



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Climate Action Committee

Mark Ruskell MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs Committee

18 September 2026

Dear Mark,

Inquiry into the environmental impacts of AI data centres

The Climate Action Committee agreed on 3 September that it would undertake an inquiry into the environmental impacts of data centres.

We have now agreed our approach to that inquiry. The remit / areas we intend to explore will be:

The inquiry will explore the potential environmental impacts of hyperscale data centres in Scotland. It will ask:

- What are the potential impacts of the operation and construction of hyperscale data centres on the environment in Scotland, including on:
 - water quality and consumption;
 - air quality;
 - nature and biodiversity, including soil quality;
 - noise pollution;
 - energy use, and associated generation (including of back up generation); and
 - emissions, including avoided emissions.
- Where there are negative impacts, can these be mitigated or avoided?
- What systems are currently in place to support avoidance or mitigation of negative environmental impacts and what is still needed?
- What can Scotland learn from other jurisdictions on the environmental impacts of hyperscale data centre operation and construction?

Contact: Climate Action Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.
Email climateaction.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

- What impact would different levels of hyperscale data centre operation and construction in Scotland have on the ability to meet carbon budgets and anticipated statutory biodiversity targets?

The inquiry will focus on understanding the environmental implications of data centres and contribute to the public and parliamentary debate on an evolving and fast-moving topic from an environmental perspective.

It will not look at specific applications for new data centres.

The Committee will produce a report on its findings.

The Committee recognises that the issue of data centres spans several committee remits and Scottish Government portfolio responsibilities. While we have agreed to focus on the environmental impacts, we recognise this is a complex issue and one which could benefit from holistic approach to scrutiny.

The Committee therefore agreed that as a first step to our work, we could contact conveners of committees to initiate discussions on our respective work programmes and plans for work in this area.

The Climate Action Committee has agreed to undertake initial exploratory evidence sessions, as well as undertake a visit, to inform our work.

I propose a meeting to discuss how our respective committees' work programmes might align and complement one another, on data centres and on scrutiny of the climate and nature crises more generally.

If you are in agreement, I will ask the clerks to liaise with the clerks to your committee.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Stuart McMillan MSP
Convener