

NICK DAMETTO
Member for Hinchinbrook



MEDIA RELEASE

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Automation hurting local jobs

SELF-service checkouts will largely kill off entry-level local jobs for young people in small towns unless guarantees are given by major franchises to protect them, Katter's Australian Party (KAP) MPs have warned.

KAP Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto said "creeping automation" was slowly being rolled out across regional centres like Townsville, Ingham, Charters Towers and Tully, with some locals baulking at being forced to use a touchscreen.

"Local Ingham residents have voiced their concerns about being forced to use a touchscreen at McDonald's now to make their order instead of being able to do so from the counter. And the local Coles supermarket here has had their self-service section for some time," Mr Dametto said.

"For the tech-savvy younger generations, this isn't too much of a problem but we've got a growing elderly population who find it much easier to deal with someone face-to-face. However, my main concern is the negative impact self-service machines have on our young people trying to find work."

Mr Dametto said major franchises should be acutely aware of the impact self-service checkouts had on jobs in small towns and work with local chambers of commerce to guarantee a minimum number of manned checkouts.

"A checkout position at Maccas, Coles or Woolworths is an important part of the customer service experience and it worries me that many young people may never have the opportunity to work in these roles. Often, these roles help young people develop communication skills that will set them up for their entire work life," he said.

"I understand self-service checkouts are the norm in cities but there are far more opportunities and alternatives for young people in these areas. The options are far more limited in places like Ingham or Charters Towers which is what makes these positions so vital.

"Technology is a wonderful thing but the question needs to be asked – where do we draw the line when it comes to protecting people's livelihoods?"

"I particularly have a growing concern about large corporations heading towards mass automation. The trade-off has always been local jobs and if this trend continues, then all these companies are committed to doing is taking money out of our regions."

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KAP State leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter said while embracing technology was part of life, governments had a role to play in preserving people's ability to earn a living as well as the overall social fabric of the nation.

"We know that when it comes to automation, it is largely the massive corporations (often owned by overseas investors) that benefit financially from cutting down on staff," he said.

"We are not saying do not embrace technology, but where do we, as a society and as consumers, benefit from this?"

"At the KAP, we are concerned not only about any jobs lost to automation, though these will certainly be felt very acutely in rural and regional areas, but also what this trend shows in the overall corporatisation of our country.

"Gone are the days when battlers and up-and-comers could open up a corner store and do well for themselves, their family and community - these days it is the likes of Coles, Woolworths, Aldi and IGA having about 80 per cent market share.

"Now these massive companies don't even want to employ people - where does it end?"

Mr Katter said his concerns didn't end with the retail sector, with the KAP also warning about the corporatisation and automation of the Australian agricultural and transport industries.

He added that both state and federal governments also had a role to play in addressing the issue.

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