

Canberra no shoo-in for commonwealth data centres

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Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner has issued a thinly veiled warning in the wake of the ACT government election that new datacentres servicing commonwealth organisations could be built outside Canberra.

The comments come as uncertainty persists over a new \$1 billion data-park proposed for the capital by developer Technical Real Estate to cater for growing government infrastructure requirements.

The project, which plans to use gas rather than coal to generate its own electricity, was put on hold by the Stanhope Labor government after Tuggeranong residents complained about its proximity to their houses.

"There are some parts of NSW that are closer to Parliament House than some parts of the ACT," Mr Tanner said. "If you assume you want a data centre very close to the centre of government ... we shouldn't assume automatically it will be located in the ACT."

The release of the Gershon review of government technology last week intensified pressure on federal agencies to find cheaper, more energy-efficient solutions to consolidate its 50 data centres, many of them ageing.

A key measure in the report is a saving of \$1 billion that it estimates can be gained by consolidating datacentres over the next 10 to 15 years.

A spokesman for the ACT Greens said that while data centres powered by cleaner alternatives to coal-fired electricity were the sort of industry

the ACT should be getting into, questions remained about the suitability of the location for the proposed TRE development.

TRE has repeatedly threatened to walk away from the ACT in the event approval for the proposal is knocked back — particularly the Tuggeranong location, which it claims it was largely guided to by the ACT government.

TRE director Stephen Ellis yesterday confirmed his company was already looking at alternative sites

in NSW and said investors would not stomach a switch of sites in the ACT after the current process.

Many government agencies are particularly keen on TRE's proposal because it will allow them to mitigate risk and save money by retaining their staff in Canberra.

Earlier this year a Centrelink data centre was forced into an emergency shutdown that affected social security payments caused by a electrical substation problem in the Canberra suburb of Bruce.