale terms

Full text of each recommendation in Chapter 7.

B.1 Why the fibre internet connection matters

A data centre **cannot run without an internet connection**, and the connection determines who controls it and who earns from it. Connecting to federally owned fibre does two things:

- **Earns revenue** for a public network that is losing money.
- **Keeps public control** of the critical network that carries payments, emergency calls, health records and the courts. The Director-General of Security, Mike Burgess, has warned that foreign governments have elite teams investigating how to take such networks down.[25]

B.2 Public fibre already reaches many mining towns, often through the local school

NBN Co's transit backbone spans more than 60,000 kilometres.[26] Governments have also spent decades bringing fibre to almost every school, and because most mining towns have a school, many have fibre nearby.

- **Schools:** In New South Wales, a $280 million contract signed in 2009 laid more than 4,500 km of fibre to over 2,400 schools and TAFEs. A later $328 million program connected the last 12 mainland public schools still on satellite in 2022.[27]
- **Regional fibre infrastructure:** The Commonwealth's $250 million Regional Backbone Blackspots Program built more than 6,000 km of open-access fibre to more than 100 regional locations, including Broken Hill, Emerald, Mount Isa and Cloncurry.[28]
- **Former mine sites:** In Batchelor, Northern Territory, about six kilometres from the former Rum Jungle uranium mine, AARNet received federal funding in December 2023 to run fibre to key sites, including the local school.[29] In the Latrobe Valley, VERNet research-and-education fibre reaches Kurnai College and TAFE Gippsland near the closed Hazelwood mine.[30]

Public or publicly funded fibre therefore already reaches many mining towns. Under this proposal, a data centre would connect to the nearest federally owned point of presence and buy wholesale capacity on that existing network. Often the only missing pieces are a few kilometres of cable and NBN Co's role as seller.

[25] M. Burgess, Director-General of Security, address to the ASIC Annual Forum, 12 November 2025, reported in *The Register*, 12 November 2025.

[26] NBN Co, 'NBN Co flicks switch on transit capacity upgrade', 25 September 2018.

[27] *iTnews*, 'Telstra builds $280m NSW education fibre network', 20 November 2009; NSW Department of Education, 'Internet now lightning fast for regional schools', 21 July 2022.

[28] Australian National Audit Office, *Administration of the Regional Backbone Blackspots Program*, Audit Report No. 2 2012–13.

[29] AARNet, 'AARNet receives $6.55 million to boost digital connectivity in regional Australia', 11 December 2023.

[30] VERNet, Customer Reach.

B.3 NBN Co as a supplier

By law NBN Co is wholesale only. It can supply data centre connectivity through any licensed carrier or service provider.[31]

Recommendation 7 would require every data centre on public land, and every new data centre regulated as critical infrastructure, to connect to federally owned fibre as a primary or backup path, on published, non-discriminatory wholesale terms. The public network should win customers on price and reach, not by preference.

B.4 Why the power grid now depends on the internet

What rooftop solar taught us

More than four million Australian homes and businesses now have rooftop solar.[32] It spread faster than the local power network could adapt.

Australia's energy grid was designed to send electricity one way: from big power stations out to homes. When many homes on the same street started pushing power back into the grid at midday, it caused problems. Voltages rose above safe levels, transformers overheated, and solar systems switched themselves off.

Networks responded by **capping how much power homes could send back**. Many households were limited to 5 kW, some as low as 1.5 kW, and in the most congested areas, networks could impose a **zero-export limit**. That left households that had paid for solar unable to sell their surplus power.

In 2021 the national rule-maker, the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), changed the rules. Networks now have to treat solar exports as a core service and they can no longer impose blanket zero limits on new systems except in limited cases. It acknowledged that the grid had not been built for two-way flows.[33]

B.4.1 The fix needs an internet connection

The modern solution is called **flexible (dynamic) exports**. Instead of a fixed cap, the network sends each solar system an export limit that changes through the day with local conditions. When the local grid has spare room, the home can send back more.

- **South Australia** made this compulsory for all new and upgraded solar systems from July 2023. Homes can send back up to 10 kW per phase. If the home's internet drops out, the limit falls to 1.5 kW until the connection returns.[34]
- **Victoria** required new inverters to be capable of flexible exports from March 2024 for systems installed under its Solar Victoria rebates**.**[35]
- **Western Australia** introduced similar rules for new systems on Perth's main grid from May 2026.[36]

In short, **a home's ability to sell its solar power now depends on its internet connection**. The electricity grid increasingly depends on telecommunications.

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[31] *National Broadband Network Companies Act 2011* (Cth), ss 9 and 18.

[32] Clean Energy Council, 'Rooftop solar shines bright as Australia surpasses four million installations', November 2024.

[33] Australian Energy Market Commission, *Access, pricing and incentive arrangements for distributed energy resources*, final rule determination, 12 August 2021.

[34] SA Power Networks, 'Flexible Exports'; South Australian Government dynamic export requirements, in force from 1 July 2023.

[35] Solar Victoria, Notice to Market, reported in *pv magazine Australia*, 'Victoria introduces dynamic export rule for rooftop solar', 2023.

[36] WhySolar, 'New WA solar and battery rules from May 2026', 21 February 2026.

B.4.2 Lay public fibre with every grid upgrade

The energy grid will be rebuilt again to serve data centres, electric cars and renewable energy. If the power network is upgraded first and fibre is added later, Australia will repeat the solar mistake: expensive assets that can't be used fully because the two networks weren't planned together.

Every new pole, power line and substation upgrade is a chance to lay public fibre at the same time, in the same trench or along the same pole route. Power companies have long run communications cables alongside their own wires.

B.4.3 Power networks already carry data

Power companies have used their networks to carry data for decades. The results show a clear pattern: selling internet over power lines to households failed, but laying fibre along power networks and leasing it to others has worked repeatedly.

WHERE	WHAT HAPPENED	LESSON
Manassas, Virginia, USA	In 2005 Manassas became the first US city with internet over power lines available citywide. When the private operator couldn't make it profitable, the city bought the network in 2008. Comcast and Verizon offered faster service, customers fell from about 650 to 500, and the city ran it at a loss of about US$160,000–170,000 a year. It closed in 2010.	A public owner selling slow powerline internet to households lost.
Germany and Spain	Power companies trialled selling internet over their power lines but won few paying customers against cheaper ADSL. Germany's MVV Energie wrote off €30 million in 2004.	Selling internet to households over the power wires did not pay at that time.
Dallas, USA	In 2008 the power company Oncor paid US$90 million to buy a powerline network, not to sell internet but to monitor its own grid and read meters.	Using power lines for the grid's own needs worked.
France and Italy	Enedis reads about 37 million French smart meters over power lines, and Enel reads more than 30 million in Italy.	Grid owners using their own wires for their own network succeed at scale.
Tasmania, Australia	From 2009 state-owned Aurora Energy built the first stage of Tasmania's fibre-to-the-home network by stringing fibre on its own power poles, as agent for NBN Tasmania.	Australia has already laid fibre on public power poles.
Italy	Power company Enel created Open Fiber to run fibre through its electricity network to homes and businesses, selling only wholesale to other telcos. Enel estimated that using its power infrastructure would cut costs by 30–40%.	Laying fibre along the power network is much cheaper, and wholesale works.
Ireland	SIRO, a joint venture between state-owned power company ESB and Vodafone, runs fibre in ESB's ducts and along its power lines. Other internet providers sell services over it.	A state power company built an open-access fibre network on its own poles and ducts.

WHERE	WHAT HAPPENED	LESSON
Spain	Reintel leases spare fibre on Red Eléctrica's high-voltage transmission grid, a network of more than 52,000 km. In 2021 KKR agreed to pay €971 million for a 49% stake, valuing it at €2.3 billion.	Fibre laid along the grid became a highly valuable asset.
Stockholm, Sweden	Since 1994 the city-owned company Stokab has built unlit fibre and leased it on equal terms to about 100 operators. It connects more than 90% of apartment buildings. It took 13 years to turn a profit but has been profitable since.	Patient public ownership of wholesale fibre pays off.
Chattanooga, USA	The city-owned power utility built fibre across its area to run a smart grid and sell internet. Grid savings plus internet fees more than covered the smart grid's costs.	A public utility succeeded by building fibre and using it to run its own grid, not just to sell internet.

Sources: Motorola, 2006; Institute for Local Self-Reliance; American City & County; DSLweb, 11 March 2004; T&D World, 7 May 2008; Enedis; STMicroelectronics, 2017; iTnews, 18 July and 8 December 2009; Corriere Comunicazioni and Telecompaper, 2016; SIRO; Red Eléctrica, 16 December 2021; Stokab; Berkman Klein Center, 2017. See References.

B.4.4 The lessons for this proposal

1. **Build fibre, not powerline internet:** Sending internet over the power wires themselves failed everywhere it was sold to households. Laying fibre alongside the wires has succeeded in Italy, Ireland, Spain, Stockholm, Chattanooga and Tasmania.
2. **Do it when the grid is upgraded:** Using the same poles, ducts and trenches cut Enel's costs by an estimated 30–40%.
3. **Keep the backbone public and lease access to it:** The most reliable public returns come from leasing fibre to others, as Stokab and Reintel do, rather than competing for retail customers. Chattanooga shows that a public utility can also succeed in retail, but only with fibre and only because the fibre also runs the grid.
4. **Expect the asset to grow in value:** Reintel's €2.3 billion valuation shows that fibre laid along the grid becomes a significant asset in its own right.

ELEMENT 3 OF 5

Collect revenue from rent and fibre

The public doesn't collect any rent from a data centre on private land, yet it pays for much of what that data centre uses. When a mine gets a second life on public terms, the state leases the void, and Australians earn in five ways.

WHAT WE ASK

Rec 8 Converted voids kept in public ownership and leased, with rent to the state

Rec 9 Full cost recovery for grid and water, and cooling with recycled or non-drinking water

Rec 10 NBN Co's data centre revenue reported separately and returned to households

Rec 11 Nuisance and compensation exposure assessed before large approvals near homes

Full text of each recommendation in Chapter 7.

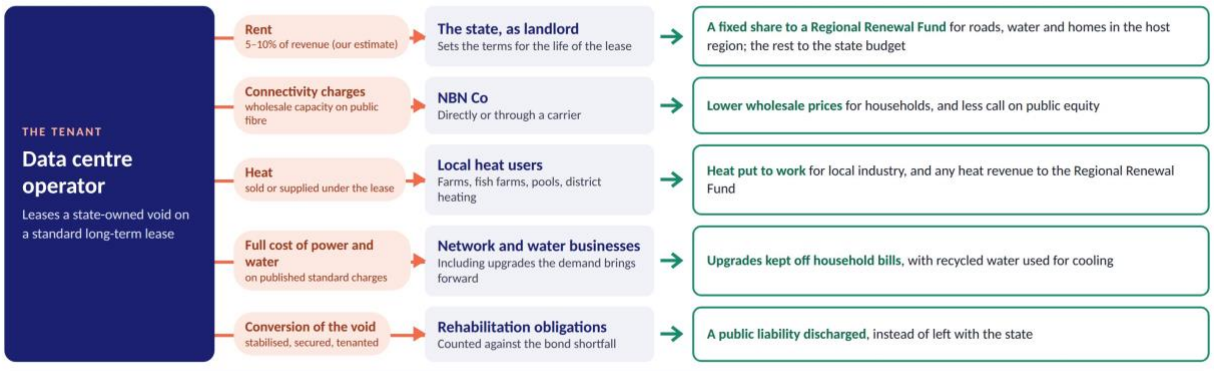
C.1 Lease, don't sell

In a state-controlled void, the operator should be a **tenant, not an owner**. The state keeps the land and the void, grants a standard long-term lease and collects the rent (Recommendation 8). **A landlord has powers a planning authority does not.** Its conditions run for the life of the tenancy, it can inspect, and it can step in or terminate if the conditions are broken.

FIGURE 6 · COLLECT

Where the money goes

On private land the public collects nothing. In a public void, on public fibre, the boom pays the public five ways.



Source: Handle My Complaint. Rent estimate based on NEXTDC FY26 revenue per billed megawatt; not a market valuation.

Figure 6. Where the money goes when the void is public.

C.2 Rent

Lease a state-controlled void for a share of the operator's revenue, and the public earns for as long as the facility runs. At an indicative **5 to 10 percent** of revenue, a single 100 MW data centre would return **$11.6–$23.1 million a year**, and every gigawatt **$116–$231 million a year**. Even at 2 percent, a 100 MW facility would return about **$4.6 million a year**.

These are our estimates, not a market valuation. They use the 2025–2026 results of NEXTDC, an Australian data centre developer and operator: net revenue of $405 million, against 175 MW billed at year end, or about $2.3 million per billed megawatt. That ratio is our calculation, not a figure NEXTDC reports.[37] A share of revenue is more than the rent on bare land, because **a void is not bare land: the excavation, the stable temperature, the transmission and the fibre that make a site valuable are already there**. The actual rate would be set by competitive tender for each site (Recommendation 8).

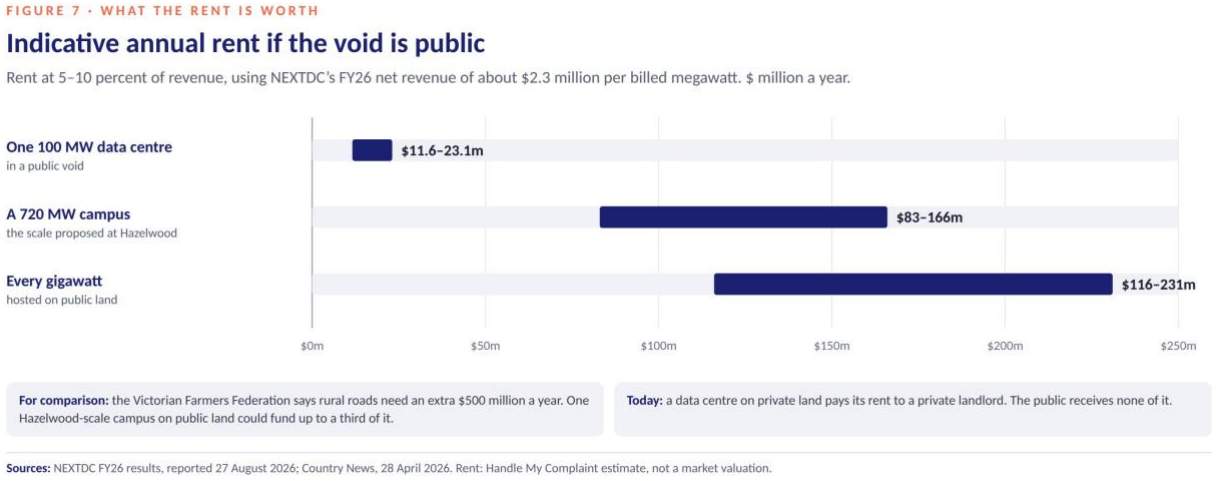


Figure 7. Indicative annual rent if the void is public.

[37] NEXTDC FY26 results, 27 August 2026, reported by Investing.com and ARN.

CASE STUDY 3

Hazelwood: What a campus that size could return on public land

720 MW	$83–$166m a year	$500m a year
AI data centre campus proposed beside the closed Hazelwood Power Station, about $10 billion	Indicative rent if a campus that size sat on state-controlled land	Extra road funding the Victorian Farmers Federation says rural Victoria needs

What is proposed: Early in 2026, Keppel secured leasing rights over 123 ha beside the closed Hazelwood Power Station near Morwell for a 720 MW AI data centre campus worth about $10 billion. The site has grid access, non-potable water and fibre. The land is held by a private company, Lightwood Group, so the rent will go to a private landlord, not to the region that carried a century of coal extraction for Victoria's electricity.

What the rent could do: At about $2.3 million per billed megawatt, a fully billed 720 MW campus would earn about $1.66 billion a year. Rent at 5–10 percent of that is $83–$166 million a year. The Victorian Farmers Federation called the state's $1.04 billion 2026–2027 road maintenance package "a band-aid on a broken leg" and asked for an extra $500 million a year. One campus on public land could fund up to a third of that, every year of the lease.

The lesson: The Hazelwood site is private land, leased between private parties. It shows what the current model offers a coal region: the region hosts the infrastructure, and the rent goes to a private landholder. The next Hazelwood-scale project should be offered state-controlled land, ideally a void, with a fixed share of the rent going to the roads the community drives on. That is Recommendations 3, 8 and 12.

Sources: DatacenterDynamics, 16 January 2026; The Urban Developer, February 2026; Latrobe City Council; Country News, 28 April 2026; NEXTDC FY26 results. Rent figures are Handle My Complaint's estimate, not a market valuation.

C.3 Fibre connectivity revenue

Every data centre on public fibre pays NBN Co, directly or through a carrier. That revenue should be reported separately and used to lower wholesale prices for households and reduce NBN Co's call on public equity (Recommendation 10).

C.4 Heat generated

The lease decides whether heat is sold, supplied at cost to local industry, or shared with the host community. Any revenue goes to the Regional Renewal Fund (Recommendations 12 and 15).

C.5 Rehabilitation liability discharged

A conversion that stabilises a void, manages its water and puts a paying tenant in it removes part of a rehabilitation bill the state would otherwise carry (Recommendation 4).

C.6 Costs no longer carried by households

Operators pay the full cost of the grid and water capacity they use, on published standard charges, and cool with recycled or non-drinking water (Recommendation 9). Victoria's action plan already expects this, and New South Wales has asked the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) to review water pricing for data centres.[38] A facility in a void also avoids the nuisance claims a facility beside homes invites (Recommendation 11).

[38] Premier of Victoria, 22 September 2026; ABC News, 17 August 2026, on the IPART review in the NSW framework.

ELEMENT 4 OF 5

Reinvest in housing and infrastructure

The return reaches the people who carried the costs in different ways, including roads, water, homes and lower bills.

WHAT WE ASK

Rec 12 A Regional Renewal Fund in each host region, reported publicly each year

Rec 13 A Regional Housing Revolution, with builder bonds

Rec 14 Low-deposit lending, a price target, and homes reserved for those most in need

Full text of each recommendation in Chapter 7.

D.1 Why it matters

When Australians lose confidence in the future, the reason is usually the economy. According to the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, financial circumstances remain the most important factor associated with social cohesion: 53 percent of people who identify as poor often feel isolated, against 10 percent nationally.[39]

A plan that fixes the roads a region relies on, puts affordable homes near new jobs and lowers bills is a plan for social cohesion as much as an infrastructure one.

> **"The way we treat each other is not as good as it used to be... we react in a way which is less tolerant and less respectful."**
>
> Mike Burgess, Director-General of Security, interview with Neil Mitchell, September 2026

D.2 A Regional Renewal Fund

A fixed share of tenancy and heat revenue should go to a **Regional Renewal Fund** in each host region, for roads, water and sewerage, housing-enabling infrastructure and local services, with its spending reported publicly each year so residents can see what their mine's second life has paid for (Recommendation 12). The rest of the rent goes to the state budget, like any other public revenue.

Regional productivity runs on local roads and water networks, and both are short of money. Water is the clearest case, because data centres are about to become the largest new water customers in a generation.

[39] Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2025*, December 2025; *Social Cohesion Insights 09: Stretched thin*, October 2025.

CASE STUDY 4

Victoria's water bill: Data centres should pay into the pipes, not drain them

$1.1bn
Dividends and capital returns taken from Melbourne's four water companies since 2021

$18.7bn
Borrowed by Victoria's 18 water corporations in 2024–2025, up 35 percent in three years

Almost 20 GL
A year of water sought by data centre applications in Melbourne's west, north and east, reported in 2025

The squeeze: Victoria's state-owned water corporations borrowed $18.7 billion in 2024–2025, up 35 percent in three years and almost 50 percent at the regional corporations. At a third of the 18 corporations, operating cash flow has fallen below the benchmark ratings agencies use against debt. Even so, the Government has taken $1.1 billion in dividends and capital returns from Melbourne's four water companies since 2021. Coliban Water warned that "even with quite dramatic price increases, financial health metrics remain outside of the tolerances". The Government says the framework is working as intended.

The new customer: In 2025, data centre applications to Greater Western Water and Yarra Valley Water sought almost 20 gigalitres of water a year. Victoria's action plan now expects operators to cool with recycled or non-drinking water and pay the full cost of their connection. Greater Western Water has signed the state's first recycled water supply for a data centre, with AWS.

The lesson: Data centres can strengthen water corporations instead of straining them: pay the full cost of the capacity they use, buy recycled water under long-term contracts and, where they sit on public land, return part of the rent to the corporation as equity rather than dividends flowing out. That is Recommendations 9 and 12.

Sources: Australian Financial Review, 1 October 2026; Premier of Victoria, 22 September 2026; Utility Magazine, 18 June 2026; ABC News, 26–27 August 2025, as reported by W.Media.

D.3 Homes: A Regional Housing Revolution

Giving mines a second life puts new jobs in the regions, where homes can still be built at a reasonable cost.

$1,100,400
average price of an Australian home, June quarter 2026

178%
household debt as a share of household income

+5.6%
regional home values in the year to September 2026, while capital city values fell 1.8%

≈ $220,000
one-fifth of the average: our price target for a modest new regional home

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Australia, Composition of the Australian Economy snapshot, 30 September 2026; Cotality Home Value Index, 1 October 2026. Target: Handle My Complaint.

Housing affordability reached record lows in late 2025. Cotality's November 2025 affordability report put the median dwelling value at 8.2 times household income nationally and 8.1 times in the regions, and found that servicing a new mortgage took 45 percent of an average household's income.[40]

Subsidising demand for existing homes only lifts prices. The way to deliver at speed is to build new, simple, well-made homes on public land in the regions where the jobs are being created, including former mine land released through closure, applying the delivery model Australia used for schools after the global financial crisis (Recommendation 13):

[40] Cotality, *Housing Affordability Report*, November 2025.

PART OF THE CHAIN	REGIONAL HOUSING REVOLUTION
Land	Serviced public land in host towns, including former mine land released through closure
Approvals	A code-assessed, expedited pathway for single-level homes to approved designs
Builders	Pre-qualified, licensed builders with a clean record, contracted in volume
Protection	A performance bond held by government, from which defects are fixed without litigation
Finance	Government-backed, low-deposit lending for workers and residents of host regions
Allocation	A reserved share for people leaving family and domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness

Providing more supply where it is cheapest to build, and good reasons for people to move there, eases housing pressure **without asking homeowners in the cities to accept falling prices** and brings the regions back to life.

CASE STUDY 5

Building the Education Revolution: How fast Australia can build

$16.2bn
Committed in 2009 in response to the global financial crisis

9,540
Schools eligible for new or upgraded buildings

Half the time
Primary school projects were to be delivered in half the time usually allowed

What it did: Building the Education Revolution, announced in February 2009, funded new halls, libraries and classrooms in schools across the country. The federal government set the money and the deadlines; the states delivered with standard designs and established builders, and New South Wales legislated so that projects did not need ordinary council approval. Within six months about 10,700 primary school projects had been approved.

What went wrong: Speed came at a price in places. The BER Implementation Taskforce found in December 2010 that complaints came from only about 3 percent of schools, but that value for money was uneven: 13 of the 17 projects it found had failed on value for money were in New South Wales.

The lesson: When the federal government funds and the states clear the planning path, Australia can put thousands of buildings on the ground in two years. To protect value, add pre-qualified builders, standard designs and a performance bond from which defects are fixed without litigation. That is Recommendation 13.

Sources: Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister, media release, 3 February 2009; Australian National Audit Office, Audit Report No. 33 2009–10; BER Implementation Taskforce, *First Report*, December 2010.

CASE STUDY 6

Eyre and Penfield, South Australia: The solution, ready to test on state land

1,900	≈ 750	≈ 1,150
Homes planned at Eyre when Renewal SA partnered with a developer in 2010	Homes built in 16 years, with a shopping centre and sporting fields	Homes still to be built, on land now back with Renewal SA

What happened: Penfield, north of Adelaide, was acquired by the Commonwealth in 1940 for the Salisbury explosives factory and later housed defence research beside RAAF Base Edinburgh. In 2010, the state's development agency, Renewal SA, partnered with a developer to build 1,900 homes on 120 ha at Eyre. By September 2026, about 750 were complete. On 29 September 2026, the developer, AVID Property Group, announced it was walking away to focus on the eastern seaboard. Renewal SA has taken back the rest of the project. AVID is to finish its current stages by mid-2027, and the state will seek a new private development partner. The Premier said the developer had not been building homes at the pace the government wanted.

What is there already: The hard parts are done. About 750 homes are already built at Eyre, with a shopping centre and sporting fields, and the rest of the land is back in public hands. Next door, the Edinburgh industrial precinct has hosted a Tier III data centre since 2016, beside RAAF Base Edinburgh and the Defence Science and Technology Group, organisations that rely on secure data. And the horticulture district at Virginia, a short distance west, already grows with recycled water from the Bolivar treatment plant.

The solution, applied: Rather than hand the remaining 1,150 homes to another developer on the same terms, Renewal SA could keep the land public and deliver them as the first tranche of a Regional Housing Revolution: standard designs, pre-qualified builders who lodge performance bonds, and a code-assessed approval pathway (Recommendation 13), with low-deposit lending and the price target for buyers (Recommendation 14). Any data centre in the precinct would be built underground on state land, with the state as landlord and the facility connected to public fibre, and part of its rent would go to a Regional Renewal Fund for the roads and fields still to be built (Recommendations 8 and 12). Its heat could go to the greenhouses nearby (Recommendation 15).

The lesson: Handing public land to a private developer delivered fewer than half the homes in 16 years. The state has the land, the town centre and the jobs next door. Like a mine, a former munitions site is public land waiting for a second life, and Eyre is ready to test the model now.

Sources: ABC News, 29 September 2026; InDaily, 29 September 2026; The Urban Developer, 30 September 2026; history of the Salisbury explosives factory and the Weapons Research Establishment; Data Center Map, Edinburgh data centre listing; Primary Industries and Regions SA, Recycled water for horticulture. No data centre is currently proposed for the site.

CASE STUDY 7

Lismore and the Northern Rivers: A public quarry for a city still rebuilding

14.4 m
Peak of the Wilsons River at Lismore on 28 February 2022, about 2.3 metres above the previous record

0 of 4,382
Homes or lots delivered by the Resilient Lands Program, as at 31 March 2026

2039
Extraction approved until then at Blakebrook Quarry, owned and run by Lismore City Council

What happened: On 28 February 2022 the Wilsons River peaked at 14.4 metres, and a second flood followed on 30 March. Across the Northern Rivers, 13 people died and 4,055 properties were left uninhabitable. Lismore has flooded 155 times since 1850, and the state is now buying back homes to retreat from the worst of the floodplain. Four years on, the recovery is unfinished. In May 2026 the NSW Auditor-General reported that the buyback target of the $880 million Resilient Homes Program had been cut from 1,345 homes to 1,000, and that the $100 million Resilient Lands Program had not yet delivered any of the 4,382 homes or lots expected. Pod village residents have been told to leave by mid-December, and the chair of the Lismore Alliance, which represents 6,000 members, calls flood risk “the single biggest constraint on the economic future of this region”.

What is there already: Gold was worked near the Evans River in the 1890s, and gold, silver and copper were mined at Drake, in the ranges to the west, from 1853 until the early 1990s, leaving 391 shafts, 250 tunnels and 2,726 trenches and pits. Closer in, Lismore City Council owns and runs Blakebrook Quarry on Nimbin Road, about 9 kilometres from the city, which has produced basalt since 1979 and is approved to extract 600,000 tonnes a year until 2039. The public school next door is on the state’s schools network, and Southern Cross University’s Lismore campus is on AARNet, which kept residents, police, emergency services and medical facilities online during the 2022 floods. Transgrid’s 330/132 kV substation at Lismore supplies the region.

The solution, applied: Plan Blakebrook’s second life now. The council would keep the site and lease the void to a data centre operator (Recommendations 3 and 8), as an alternative to the regional landfill it is investigating there; councillors endorsed the quarry for further investigation in September 2025, but no decision has been made. The grid upgrade the facility needs would lay public fibre in the same works (Recommendation 7). A fixed share of the rent would go to a Regional Renewal Fund for buybacks, house raising and the catchment flood works that CSIRO modelling found would have lowered the 2022 flood in Lismore by 2.07 metres, now the subject of a $3 million feasibility study (Recommendation 12). New homes for flood-affected residents would go on higher ground through the Regional Housing Revolution (Recommendation 13).

The lesson: Lismore has public land, public fibre and a pressing need for a steady income to finish its recovery. It also shows why every site must be tested before it is listed: the school beside the quarry was badly damaged in 2022, the council was penalised in 2016 for not completing a required groundwater assessment for the quarry’s south pit, and in July 2024 a transmission fault forced 40 megawatts of load shedding that cut power to about 24,500 customers. Many residents believe promises made after the flood were not kept, so the community would need to see exactly where the money goes.

Sources: Audit Office of NSW, Flood housing response, 22 February 2024, and The Resilient Homes and Resilient Lands Programs, 20 May 2026; ABC News, 20 May and 30 July 2026; The Guardian, 18 October 2026; Journal of Australasian Mining History, 2020; IndyNR, 29 July 2025; Lismore City Council; Quarry, 2016; The Echo, July 2024 and May 2026; NSW School Infrastructure; AARNet. The Blakebrook option is Handle My Complaint’s proposal; no data centre is proposed for the site.

CASE STUDY 8

Queensland: A 2 percent deposit, with half the places held for the regions

2%	50%	$201,000
Minimum deposit under both Queensland schemes, with no lenders mortgage insurance on the state loan	Of Boost to Buy places reserved for homes outside South-East Queensland	Household income limit for the state loan in 45 eligible regional areas, against $141,000 elsewhere

What they do: The Queensland Housing Finance Loan is a state government home loan for people who can afford the repayments but struggle to save a deposit. The minimum deposit is 2 percent, there is no lenders mortgage insurance, and repayments start at up to 35 percent of gross household income. Boost to Buy, run by Queensland Treasury, is a shared equity scheme: with a 2 percent deposit on a home worth up to $1 million, the state contributes up to 30 percent of the price of a new home or 25 percent of an existing one. Its funding was doubled to $330 million in December 2025, for up to 2,000 first-home buyers, and half the places are reserved for regional Queensland.

What happened: By the end of September 2026, the South-East Queensland places in Round 2 of Boost to Buy had all been allocated, while regional places were still available. A regional trial of the state loan, which lifts its income limit to $201,000 in 45 local government areas, closes on 31 October 2026.

The lesson: Queensland has already built the finance half of a Regional Housing Revolution: a state lender that accepts a 2 percent deposit, and a shared equity scheme that holds half its places for the regions. Finance helps buyers into a home; the regions also need new homes near new jobs for buyers to choose. Pair Queensland's finance with homes built on public land near converted mines, and the deposit gap and the supply gap close together. That is Recommendations 13 and 14.

Sources: Queensland Government, 'Low-deposit home loan', updated 2 October 2026; Queensland Treasury, 'Boost to Buy' and 'Boost to Buy overview', updated 30 September 2026; Queensland Treasury, 'Big boost for Queensland first home buyers', 12 December 2025.

Housing is also the gateway to safety. In 2024–2025, about 117,000 people who sought help from specialist homelessness services – two in five of all clients – had experienced family and domestic violence. A woman cannot leave a violent home if there is nowhere to go. A share of every tranche should be reserved for people leaving violence and/or experiencing homelessness (Recommendation 14).[41]

D.4 Lower bills

Rent returned to the region
Roads, water and services funded from tenancy and heat revenue, without a new tax on residents (Rec 12).

Homes that cost less
The Regional Housing Revolution targets the largest item in most household budgets (Recs 13, 14).

Fibre revenue returned
Data centre connectivity revenue lowers NBN wholesale prices and the network's call on public equity (Rec 10).

Fewer costs on neighbours
Full cost recovery keeps grid and water upgrades off household bills; voids avoid nuisance claims (Recs 9, 11).

[41] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25*.

ELEMENT 5 OF 5

Reuse heat generated

In Europe, data centre heat warms homes, pools and whole towns, and the law increasingly requires it. In Australia, all that heat goes into the air.

WHAT WE ASK

Rec 15 A heat reuse plan in every lease of a public void and every approval above 1 MW: a feasibility test, a rising target, and heat rights set in the lease

Full text of each recommendation in Chapter 7.

Almost all the electricity a data centre uses ends up as heat. An above-ground facility spends a large share of its energy getting rid of that heat, which then warms the streets around it. Captured in a sealed loop and lifted with a heat pump, the same heat becomes a product a town can use.[42]

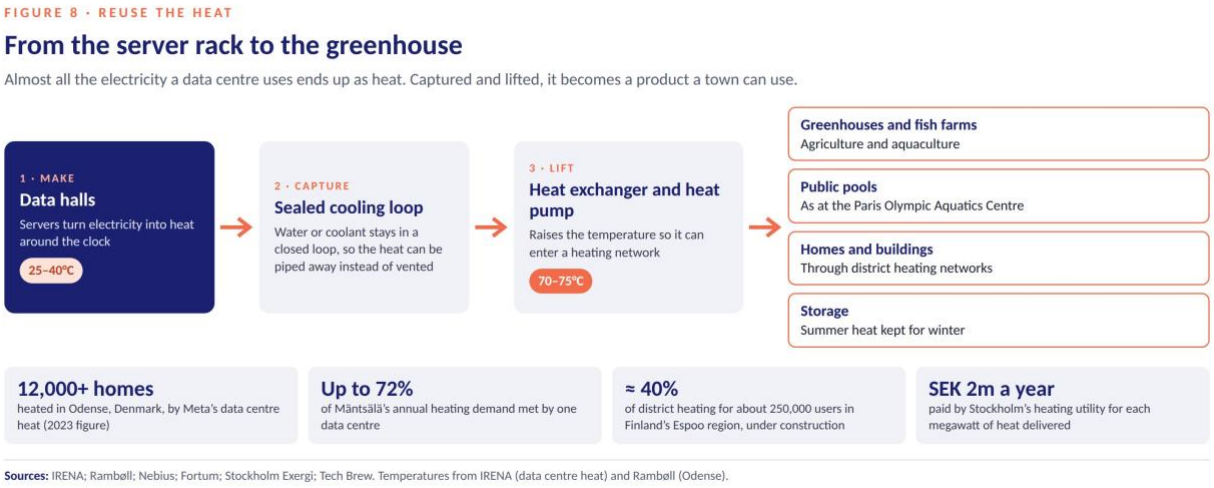


Figure 8. How data centre heat is captured, lifted and reused.

[42] International Renewable Energy Agency, 'Waste heat recovery from data centres'.

CASE STUDY 9

Mäntsälä, Finland: The town a data centre heats

2015–2016	Up to 72%	54%
Heat recovery phased in, the first in Finland	Of the town's annual heating demand covered by data centre heat	Cut in the town's heating emissions in 2024

What happened: A data centre built by Yandex, now operated by Nebius, in the small town of Mäntsälä north of Helsinki began feeding its waste heat into the local district heating network in 2015–2016. In the past two years it has supplied more than 30 GWh of heat, even while running below full capacity.

Why it matters: Mäntsälä is a regional town, not a capital city. It shows that one large data centre can become a town's main source of heat and cut its heating emissions by more than half.

The lesson: A data centre in a regional host community can give back more than jobs and rent. Plan for the heat before the facility is built. That is Recommendation 15.

Source: Nebius, 'Turning heat into a resource'.

E.1 Europe now requires it

- **European Union:** Since 11 October 2025, data centres with a rated energy input above 1 MW must reuse their waste heat, unless they can show it is not technically or economically feasible under the Energy Efficiency Directive.[43]
- **Germany:** New data centres with a grid connection of 300 kW or more must reuse at least 10 percent of their energy as heat from July 2026, rising to 15 percent in 2027 and 20 percent in 2028.[44]

Australia has no equivalent rule.

E.2 What it means for Australia

Australia has little district heating, so the Nordic model won't transfer directly. The opportunity lies in other uses: **fish farms, greenhouses, food processing, public pools** and other low-temperature industrial heat. Many of these suit regional and mining towns, where a data centre in a former mine sits close to farms and industry.

Going underground makes heat recovery easier, not harder. A data centre in a mine can't vent heat passively the way a surface building does. It needs engineered cooling loops and shafts, and that same engineering delivers the heat in a form that can be piped to a user.

Heat also has a market price. Stockholm's heating utility pays about **SEK 2 million a year for each megawatt** of recovered heat delivered.[45] Where the state owns the void, that value is set in **the lease** (Element 3).

[43] Directive (EU) 2023/1791 (Energy Efficiency Directive), Article 26(6); Covington & Burling, 'The EU's Energy Efficiency Directive and its impact on datacenters', April 2025.

[44] *Energy Efficiency Act* (EnEfG), section 11; White & Case, 'Data center requirements under the new German Energy Efficiency Act'.

[45] Stockholm Exergi, 'Heat recovery'.

PART THREE

Getting it done

Where to start, who does what, how to pay for it, and how Australians will know it is working.

4 Where to start
5 How to deliver it
6 Measuring what matters
7 The 16 decisions

CHAPTER 4

Where to start

Three demonstrations will prove the model in Australian ground and set the standard lease and heat terms for everything that follows.



Figure 9. Candidate demonstration regions, towns with public fibre, and a mine already given a second life.

4.1 Three demonstrations

Recommendation 16 asks for three demonstration sites in different states, including at least one open-cut and one metropolitan underground site. The places in Figure 9 are candidates for assessment, not decisions:

TYPE	CANDIDATE	WHY
Open cut	Leigh Creek, SA	A former state coalfield, back under full state control since 1 January 2024. The state can offer tenure and set the terms directly.
Coal region	Upper Hunter, NSW, or Latrobe Valley, Vic	Coal voids, heavy transmission and grid capacity as coal generation retires, in regions already attracting private data centre proposals.
Metropolitan underground	Kogarah, Sydney	Close to the airport, fibre, power and customers. Data halls underground, green space above.

4.2 What each demonstration should prove

1

The ground

Geotechnical, groundwater and flood performance, assessed before listing.

2

The lease

A standard long-term lease, tested with a real tenant.

3

The connection

A federally owned fibre path, with NBN Co as supplier.

4

The heat

A local heat partner: a greenhouse, fish farm, pool or industrial user.

5

The consent

Agreement with Traditional Owners and a community benefit agreement, before work starts.

6

The return

The first Regional Renewal Fund payments and a first tranche of regional homes.

CHAPTER 5

How to deliver it

Our proposed compact approved through National Cabinet, clear roles for each level of government, and a funding model that largely pays for itself.

5.1 A Mine Life-Cycle Compact

The land, planning, water, heat and housing levers sit with the states; the fibre, security and finance levers sit with the federal government. The plan therefore needs an intergovernmental agreement. National Cabinet has already agreed to develop mandatory data centre standards for energy, water and land use.[46]

A **Mine Life-Cycle Compact** would extend that agreement to ownership, connectivity, heat and public return, so that the end of every mine's first life is planned as the start of its second, with a lead federal minister, a small implementation unit and an annual public report (Recommendation 16).

5.2 Who does what

PARTY	ROLE
Federal government	The national data centre legislation; public fibre and NBN Co's mandate; critical infrastructure security; heat reuse standards; housing finance; national reporting
State and territory governments	The void register and leasing; heat rights in leases; closure and rehabilitation criteria; planning pathways; full cost recovery for power and water; housing delivery and builder bonds; the Regional Renewal Fund
Local government	Host-community planning; local roads and services funded through the Regional Renewal Fund; community benefit agreements; local heat users
Traditional Owners	Agreement before any listing; an equity or revenue share in conversions
Industry	Tenancy, fit-out and operation; heat recovery; local jobs and procurement; public reporting under the lease

5.3 First decisions, by portfolio

Each portfolio has one decision it can take first. Most use powers ministers already hold.

PORTFOLIO	FIRST DECISION	RECS
First Ministers, through National Cabinet	Agree the Mine Life-Cycle Compact and three demonstration sites	16
Federal minister leading the data centre legislation	Write underground by default, public fibre, heat reuse plans and public return into the legislation	1, 7, 15
National communications infrastructure	Direct NBN Co to supply data centre connectivity and report that revenue separately	7, 10

[46] Prime Minister of Australia, 'Meeting of National Cabinet', communiqué, 26 August 2026.

PORTFOLIO	FIRST DECISION	RECS
Federal housing	Partner with the states on the Regional Housing Revolution and government-backed, low-deposit lending	13, 14
State resources and mining	Require closure plans to assess a second life, publish the register of state-controlled voids, and recognise cut, build and cover	2, 3, 4
State treasury and lands	Adopt the standard lease and establish the Regional Renewal Fund	8, 12
State planning	Require metropolitan data centres to be built underground, assess nuisance exposure, and open a code-assessed housing pathway	5, 11, 13
State energy and water	Require full cost recovery for grid and water connections and recycled or non-drinking water for cooling	9
Indigenous affairs, federal and states	Secure agreement with Traditional Owners before any listing, with an equity or revenue share	6

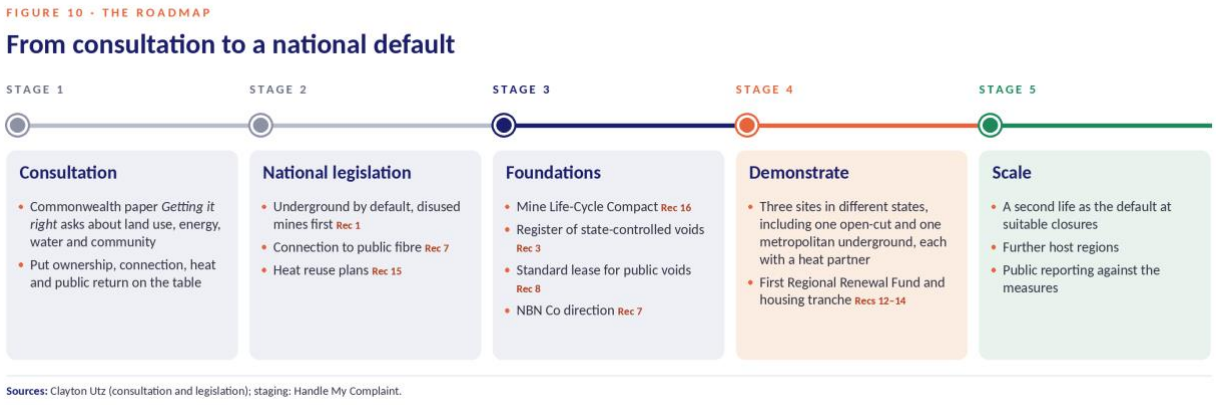


Figure 10. The roadmap from consultation to a national default.

5.4 Paying for it

The plan is largely self-funding. The voids have already been dug and the backbone fibre already laid, both at public expense. Tenancy rent and heat sales fund the Regional Renewal Fund; NBN Co's connectivity revenue offsets its call on public equity; credit for conversions reduces the rehabilitation liability the states carry; and homes built on public land to standard designs cost less than homes bought on the open market.

The main upfront costs are the void register, site assessments and the lending guarantees for the housing program.

5.5 Objections and risks: Addressing the concerns

OBJECTION OR RISK	RESPONSE
Rent at 5–10 percent of revenue makes projects uneconomic	The range is indicative; rent for each void would be set by competitive tender. The site brings its own savings: excavation done, lower cooling energy, secure tenure and a connected site. On private land the operator pays rent anyway. The question is who receives it (Recs 8, 12).
"Governments already collect tax from data centres."	They collect payroll tax, land tax and rates, as from any business, but no rent for the land and no return on the public assets that make a site work. This plan adds a landlord's return; it does not replace tax.
"NBN Co would be competing with private carriers."	NBN Co stays wholesale only, as the law requires, selling through carriers and retailers on published, non-discriminatory terms. Carriers keep competing on price and service, and the public network earns revenue it currently forgoes (Recs 7, 10).
"Miners should be free to convert their own voids."	This plan does not stop them. It starts with the voids the state already controls, where the public already carries the liability, and asks that every closure plan assess a second life (Recs 2, 3).
Cut, build and cover lets miners off their rehabilitation obligations	Credit applies only where a conversion meets closure criteria, and bonds are released only for work done. Where a void is better suited to a pit lake or another use, the closure plan decides (Rec 4).
A void proves unsuitable	Geotechnical, groundwater and flood assessment of every site before listing (Rec 3).
There is no nearby user for the heat	A feasibility test at planning stage and a target that rises over time, as in the EU and Germany, rather than an absolute requirement (Rec 15).
Sending rent to a regional fund reduces budget flexibility	Only a fixed share goes to the fund; the rest is general revenue. Host communities carry the local costs, and a visible return builds social licence (Rec 12).
Building the Education Revolution wasted money	It showed how fast Australia can build when the federal government funds and the states clear the planning path. Complaints came from only about 3 percent of schools. The Regional Housing Revolution adds what the BER lacked: pre-qualified builders, standard designs and performance bonds (Rec 13).
A home for about $220,000 is unrealistic	It is a target for a modest, single-level home to a standard design, on serviced public land supplied at cost, with no developer margin. Progress against it is reported publicly (Recs 13, 14).
Low-deposit lending duplicates existing schemes	It builds on them, targeting workers and residents of host regions buying homes delivered through the program, and tied to a price target so support does not simply lift prices (Rec 14).
Regional voids are too far from customers	Much data centre work, such as storage, backup, disaster recovery and training AI models, can tolerate the extra milliseconds of a regional link. Work that must be close to customers goes in metropolitan underground sites (Recs 1, 5).
The states will not hand powers to a national compact	The compact transfers no powers. Land, planning and housing stay with the states. It coordinates, building on National Cabinet's August 2026 agreement (Rec 16).
The demonstration sites aren't appropriate, and Kogarah is private land	The sites named are candidates for assessment, not decisions. Kogarah would proceed only with the landowner's agreement; otherwise another metropolitan site would be chosen (Rec 16).
Equity for Traditional Owners adds cost	Agreement before listing gives operators certainty and avoids the litigation risk the Fortescue case shows. No void is offered without agreement (Rec 6).

CHAPTER 6

Measuring what matters

What gets measured gets done. Each element has measures that can be reported publicly every year, so Australians can see whether their mines are getting a second life, and who benefits.

ELEMENT	MEASURES	STARTING POINT
1 Reuse inactive mine voids	Data centre capacity (MW) underground or in voids; voids converted or under lease; closure plans that assessed a second life	No voids converted to data centres
2 Connect to existing public fibre	Share of new data centre capacity connected to federally owned fibre; NBN Co data centre revenue	Not reported separately
3 Collect revenue from rent and fibre	State tenancy and heat revenue; rehabilitation liability discharged ($); grid and water costs recovered from operators	Nil public rent
4 Reinvest in housing and infrastructure	Regional Renewal Fund spending on roads, water and services; homes delivered at an agreed price-to-income ratio; homes allocated to people leaving violence or homelessness	8.1 × regional value-to-income
5 Reuse heat generated	Facilities with a heat reuse plan; heat reused (MWh) and share of energy reused	No national requirement

Measures should be reported through *Measuring What Matters* at the federal level and through state budget papers, with the first report published within 12 months of the compact being agreed.

CHAPTER 7

The 16 decisions

A single package, grouped by the five elements. Each shows the level of government that would lead.

These recommendations are numbered independently of the 24 in our 21 September 2026 submission and of those in our second submission. Recommendations 13 and 14 will need consultation with the building and banking industries.

Element 1 · Reuse inactive mine voids

Recommendation 1 Adopt **underground by default, with disused mines first,** as the national siting rule in the planned national data centre legislation, with surface sites approved only where a proponent shows that an underground or mine site is not feasible. *Federal and states*

Recommendation 2 Require every **mine closure plan** to assess a second life for the void and the site's roads, power, water and fibre, including data centre use, before final rehabilitation is approved. *States*

Recommendation 3 Publish a **register of state-controlled voids**, each assessed for geotechnical, groundwater, flood, power, water, fibre and heat-use suitability, and offer them to data centre operators first. *States*

Recommendation 4 Recognise **cut, build and cover** in open-cut voids in closure and rehabilitation criteria, so that, where the closure plan finds conversion the best use of the void, it counts toward rehabilitation obligations and the bonds held against them. *States*

Recommendation 5 Where a data centre genuinely needs a metropolitan site, require it to be **built underground with the surface returned** to public, housing or community use. Assess the former Kogarah Golf Club site as a demonstration. *States; New South Wales for Kogarah*

Recommendation 6 Complete native title, cultural heritage assessment and **agreement with Traditional Owners** before any void is offered for lease. Offer Traditional Owners an equity or revenue share in each conversion. *States*

Element 2 · Connect to existing public fibre

Recommendation 7 Require every data centre on public land, and every new data centre regulated as critical infrastructure, to **connect to federally owned fibre** as a primary or diverse path, and direct NBN Co to offer data centre connectivity on published, non-discriminatory wholesale terms, amending its mandate if needed. *Federal*

Element 3 · Collect revenue from rent and fibre

Recommendation 8 Keep converted voids in **public ownership** and lease them to operators as tenants on a standard long-term lease, with rent set by competitive tender as a share of the operator's revenue and paid to the state. *States*

Recommendation 9 Require operators to pay the **full cost of grid and water connections** and of any network upgrade their demand brings forward, on published standard charges, and to cool with recycled or non-drinking water under long-term supply contracts. *States*

Recommendation 10 Report **NBN Co's data centre revenue** separately and apply it to lowering wholesale prices for households and reducing NBN Co's call on public equity. *Federal*

Recommendation 11 Require planning authorities to assess **nuisance and compensation exposure** before approving large data centres near homes and businesses. *States*

Element 4 · Reinvest in housing and infrastructure

Recommendation 12 Direct a fixed share of tenancy and heat revenue to a **Regional Renewal Fund** in each host region for roads, water and sewerage, housing-enabling infrastructure and local services, including equity for regional water corporations, and report its spending publicly each year. *States*

Recommendation 13 Establish a **Regional Housing Revolution** modelled on Building the Education Revolution: code-assessed, single-level homes to standard designs on serviced public land in host regions, built by pre-qualified builders who each lodge a performance bond from which defects are fixed without litigation. *Federal and states*

Recommendation 14 Support it with **government-backed, low-deposit lending** for workers and residents of host regions, a price target of about one-fifth of today's average dwelling price (about $220,000), and a reserved share of homes for people leaving family and domestic violence and people experiencing homelessness. *Federal and states*

Element 5 · Reuse heat generated

Recommendation 15 Require a **heat reuse plan** in every lease of a public void and every approval of a data centre above 1 MW: a feasibility assessment at the planning stage, a reuse target that rises over time on the model of the EU and German rules, and lease terms that set out who owns the heat and who may sell it. *Federal and states*

Making it happen

Recommendation 16 Agree a **Mine Life-Cycle Compact** through National Cabinet that puts ownership, connectivity, heat and public return into the planned national data centre legislation, with a lead federal minister, an implementation unit, three demonstration sites (including one open-cut and one metropolitan underground site) and an annual public report against the measures in Chapter 6. *Federal and states*

OUR ASK

The voids have already been dug.
The fibre has already been laid.
The heat is already being made.

What is missing is the decision.

Australia is about to fix the location, ownership and terms of a very large body of new infrastructure for the next half century.

It can do that the way it is doing it now: on private land, on private fibre, beside homes, with the heat vented into the air, the value flowing elsewhere and the costs flowing to households.

Or it can give its **mines a second life and invest in Australia's future**.

- Build the **data centres underground**, in the **voids the state controls**.
- Connect them to **public fibre**.
- Put their **heat to work**.
- **Collect the rent**, and spend it on the **roads, water and homes** that make a **region productive** and a **life affordable**.

The country that dug the holes can be the first to fill them with its future.

CONTACT

Talk to us

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Handle My Complaint is an Australian community advocacy organisation. We help Australians lodge and escalate complaints against energy retailers, telecommunications carriers, insurers, banks and government bodies, and we build group member infrastructure for class actions. That casework shows us what happens when the cost of infrastructure is carried locally and the value flows elsewhere.

Jo Ucukalo is a civil engineer, holds a Bachelor of Financial Administration and is a member of Engineers Australia and the Australian Institute of Company Directors. She has worked on underground construction and structural assets, on electricity network investment at Ergon Energy and Energex, and with the Queensland Government on the design and delivery of Advance Queensland. She contributed to the NBN Complaint Handling Standard, served on the Australian Communications and Media Authority's Consumer Consultative Forum, and has contributed to Standards Australia committee work for more than ten years.

Jo has made more than 700 media appearances on consumer pricing, housing and utilities affordability.

Handle My Complaint consents to this submission being published in full. We would welcome the opportunity to brief ministers, their offices and agencies on the proposals in this submission and its companion.

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