

E-Guide | 2026 Edition

# WHICH SUPPLY CHAIN ROLES WILL AI REPLACE FIRST?

## An Australian Recruiter's Timeline

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This guide explores which supply chain, procurement and logistics roles are most at risk from AI and robotics — with a specific focus on the Australian market. Based on 15+ years of executive supply chain recruitment and weekly analysis of the ANZ jobs market, this is a practical timeline to help professionals assess where their role sits and what they should be doing about it.

**55%**

SC leaders expect AI to reduce entry-level hiring

**28%**

Procurement time ripe for automation

**\$4B+**

Coles investment in automated DCs

**20%**

Procurement roles will be new AI-driven by 2030

## SECTION 01 — WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENING IN AUSTRALIA

This isn't theoretical anymore. The largest players in Australian supply chain have already placed multi-billion dollar bets on automation and the investments keep coming.

**Coles** has committed over \$4 billion to automated distribution centres in partnership with Witron and Ocado. Their Witron-powered ADCs in Queensland and New South Wales are now operational, and they've recently announced an additional \$880 million for a third in Truganina, Victoria — capable of processing 4.6 million cartons per week. Their Ocado facilities use over 1,000 robots each on hive grids, picking and packing online grocery orders in what are essentially lights-out warehouses.

**Woolworths** has deployed automated distribution centres at Moorebank Logistics Park in western Sydney, with robotic cranes and shuttles moving thousands of crates per hour across both store replenishment and direct-to-customer fulfilment.

**Amazon** continues to expand its Australian robotics-driven fulfilment network — 75% of Amazon customer orders globally are now handled in part by robotics. Their second Australian robotics fulfilment centre opened in Melbourne recently, following the Kemps Creek facility in Western Sydney.

These aren't pilot programs. These are the new operating model. And the economics in Australia actually *accelerate* adoption — higher wages, a persistently tight labour market and vast geographic distances all improve the ROI on automation.

### THE RISK TIMELINE — ROLE BY ROLE

Not every supply chain role faces the same level of disruption, or on the same timeline. Based on the roles I'm briefed on, the roles disappearing from job boards, and conversations with hiring managers — here's how I'd categorise the risk.

#### HIGH RISK — Already Underway to 3 Years (2026–2029)

##### Warehouse Pick, Pack & Despatch Operators

Automation is hitting hardest and fastest here. Autonomous mobile robots, goods-to-person systems and robotic picking cells are replacing the manual labour model. Goods-to-person systems alone increase pick rates by 200–300%. Coles, Woolworths and Amazon are already operating at scale. Human roles shift to system oversight, exception handling and robotics maintenance.

##### Inventory and Stock Clerks

Tracking inventory levels, reordering stock and maintaining records is increasingly handled by AI-driven systems and IoT sensors. Cycle counting is being automated through RFID and drone-based scanning. The role moves from counting to analysing — and that distinction matters.

##### Transactional Procurement (PO Processing, Invoice Matching)

Gartner estimates nearly 28% of procurement time is spent on transactional sourcing — managing bids, POs and routine supplier interactions. KPMG simulations suggest AI could automate 50–80% of current procurement tasks. Strategic procurement professionals who manage complex negotiations and category strategy remain essential.

##### Data Entry and Basic Reporting Roles

Any role primarily focused on extracting data from one system and putting it into another is at immediate risk. AI tools already build dashboards and generate exception reports faster than a human. The analyst who can interpret the output and recommend actions keeps their seat.

## **MEDIUM RISK — 3 to 7 Years (2029–2033)**

### **Demand Planners and Forecasters**

AI-driven demand sensing tools from Blue Yonder, o9 Solutions and Kinaxis are already outperforming traditional statistical methods. They incorporate real-time signals — weather, social media, competitor pricing — that a human planner can't process at the same speed. Coles already uses AI models based on 100+ variables. You'll need fewer planners, but those who remain must understand how to tune and override AI models.

### **Logistics Coordinators and Freight Booking Roles**

Route optimisation, carrier selection, load planning and freight booking are increasingly handled by TMS platforms with embedded AI. The coordinator who spends their day booking freight and chasing ETAs is at significant risk. Logistics professionals who manage carrier relationships, negotiate contracts and design network strategy will grow in importance.

### **Production Planning and Scheduling Clerks**

Machine learning can predict production needs and automatically schedule based on capacity, materials and demand signals. Production planners who manage complex multi-site scheduling, disruption scenarios and cross-functional coordination remain essential.

### **Category Analysts and Spend Analysts (Procurement)**

AI can now analyse spend data, benchmark pricing and flag contract anomalies faster than an analyst in Excel. Gartner predicts by 2027, half of procurement contract management will be AI-enabled. Category managers who combine insight with negotiation skills and cross-functional influence remain in demand.

## **LOW RISK — 7+ Years (2033+)**

### **Supply Chain Directors and VP/C-Suite Roles**

Strategic leadership, board communication, cross-functional influence and organisational change management are deeply human capabilities. Nobody is putting an AI agent in charge of a \$40M logistics budget, an EA negotiation, or a board presentation on network strategy.

### **Strategic Sourcing and Supplier Relationship Managers**

Complex negotiations with strategic suppliers require trust, cultural understanding and the ability to read a room. Deloitte found 57% of SC executives believe creativity and critical thinking significantly outperform AI. Supplier relationship management is the embodiment of this.

### **Supply Chain Network Design and Strategy**

Designing distribution networks, making facility location decisions and modelling end-to-end scenarios involves complex trade-offs and strategic judgement. AI tools can model scenarios, but interpretation remains human.

### **Warehouse and Logistics Site Managers**

Even in highly automated facilities, someone needs to lead the people, maintain safety culture, navigate industrial relations and drive continuous improvement. People management, safety leadership and site-level decision-making are fundamentally human. The tools change; the leadership requirement doesn't.

## SECTION 02 — THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Australia's adoption curve has unique characteristics that supply chain professionals should understand.

**Higher wages accelerate ROI.** Australian warehouse workers earn significantly more than counterparts in Southeast Asia or the US. That makes the payback period on automation investment shorter, meaning Australian companies have stronger incentives to automate sooner.

**Geographic spread slows deployment.** The economics of full automation work brilliantly for a Coles NDC in Sydney processing millions of cartons a week. They work less well for a regional distributor with 5,000 SKUs in Townsville. Mid-market companies will be slower than the majors.

**The labour shortage is real.** Australia's supply chain sector has faced persistent talent shortages since COVID. This drives automation — companies aren't replacing people, they're filling gaps that people can't fill. Demand for robotics technicians and automation engineers is growing as a result.

**Defence is creating new roles.** The AUKUS pipeline and broader defence build-out is generating supply chain roles that didn't exist five years ago. Defence logistics, cleared supply chain professionals and specialist procurement roles in aerospace are growing, not shrinking.

## SECTION 03 — WHAT NEW ROLES WILL AI CREATE?

Gartner predicts that by 2030, 20% of procurement professionals will occupy new AI-driven roles that don't exist today. A survey of 509 supply chain leaders found that 86% believe agentic AI adoption will require completely new processes for developing talent pipelines.

Roles already emerging include **AI and Automation Product Owners** managing implementation and continuous improvement of AI tools within supply chain operations; **Robotics Fleet Managers** overseeing autonomous warehouse robots and optimising human-robot collaboration; **Supply Chain Data Governance Leads** ensuring the data quality AI depends on; and **Digital Supply Chain Analysts** combining traditional supply chain knowledge with data science and AI literacy.

*These roles didn't exist 5 years ago. In another 5 years they'll be standard requirements on every mid-to-large supply chain org chart.*

## SECTION 04 — WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT IT?

**If you're in a transactional role** — data entry, PO processing, basic reporting — start upskilling now. Learn Tableau or Power BI. Get comfortable with AI tools. Understand how WMS and TMS platforms work at a system level. The window to transition is open, but it won't be forever.

**If you're in a mid-level analytical or planning role** — your job isn't going away, but it's changing fast. The value shifts from producing the analysis to interpreting and acting on it. Build your stakeholder communication skills and commercial acumen. When updating your resume and LinkedIn, focus on decisions influenced and outcomes delivered, not just reports produced.

**If you're in leadership** — AI makes you more effective, not redundant. But you need to understand it. Leaders who can't discuss AI, automation and digital supply chain strategy will find themselves left behind. You don't need to code, but you need to know what's possible.

**If you're hiring** — rethink your job descriptions. The best supply chain hires in 2026 combine operational experience with digital fluency and adaptability. Look for people who've implemented systems, driven change and embraced new technology.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 01 High risk roles (warehouse operators, stock clerks, transactional procurement, data entry) are already being automated at scale by Coles, Woolworths and Amazon in Australia
- 02 Medium risk roles (demand planners, logistics coordinators, category analysts) will transform significantly over the next 3–7 years — fewer people, higher skill requirements
- 03 Low risk roles (directors, strategic sourcing, network design, site managers) remain fundamentally human — leadership, negotiation and strategic judgement are not automatable
- 04 Australian economics accelerate adoption — higher wages and labour shortages improve automation ROI, making ANZ one of the fastest adoption markets globally
- 05 New roles are emerging — AI product owners, robotics fleet managers, data governance leads. Gartner predicts 20% of procurement roles by 2030 will be jobs that don't exist today
- 06 Upskill now — regardless of your level, digital fluency and AI literacy are becoming baseline expectations across all supply chain roles

## THE BOTTOM LINE

AI and robotics aren't coming for every supply chain job in Australia. But they are fundamentally reshaping which roles exist, what they look like and what skills they require. The professionals who thrive will be the ones who move up the value chain — from execution to analysis, from analysis to strategy, from strategy to leadership. The ones who resist won't have that luxury.

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