



MinRes's best bail to Fortescue

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Body

It was in May last year that Chris Ellison, the billionaire founder of Mineral Resources, made a bold and unhelpful declaration - that hybrid-work arrangements (working from home) had no place at the mining company.

"If you want to work from home, you don't work here," Ellison sniped. This clumsy, boneheaded remark, uttered in the midst of a cultural audit at the company, is typical of a proud oaf like Ellison. He wouldn't have the slightest clue that it's the women of MinRes, far more than the men, who rely so heavily on flexible working arrangements - and it's women, strangely, who he's still so eager to attract to his workforce.

MinRes has had a longstanding problem with women. Its most senior have departed and its leadership team is stacked with Chris's and Marks and Mikes and Darrens.

There are six chief executives in the upper levels of the executive, all men. There's not even a pretence of diversity, a feat in itself. The place is a giant, heaving man-cave, a boys club stinking of chauvinism and Lynx Africa.

One of the most senior women to work with Ellison was lawyer Bronwyn Grieve. She arrived in August 2022 as chief people officer and had been tasked with revamping culture at the mining company. In other words, it was her job to make the place more amenable - or just slightly less repellent - to women. Blocked at every turn, she quit within a year.

So did executive general manager Shelley Robertson, who quit MinRes in March 2023. Grieve and Robertson have since ended up at **Fortescue**, as Margin Call has learned, both now occupying seats on Andrew Forrest's executive. Robertson was promoted this month to chief operating officer and Grieve is **Fortescue**'s global sustainability and external affairs lead.

Not to mention the profusion of women elsewhere at MinRes who have walked out over some shabby treatment. Tania Champion, MinRes's principal tenement adviser, started at **Fortescue** two months ago as the principal of approval planning. Courtney Kelley, MinRes's in-house counsel, ended her two years at the company at the same time, according to LinkedIn.

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Meanwhile, Ellison, a year on from his outright dismissal of flexible work, is back to making more bold pronouncements - this time about his commitment to hiring more women. Here he is at a Macquarie Australia conference in May talking about his vision for a "safer work environment" for women.

"I'm building a daycare centre so, ladies, if you want to come and work for me, 20 bucks a day for your kids, we're going to be able to accommodate about 140 kids, so all our workforce." This wasn't satire. Nor was the hiring of company "ambassador" Julie Bishop to star in a video spruiking the miner as modern and female-friendly.

Oh, if only she knew that the women who get anywhere near the MinRes leadership are out of that place faster than a Manhattan rat in a kitchen.

Ellison's problem isn't just hiring women, it's keeping them - and losing the best of them to **Fortescue**.

Early exit Meanwhile, what to make of Richard Harding's premature exit as CEO of Insurance and Care NSW?

Harding had been booked to leave in October but was quietly desaparecido'd earlier this month, leaving the agency and the government flat-footed in finding a replacement.

No change to his LinkedIn, of course; according to that, he hasn't left at all. But he has, and there's been little progress identifying a successor.

Part of the problem seems to be a tiff between iCare's chair, John Robertson, and the responsible minister, Sophie Cotsis. Their beef centres on control of the appointment process and a broader argument around the agency's independence.

The other snag is the board. Once upon a time it was stacked with Liberal Party donors and toadies. Now it's Labor's turn to try that on.

Deputy chair Michael Cameron disappeared in November (apparently rissoloed for being a Liberal Party member) and a month later Unions NSW secretary Mark Morey appeared with a directorship. That's worth at least \$100,000, and even more if he chairs a subcommittee. Robertson, a former union boss himself, receives \$200,000 as chair. All of it's easy money for just nine meetings a year.

Nevermind that there's no one on the board with any actual experience in the realm of insurance. The only person who comes close is Stuart Farquharson, formerly a CFO at Zurich. He's not on the board but rather acting in Harding's role as interim CEO, so he's allowed to sit in the room.

In any case, all this bickering over who gets to run the appointment process is awkward when one considers Robertson's position. Cotsis might put up a fight but she knows - or should - that Chris Minns was chief of staff to Robbo while he was opposition leader.

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