



Minderoo in WorkSafe stoush

The Australian

October 21, 2024 Monday

Australian2 Edition

Copyright 2024 Nationwide News Pty Limited All Rights Reserved

Section: BUSINESS; Pg. 18

Length: 819 words

Byline: Brad Thompson

Body

Western Australia's workplace safety watchdog has issued Andrew and Nicola Forrest's \$8bn philanthropic foundation with an improvement notice in the fallout from an incident where one of its employees needed to take extended time off work.

WorkSafe WA has given the Minderoo Foundation until January to comply with the notice, which is linked to an internal update of the charity's guidelines for dealing with matters such as psychosocial safety, and any employee concerns about sexual and other forms of harassment.

A WorkSafe spokeswoman confirmed Minderoo had been issued with the improvement notice and given a compliance deadline.

It is understood the notice was issued after WorkSafe inquiries sparked by an employee taking 10 days or more off work to deal with psychosocial trauma.

Under WA regulations, Minderoo was required to self-report the injury because of the length of time the woman spent off work.

The improvement notice was issued after a WorkSafe inspector spoke to senior figures at Minderoo and was told the foundation had started to update its reporting guidelines and procedures.

Minderoo was given five months to complete the update and to roll out appropriate staff training in line with its guidelines.

There is no suggestion Minderoo did not handle the matter properly or that the incident is connected to last week's announcement that the Forrests were stepping down as co-chairs of Minderoo.

High-profile lawyer and businessman Allan Myers will take the reins as Minderoo chair while the Forrests, who announced their separation last year, remain on the board.

Minderoo in WorkSafe stoush

Minderoo confirmed it had self-reported an incident to WorkSafe and received an improvement notice. "We notified WorkSafe of an isolated incident," a spokesman said.

"The matter is confidential, and it is not appropriate to discuss the incident. However, as soon as we became aware of the incident we took immediate action.

"We take all matters relating to safety seriously. While we have policies, training, reporting and support services in place, this improvement notice reinforces the work already under way and the need to continuously improve." In a joint statement last week, the Forrests said it was an appropriate time to step aside as co-chairs with Minderoo's 2030 strategy finalised and being rolled out. Dr Forrest also said he wanted to focus on his role as executive chair of iron ore miner **Fortescue**.

The WorkSafe revelations come amid rumblings about the workplace culture at Minderoo, where 150 staff have been shown the door since April as part of -efforts to ensure more funds go -towards causes that include helping vulnerable communities and protecting oceans.

One former employee, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said they had concerns about psychosocial safety at Minderoo. "There is clearly a cultural problem, I don't think that is a great secret," the employee said.

Another source at Minderoo spoke of unrealistic workloads and being pressed to work on tasks outside their employment contract. Some of the concerns were borne out in a staff survey.

Others have praised the Forrests and Minderoo CEO John Hartman for their achievements in philanthropy and leadership through the foundation's overhaul.

Minderoo became one of world's biggest philanthropic foundations in June last year when the Forrests tipped in 220 million shares in iron ore miner **Fortescue**. The shares were worth about \$5bn at the time and represented about a fifth of their total shareholding in the miner.

The foundation, started by the couple more than 20 years ago, subsequently went through a shake-up and staff clean-out. The reset included a new structure and executive team, and cutting the workforce from about 350 to 200.

Apart from Mr Hartman, the rest of the Minderoo nine-member executive team are women.

The foundation made one of its biggest grants last year to a gender fund aimed at achieving a fairer world for women and girls.

The watchdog took **Fortescue** to court last year, alleging the miner had failed to supply work safety authorities with documents relating to 34 cases of -alleged sexual harassment.

For-tescue was charged with 34 counts of refusing or failing to comply with a requirement to provide documents to a WorkSafe inspector within a specified period.

The legal showdown involved legislation introduced after a WA parliamentary inquiry shed light on sexual harassment and assaults on women in the mining industry. **Fortescue** said at the time that it did not want to reveal the identity of those mentioned in the documents to WorkSafe inspectors, but was "committed to upholding the highest standards of workplace health and safety and has zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour in the workplace". WorkSafe's dropped the charges after reaching agreement with **Fortescue** on an "enforceable undertaking" that included handing over the documents. and a commitment to tackle inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Load-Date: October 20, 2024