



## *Leader inspires change*

The Australian

August 14, 2024 Wednesday

AustralianFeatureG Edition

Copyright 2024 Nationwide News Pty Limited All Rights Reserved

**Section:** BUSINESS; Pg. 16

**Length:** 1363 words

**Byline:** Zak Kirkup

### **Body**

---

PROFILE | ROSLI WHEELOCK Get to know **Fortescue**'s trailblazer in First Nations engagement, writes Zak Kirkup

Rosli Wheelock's journey to becoming a prominent figure in the mining industry and a key player at resource giant **Fortescue** is a testament to his resilience, vision, and commitment to Indigenous empowerment. His story is not only inspiring but also reflects the broader efforts of **Fortescue** to integrate First Nations values and business practices into their operations, culminating in a remarkable \$5bn investment with Indigenous service providers and suppliers.

Early life and career beginnings Mr Wheelock, a Badimaya/Wajarri man, grew up in Broome, Western Australia, spearing, and enjoying the freedom that those early days of growing up in the Kimberley had to offer.

His early life was shaped by the rich cultural heritage of classic Broome, as well as the challenges of Kimberley life. While his career began in the pearling industry, seeking more stable employment and driven by a desire to contribute more significantly to his community, he enrolled in a Certificate III in Geoscience Practices at his local TAFE, setting his sights on the mining and resources sector.

"I started mining in my early 20s," Mr Wheelock recalls.

"Mining just made sense to me personally because of the fly-in, fly-out arrangement, and it offered a clear path for career advancement." His early days in the state's biggest industry were marked by a commitment to continual learning and development, completing a degree in Mine Engineering and recently earning a Global Executive MBA.

Rise through the ranks at **Fortescue** Mr Wheelock's career at **Fortescue** spans over a decade, during which he has held numerous leadership roles. Starting off as a technical services superintendent in 2011, he quickly advanced through the ranks, as he pressed to always do more - a common theme of his life. He served as the production superintendent at Cloudbreak and later as the mining manager at both **Fortescue**'s Cloudbreak and Solomon mines, where he oversaw critical operations and drove significant improvements in efficiency and safety. In his role as general manager Eliwana, Mr Wheelock was instrumental in the operational readiness and

## Leader inspires change

management of the Eliwana Mine. His strategic vision early on, and his hands-on style saw the successful commissioning and operation of the site in December 2020.

In March 2023, Mr Wheelock took on the role of **Fortescue's** general manager First Nations, where he has been instrumental in consolidating the miner's First Nations functions into a cohesive unit. This strategic move has streamlined processes and enhanced the company's engagement with Indigenous communities, ensuring that **Fortescue's** initiatives have been both more co-ordinated and more impactful.

Passion for Indigenous empowerment Throughout his personal and professional life, Mr Wheelock has been passionate about creating opportunities for Indigenous people. His efforts align perfectly with **Fortescue's** commitment to fostering Indigenous employment, training, and business development, with some of the most ambitious targets for Indigenous engagement.

"We have a huge amount of talent within our organisation, and it's recognised which has given the opportunities that those individuals deserve on their own merit," Mr Wheelock says.

"It's not because I'm Aboriginal that I am in this critical role; it's because of my track record in running operations, managing teams and solving complex problems. However being Aboriginal does give me unique and diverse perspectives." Mr Wheelock's personal journey of continuous professional development and his rise to leadership positions within **Fortescue** serve as an inspiration to many Indigenous people. He embodies the potential for success when opportunities are made available and supported by strong organisational commitment at every level.

**Fortescue's** \$5bn commitment to Indigenous businesses **Fortescue's** "Billion Opportunities" program, which began in 2011, is designed to boost Indigenous business participation across the company's entire supply chain.

In August this year, days before this magazine was launched, the initiative saw over \$5bn in contracts awarded to more than 190 Indigenous services and suppliers. In the 2023 financial year alone, there was more than \$505m spent with Indigenous-owned businesses. Such a significant milestone underscores the company's dedication to fostering Indigenous economic independence and meaningful participation well ahead of its time.

Time and again, **Fortescue** has demonstrated its commitment to seeing Indigenous-owned businesses get a bigger share of the pie when it comes to their operations and engagement, but it's not without effort.

As Mr Wheelock says, "We have to make sure we're helping Indigenous-owned businesses remove roadblocks or where they're having issues. Our Aboriginal business development team, that's their task, to help ensure they're supporting these companies. We're really proud of this achievement.

"Even in Perth, it's not just about where our operations are. We've got things from coffee beans to stationery, we look for wherever there's opportunity for Aboriginal businesses to be involved with our organisation."

The broader impact of **Fortescue's** initiatives **Fortescue's** approach to Indigenous engagement extends well beyond business contracts. The company has over 1400 Aboriginal employees and ensures that there is comprehensive cultural awareness training and support for Indigenous heritage across the company.

These efforts are all part of **Fortescue's** broader strategy to integrate Indigenous perspectives into all aspects of their operations. "It makes you realise, when you take a step back and go, wow, we've actually achieved some pretty incredible outcomes," Mr Wheelock says.

Net zero commitment **Fortescue's** dedication to sustainability is encapsulated in its ambitious goal to achieve real zero terrestrial emissions by 2030 without the use of carbon offsets. This initiative is a testament to the company's forward-thinking approach and its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint.

"**Fortescue** emits more than 2.5 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent each year," Mr Wheelock notes. "Our \$US6.2bn investment in achieving Real Zero by 2030 is a significant step towards mitigating climate change and setting a new standard in the industry." The integration of Kooya's electric all-terrain vehicles, for example, into **Fortescue's** operations is a tangible example of how the company's sustainability goals align with its commitment to supporting

## Leader inspires change

Indigenous businesses. This collaboration with an Indigenous-owned business not only contributes to reducing carbon emissions but also ensures that Indigenous enterprises play a central role in **Fortescue**'s decarbonisation journey.

A vision for the future Mr Wheelock's vision for the future is closely tied to **Fortescue**'s ongoing efforts to uplift Indigenous communities through meaningful engagement and sustainable practices. His leadership and dedication continue to drive positive change within the company and beyond. "We are incredibly proud of our approach to First Nations engagement, whether it's through business opportunities, employment, or cultural heritage support," he says. "The journey has been challenging but immensely rewarding. I look forward to continuing this work and making a lasting impact." Rosli Wheelock's story is a powerful reminder of the transformative impact that dedicated individuals and forward-thinking companies can have on Indigenous communities in Australia. Together with **Fortescue**, it's these alignments of similar values and dedication which continue to lead the way in Indigenous engagement and environmental sustainability, and Mr Wheelock's role will undoubtedly be central to their ongoing success. With a strong foundation in operational excellence and a deep commitment to Indigenous empowerment, he is poised to help further **Fortescue**'s vision of creating a sustainable and inclusive future. His work not only benefits **Fortescue** but also sets a benchmark for other companies in the industry to follow and helps lift up Indigenous people across the country. "

**Load-Date:** August 13, 2024