



Fortescue boss leads anti-gay group

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Body

The chief executive of **Fortescue's** energy business, Mark Hutchinson, has assumed a leadership role at a religious organisation that says sex should exclusively be between married heterosexual couples, despite the iron ore giant's stated support for sexual and gender diversity.

Mr Hutchinson and wife Angelina became directors of Alpha International last year, putting them at the helm of a global Christian group that seeks to transform society through a "re-evangelisation of the nations".

London-based Alpha offers courses to help people "discover and develop a relationship with Jesus". Some 1.8 million watched its videos in the past year alone. The courses are aimed at teenagers, those preparing for marriage, and couples trying to salvage or "affair-proof" their marriage. The courses also preach abstinence before marriage, tell married people to serve their partner's sexual needs even when they don't feel like it, and claim that prayer can cure illnesses such as cancer.

Mr Hutchinson does not appear in the video courses but is one of 17 directors of the global organisation. He is also a director of Alpha International and Alpha Australia National Office.

In one episode of the Alpha Youth series, Canadian pastor Jason Ballard told his teenage audience that "Jesus wants to guide us" in our sexuality.

"Have you ever thought about the idea that God invented sex? The Bible is clear about it. Sex is designed for a man and a woman in the commitment of marriage," he said. "God invented sex, and it has the power to bring people together, build families and give life, and because it is powerful, it can also cause a lot of damage when it is misused."

Mr Ballard's comments are one of several instances in Alpha video courses where sex is exclusively depicted as an act between a man and a woman.

Fortescue has positioned itself as a champion of sexual and gender diversity and supports this through a dedicated employee group called Fortitude. The company won an award in July from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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of Western Australia for its diversity program, and in 2022 it painted one of its mining trucks in rainbow colours as a show of support. **Fortescue** was a supporter of not-for-profit group PrideWA in 2021.

Mr Hutchinson did not respond for a fortnight when asked by The Australian Financial Review whether Alpha's messages were at odds with **Fortescue's** stated values. He also declined to say whether he was happy for his team at **Fortescue** to include people in same-sex marriages.

As a result of Mr Hutchinson's silence over the past two weeks, his views on same-sex marriage are not known.

Shortly after the Financial Review published this story online yesterday, a **Fortescue** spokesman issued a statement saying the company was committed to diversity and encouraged people from different faiths and backgrounds to join its workforce.

"All our staff live by the **Fortescue** values in every aspect of their employment, fostering an inclusive, safe working environment for all employees," said the **Fortescue** spokesman.

Former National Australia Bank head Andrew Thorburn was forced to step down as chief executive of AFL club Essendon in 2022 because the team believed his religious links clashed with its values.

Mr Thorburn was, at the time, the chairman of City on a Hill Church, which posted at least one sermon that condemned abortion as murder and another that reportedly described homosexuality as a sin.

The board of Alpha International also includes British reverend Nicky Gumbel, who has raised concerns with Church of England bishops about their plan to introduce prayers for same-sex couples.

The Alpha Youth course also tells its audience that illnesses can be cured by prayer. In one episode, a woman named Crystal expresses a belief that worship cured her cancer, rather than the chemotherapy she was receiving.

In the same episode, Mr Ballard said he watched a cross-eyed girl, Shannah, have her vision fixed by prayer.

"I noticed right away when she looked at me, she had been healed. I could see it in her eyes, they were working together perfectly ... God had healed her."

In the Alpha marriage course, the host Sila Lee said staying attractive after marriage is an act of kindness to one's spouse, encouraging her audience to service their spouse's sexual desires even when they don't feel like it.

"Being responsive may mean taking the initiative to make love as a deliberate choice, even though we may be tired or feeling stressed by work, or the circumstances don't match up to our highest expectations," Ms Lee said.

The Hutchinsons became directors of an Australian registered company, Alpha Australia National Office, in November 2021. A charity of the same name and company number has been registered with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission since 2013. The charity reported more than \$9 million of revenue in the 18 months to December and donated more than \$1 million to Alpha International, the UK company that has counted the Hutchinsons as directors since last year.

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