



Pearson joins Fortescue board

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Body

Respected Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has joined the board of Andrew Forrest's **Fortescue**, describing the iron ore miner as a company with proud Australian values.

The Cape York Partnership founder and prominent campaigner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advancement has kept a low profile since the defeat of the Voice to parliament referendum in October.

Dr Forrest said he had deep respect for Mr Pearson, a lawyer and land rights campaigner, and a co-architect of the Uluru Statement from the Heart who led the Yes campaign for the Voice. "I have known and worked alongside Noel for nearly 20 years and admire and respect him greatly," Dr Forrest said.

"Noel is an innovative thinker and a passionate and formidable Australian who will bring enormous benefit and insight to our board.

"**Fortescue** is fortunate to have a diverse and global board of directors who bring different perspective and ideas, ensuring we remain one of Australia's top-performing companies."

Mr Pearson said he looked forward to making a contribution to the "diverse, progressive and successful business". "**Fortescue** is a proud Australian company that is led by its values from mine site to boardroom - something I have great respect for," he said in a statement.

Mr Pearson is respected by both sides of federal politics, and has worked closely with prime ministers dating back to Paul Keating.

His agenda - which has sometimes put him at odds with progressive figures in Indigenous and national politics - has included advocacy on land rights, Indigenous self-determination, boosting employment to cut welfare dependency, improving education, parental responsibility and tackling substance abuse.

Mr Pearson withdrew from public view after voters rejected an Indigenous Voice to federal parliament at last year's referendum.

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His **Fortescue** appointment comes as native titleholders, the Yindjibarndi people, are at the pointy end of a 15-year legal war with the company over compensation for mining on their land in Western Australia. In 2019, five Federal Court judges unanimously backed an earlier ruling by judge Steven Rares that granted exclusive native title over 2700 square kilometres to the Yindjibarndi, and effectively recognised them as private owners with a spiritual connection that allowed them to decide who came onto the land.

But **Fortescue** has never struck a compensation agreement with the Yindjibarndi people, nor received permission from the native title owners to mine their land, despite a decade of mining the steel-making commodity in north-west WA. Last month, it abandoned a target for the production of 15 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030 after making headlines on the subject for nearly six years.

During this time, **Fortescue** has experienced high turnover in its executive ranks. The executive in charge of **Fortescue**'s fledgling iron ore operations in Gabon, Julie Shuttleworth, left the company in June, adding to the growing list of senior executives who have left the company recently.

Green energy division chief financial officer Deborah Caudle quit the company in January after less than five months as part of what **Fortescue** described as a restructuring.

Mr Pearson did not respond to a request for comment.

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