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Body

Fortescue chairman Andrew Forrest has told his leadership team they must commit to corporate diversity and support for same-sex couples, prompting energy boss Mark Hutchinson to issue an apology for how he handled being linked to a religious group that promotes anti-LGBTQIA+ values.

Dr Forrest and Mr Hutchinson both wrote internal messages to appease **Fortescue** staff on Sunday night, after Mr Hutchinson was required to square the company's inclusive values with his directorship of Christian organisation Alpha International, which believes in a strictly heteronormative sexual ideology.

Alpha International broadcasts video sermons that tell teenagers that Jesus wants to "guide" their sexuality and that the Bible is "clear" that sex should exclusively occur between men and women within marriage.

Mr Hutchinson declined to comment for a fortnight when The Australian Financial Review asked him whether those views were compatible with **Fortescue**'s stated diversity values, which include support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex and asexual people.

He broke his silence on Friday with generalised references to his love for diversity, but no explicit assurance for LGBTQIA+ employees. The message prompted some **Fortescue** staff to raise their concerns with the board.

Dr Forrest's comments appeared to validate their anguish.

"I understand and acknowledge exactly what you felt, and I thank you for bringing it to me," said Dr Forrest in the note to staff. "I would like to reassure you all on behalf of our board, that we are resolutely committed to the cause of equal rights. We expect and require the same of our leadership.

"We deeply value **Fortescue**'s LGBTQIA+ community. At a personal level, I stand with you."

Mr Hutchinson issued his own apology on Sunday night when he declared his support for sexual equality at **Fortescue**.

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"After speaking with some of you over the past few days, I am aware that by failing to clarify my views on same-sex relationships in my comments last week that I have let you down," he said.

"This was certainly not my intention, and I apologise unreservedly. I wish to state clearly that I am supportive of everyone in a same-sex marriage and same-sex relationships and value the LGBTQIA+ community. I believe that all of us are equal, and I accept and support every member of our team."

Mr Hutchinson remains a director of Alpha, according to corporate records.

"I have always supported and lived by all **Fortescue** values and policies and this is what leads me every day in my role as energy CEO," he said.

Fortescue has two chief executives, Mr Hutchison and Dino Otranto, who runs the company's iron ore business.

Dr Forrest said **Fortescue**'s commitment to diversity was not just about social benefit, but designed to ensure the company had access to the best minds.

"If we are to stop the uncontrolled march of climate change, we need every mind at the table. Focused and free. That means working relentlessly to cultivate a culture where everyone feels comfortable to bring their full self to work," he said.

Fortescue has an in-house community of LGBTQIA+ staff called Fortitude. The WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry has praised the company for its work on corporate diversity.

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