

FORTESCUE'S FEMALE BOARD directors lead cultural change

Already renowned for its Indigenous employment and corporate social responsibility initiatives, Fortescue Metals Group is leading the charge for diversity in the boardroom after becoming the first ASX20 company with a majority of female directors.

The achievement is even more outstanding considering just three years ago it was the last of Australia's 50 largest firms to have an all-male board.

In this Q&A, Fortescue non-executive director Sharon Warburton, a highly accomplished mining executive and chair of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, discusses Fortescue's transformation and gender diversity in the broader sector.

Resource People: This milestone is another great achievement for Fortescue. As someone who's worked in the mining industry for more than 20 years, what does it mean to be part of this?

Sharon Warburton: I first joined the resources sector in the mid-nineties as a junior manager and there has incredible change just in that time. It is very exciting to see organisations embracing diversity in the industry and I'm particularly delighted to see changes at leadership levels. This helps drive broader changes in thinking, which can drive cultural change

throughout every layer of an organisation.

RP: Chairman Andrew Forrest and CEO Nev Power often speak about the importance of Fortescue's ability to innovate and 'do things differently'. How have these principles supported a rapid improvement in Fortescue's leadership diversity?

SW: A key part of cultural change is empowering people to create opportunities and ideas. Nev and the team have done a wonderful job in challenging the mindset of our organisation to build greater and more diverse talent pools

including for example by providing solutions for new and existing parents in the workplace. That in turn unlocks more innovation among our people and helps us work smarter. Achieving greater participation across all categories of the workforce is a wonderful result of that.

We've invested a lot of effort in attracting parents to return to work and creating a culture of greater flexibility for everybody in the workplace. I deliberately use the word 'parent' because that's a gender-neutral term.

RP: Do you feel that building diversity



Fortescue director Sharon Warburton.



Removing barriers for gender diversity in operational roles is a focus



Fortescue is investing significantly in return-to-work programs for parents

is a bigger challenge in operational or site-based roles as opposed to the management and director levels?

SW: Creating diversity through a range of initiatives drives the way we think about work at Fortescue, and that leads us to having an open mind to overcoming barriers that have proven difficult in the past.

In the resource sector, location is a particular barrier that comes to mind. If we continue to apply new ways of thinking to the way we work and overcome those barriers, including through the use of communications technology, there is a massive opportunity to change the way roles are done within an organisation, who can do them and where they do them.

RP: You participated in AMMA's diversity round-table with Minister for Employment and Minister for Women, Michaelia Cash. What did you take away from that experience?

SW: I was delighted to represent Fortescue at that round-table. It was really wonderful to see the government embracing discussion with leaders like myself and my peers. We can always do more in all parts of the business community, whether it's the corporates,

the government, the local community around supporting parents and families and providing opportunities and options for family members to work flexibly.

I continue to think that government can play a role in that area. I see the government embracing the way that they resource their functions and striving to achieve that greater gender diversity among other things and I think that will have a very positive effect for corporate Australia too.

“ I'm extremely proud and look forward to continuing to help improve diversity within Fortescue and across the industry. ”

RP: You were recently appointed Chair of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, how are you approaching this role and what synergies are there in your passion for Northern Australia and your directorship at Fortescue?

SW: I spent most of my childhood in

Northern Australia. I consider myself a Northern Australian and it's a wonderful part of the world that's very dear to my heart. So it was an absolute honour to be asked to chair a board whose position is to help unlock economic and population growth in Northern Australia.

It's not surprising that whether it's through Fortescue and its Pilbara operations, or with the NAIF, I'm very much enjoying all the different roles I'm doing at the moment.

RP: After a cracking 2016 where Fortescue cut operating costs, recorded a profit increase of more than 200 per cent and paid out a record dividend, how do you see 2017 playing out for the company?

SW: It's always an exciting time for Fortescue. We have relatively young infrastructure, so there's still plenty of scope to continually improve the way we use that infrastructure and increase returns to shareholders. Every day we're driving sustainable improvements in productivity and efficiency across the business through innovation, through the way we resource our business, and how we encourage greater diversity of thought across every aspect of our operations. **RP**