



WA:Environmental concerns at Fortescue's embattled WA mine

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Traditional owners are calling on the West Australian government to impose stronger environmental protections at **Fortescue's** Solomon mine in the Pilbara region.

Since **Fortescue** Mining Group began operations just over a decade ago, Yindjibarndi Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Michael Woodley said the 400 square kilometre iron ore mine had destroyed or damaged 249 cultural heritage sites.

In addition, the traditional owners said they were concerned about the mine's ground water use, contamination of the Millstream Water Reserve, and the use of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in operations and at a nearby airfield.

However, previous environmental reviews in 2010 and 2016 did not find or mention the use of the highly toxic substance.

Mr Woodley said he had made a detailed submission to WA's Environment Minister Reece Whitby, calling on him to authorise an Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) inquiry.

"We want the EPA to report on the adequacy of the implementation conditions of the Solomon Iron Ore Project and their capacity to avoid, minimise, rehabilitate and offset its impacts to our land, water, and cultural heritage."

Mr Woodley said the impacts had occurred without the consent of traditional owners, who hold exclusive native title over the land where Solomon operates.

"The current conditions are much weaker than those in recent ministerial approvals for similar projects, including **Fortescue's** own Eliwana mine and the Sanjiv Ridge project on Nyamal Country," he added.

The calls for an inquiry are the latest in a long-running legal battle between traditional owners and billionaire Andrew Forrest's **Fortescue** Mining Group.

The Yindjibarndi people are seeking upwards of \$500 million in compensation from the mining company over its lucrative iron ore operations due to the "economic and cultural loss".

While mining operations began in 2013, the Yindjibarndi people won a native title case four years later.

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Since then **Fortescue** has neglected to enter into an Indigenous land use agreement.

Mr Woodley said the mine's lack of environmental and cultural management has been causing his community ongoing "hurt and distress".

In a statement to AAP **Fortescue** Mining Group said it took its responsibilities to protect and manage cultural heritage seriously and at all times it was compliant with relevant state and territory legislation.

"We have strong relationships with the First Nations people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia, which are built on open and transparent engagement, mutual respect and the development of comprehensive native title agreements."

Fortescue said it would continue to work closely with its First Nations partners to ensure heritage was managed sustainably and responsibly.

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