



Forrest's Indigenous foes call for inquiry into Fortescue mining

The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia) - Online

June 24, 2024 Monday 12:31 AM UTC

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Length: 535 words

Highlight: The Yindjibarndi people chasing **Fortescue** for \$500 million compensation now want the independent environment regulator to consider tightening the regulation of the high-grade Solomon mine.

Body

The Yindjibarndi people of WA's Pilbara have opened another front in their war with Andrew Forrest's **Fortescue**, calling for the WA government to impose tougher conditions on the miner to protect their cultural heritage and the environment.

Michael Woodley, chief executive of the Yindjibarndi Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation said **Fortescue's** 400 square kilometres Solomon iron ore mine had destroyed or damaged 249 indigenous heritage sites and operated under more lenient conditions than more recently approved similar mines.

"Our community not only endures poor environmental and cultural management, which is a source of ongoing hurt and distress, but our native title rights and interests have also been disrespected," he said.

[Link to Image](#)

Composite image

Fortescue received environmental approval from the WA government to develop the Solomon mine in 2011.

Woodley said **Fortescue's** own Eliwana mine, approved in 2019 and Sanjiv Ridge operated by Gina Rinehart's Atlas Iron both had stricter requirements than Solomon.

In December 2023 YNAC made a detailed submission to environment minister Reece Whitby, calling on him to request the independent Environmental Protection Authority to investigate if the regulation of Solomon was adequate.

YNAC wants **Fortescue** to be required to protect cultural heritage at Solomon and adequately consult the Yindjibarndi.

It is also concerned about reduced flows into nearby creeks caused by water use at Solomon and a **Fortescue** application to increase its use of groundwater and whether there has been any use of toxic forever chemical PFAS that may have contaminated the water supply.

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Woodley said the only way to resolve the concerns was for Whitby to approve an EPA review. Whitby's office declined to comment.

Fortescue was asked if it would support changes to the conditions governing its mining at Solomon to match those imposed on other Pilbara iron ore mines more recently.

A **Fortescue** spokeswoman said the miner takes its responsibilities to protect cultural heritage seriously and is at all times compliant with WA legislation.

"We have strong relationships with the First Nations people of the Pilbara ... built on open and transparent engagement," she said.

YNAC fought **Fortescue** in the courts for years to establish its people had the native title right of exclusive possession over the area of the Solomon iron ore **Fortescue** has worked since 2013.

The battle ended in 2020 when the High Court dismissed **Fortescue**'s application to appeal to Australia's highest court, exposing the \$77 billion company to compensation claims from the Yindjibarndi for mining their land without their agreement.

Hearings for the Federal Court case on the Yindjibarndi [\\$500 million compensation case](#) started in August 2023 with at Roebourne's Fifty Cent Hall where 15 years before negotiations between Forrest and Woodley about the development of Solomon [failed to reach agreement](#).

The case is continuing, with further expert evidence expected later this year, followed by closing arguments in early 2025 and a decision, perhaps, later that year.

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Graphic

Fortescue chair Andrew Forrest and Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Michael Woodley.

Load-Date: June 23, 2024