

Cabbie app makers hit back (BY DANIEL BATEMAN, Townsville Bulletin, January 26th, 2013)

THE developers of a smartphone app that allows passengers to hail cabs without going through the main call centre have hit out at Townsville Taxis for restricting use of the service.

A number of local taxi drivers have been using free app goCatch. The app allows passengers to see and hail cabs near them, enables drivers to pick up more fares and reduces taxi companies' stranglehold on the industry by bypassing call-out charges.

The taxi industry's peak body in Queensland is against people using the booking service, claiming it dangerously places passengers 'off the radar' other otherwise regulated agencies.

The manager of Townsville Taxis was caught this month posing as a passenger to catch drivers using the app.

The Queensland United Hire Drivers Association has made a complaint to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

goCatch co-founder Ned Moorfield said the manager's actions were a classic example of taxi companies trying to protect their turf.

"They don't like the fact that we're mediating the dispatch of jobs like this," he said.

"The existing networks pretty tightly controls how the jobs are dispatched, which allows them to give preferential treatment to different drivers.

"What we're all about is delivering a better service for everyone."

The Taxi Council of Queensland has argued the app does not protect customers from predatory behaviour, by operating outside of a regulated system, and allowing drivers and customers to act anonymously.

Mr Moorfield rejected this.

"This safety argument is actually a bit of a decoy," he said.

"It's actually enhancing safety because of the fact that the driver and the passenger are no longer anonymous.

"The likelihood of a passenger doing a runner on a driver and not paying their fare is much lower if the driver accepts the job through the app."

The NSW taxi industry last year launched a campaign against unauthorised apps, including goCatch, encouraging passengers to use one of 10 apps linked to existing networks.