

Speech

****Check against delivery****

**Elizabeth Gaines, Chief Executive Officer
BN Great for the State, Hyatt Regency Perth
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I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are gathering, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I would also like to extend this respect to other Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders present here today.

West Australians are strong advocates for their state, and especially those like me, who have returned after many years away. As they say, you can take the girl out of Perth, but you can't take Perth out of the girl.

Today's event is a great opportunity to be boldly proud of WA.

And there is so much to be proud of.

Our State is the power engine for Australia's economy

Fortescue is a West Australian company first, and an Australian company second.

We are incredibly proud to call the Pilbara home, and of course the Pilbara is home to three of the four largest iron ore producers in the world, exporting around 800 million tonnes of iron ore annually.

WA is regularly underestimated but constantly overdelivers

We may only be a population of 2.60 million or 10% of Australia's population.

We may be one of the most remote capital cities in the world

But we are a power engine for Australia's economy

Last financial year WA accounted for 14 per cent of the national economy – some \$260bn - and our share of national exports reached 45 per cent.

Of course, as the representative of the resources industry here today, it would be remiss of me not to mention our sector's contribution

In fact, trade data released yesterday, showed that Australia's exports of minerals, metals and energy commodities reached a record new high of \$290bn in 2019 – up 17% from the previous record set in 2018.

Minerals and petroleum accounted for 94 per cent of Western Australia's exports in last financial year, while the resources sector employed a record 124,000 people, making us one of the largest employers in WA and a significant contributor to the State's economy.

Building strong business relationships with China

Perth is often described as Australia's gateway to Asia. Of course, that has a lot to do with our location but perhaps doesn't do justice to the hard work and dedication of many in WA to build strong relationships with our neighbours to the north, and particularly in China.

This relationship is not a flash in the pan. It has been built on decades of engagement across all sectors of our State's economy.

Premier McGowan and his cabinet have followed in the footsteps of their predecessors and have travelled the well-worn path from Perth to China 17 times since 2017.

From education, to tourism and of course the resources industry, WA companies like Fortescue, have forged strong, long term relationships with business and government in China and this has undoubtedly underpinned the success and longevity of our trading partnership.

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China has been Western Australia's largest market for exports since 2006 and last year this was valued at A\$81.4 billion.

Western Australia is the largest source of iron ore for China, which in 2019, produced a record 996 million tonnes of crude steel as it continues on its path of urbanisation and development.

Think about that for a moment: the ore that we produce is building the great cities of China and infrastructure in our region.

It makes West Australia's relationship with China unique, with businesses in Perth and around WA driving positive relationships with business and community in China.

And it is something we should all be proud of.

This is an area where WA can and should speak up.

It is critical that we all have a strong narrative about Australia's relationship with China which reflects the experience of the resources sector specifically, and WA more broadly.

And now, more than ever, is a time to reach out and support our friends in China. Fortescue has faith in the resilience of the Chinese people and economy, as they continue on their path of urbanisation and development.

We have one of the most innovative industries in the world

As we look to the future, our ability to build on the positive trading relationship with China will remain critical to the success of Australia's resources sector.

And it is this success which will allow us to continue to develop our technology footprint, ensuring Australia retains its globally leading position in mining innovation.

Perhaps it's our geographic isolation from the rest of Australia, and indeed the world.

Perhaps there is something in the water.

But it has to be said there is something unique about Western Australia's innovative and entrepreneurial spirit.

We see a problem and we fix it. We see an opportunity and we embrace it.

In education, we have the WA School of Mines. Founded in 1902 the school currently ranks second internationally for Mineral and Mining Engineering and our tertiary institutions are among the best in the world.

In medicine, we have Professor Fiona Wood. Born in the north of England but claimed as our own, Fiona and her team invented the patented spray-on skin technique – right here in WA.

In science, WA will be home to the square kilometer array. Led by Curtin University, it will be one of only two host sites in the world in an international effort to build the world's largest radio telescope.

And then there is mining.

We are the Houston of Australia with one of the most innovative industries in the world, from autonomy to processing to data analytics.

Every Western Australian should feel very proud of the sector's achievements.

And at Fortescue we have a strong record of embracing innovation.

When our Founder and Chairman Dr Andrew Forrest, established Fortescue he saw an opportunity.

He knew there was an iron ore supply gap in China and that the Pilbara was in a prime position to fill it.

Of course, in true West Australian style, Andrew and the team weren't happy simply mining the way others had.

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They imagined a highly efficient mine – integrated from pit to port.

A world leading safety operation.

And an autonomous hub.

In 2012, Fortescue's Solomon Hub became the first mining operation to deploy CAT autonomous haulage on a commercial scale and today our autonomous fleet is world leading. We have travelled over 39 million kilometres safely and moved over 1.1 billion tonnes of material. To put this in context, every day our autonomous fleet travels a distance equivalent to 3.5 times around Australia's highway one, without drivers at the wheel.

We believe embracing technology and innovation shouldn't come at the risk of jobs and we work to ensure it is embraced by communities.

By training our people and taking them on this automation journey, we are ensuring that everyone can be proud of our industry's contribution to the West Australian and national economies

I said earlier, that when West Australians see an opportunity, we embrace it.

I'm not sure how many of you have been to the Pilbara, but it's pretty sunny.

In fact, it has more sunshine hours in a day compared to anywhere else in Australia.

So the opportunities for renewables, especially solar, are considerable.

At Fortescue, we're grabbing this opportunity with both hands to reduce our emissions. Over the last four months, we have announced three energy infrastructure projects which, when completed, will see 25 – 30 per cent of our stationary energy requirements powered by solar.

Importantly, by building our own integrated transmission network, we are able to readily increase our use of renewable energy in the future.

This is another example of the mining sector's ability to harness technology and respond to the most complex issue facing us today.

Building great communities

Innovation at Fortescue goes beyond technology and equipment.

Since Fortescue was founded, we have been focussed on our vision of becoming the safest, lowest cost, most profitable mining company.

And we believe that goes hand in hand with our commitment to creating economic opportunities and contributing to thriving local communities.

We are in a unique position to empower individuals within our company and the community to be their best, and to find ways to improve the bottom line while delivering positive social change.

When it comes to Aboriginal engagement, we believe the power of economic opportunity through providing training, employment and business development pathways is the key driver of long term, sustainable engagement.

Fortescue is proud to be one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in Australia. As a West Australian company, we are not alone in our support of Aboriginal employment - Wesfarmers is also a leader in this field and I congratulate Michael and all the Wesfarmers team on their ongoing commitment.

We have a number of Aboriginal engagement programs at Fortescue to support women and men to find a job, build a rewarding career and, if they choose, become a leader.

To paint a picture of the impact these programs are having, let me share a few stories with you.

Nicholas is a Martu man who I met last year at the VTEC graduation in Karratha. Our Vocational Training and Employment Program, affectionately known as VTEC, is based on the simple, but compelling idea that after successfully completing training, you are guaranteed a job. Nicholas said participating in VTEC proved

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you can do anything, and he now wants to encourage his friends and family to “come and find their dreams”.

Or Rebecca, a Bunjima woman born and raised in Port Hedland. Bec began her journey with Fortescue six years ago and now leads a team of 11 as a Production Supervisor in our Port Operations. I had the privilege of spending the day with Bec when she was CEO for a Day. She says Fortescue’s Leadership Excellence in Aboriginal People initiative, LEAP, helped her grow both professionally and personally and in her role as a leader she strives to help people reach their potential just as her supervisor supported her to do so.

The impact of VTEC and LEAP goes beyond any one individual. Our programs change families and communities. By empowering Aboriginal People through training and employment opportunities we are supporting them to become role models.

And we are empowering generational change.

Great people driving the future

So I think you will have guessed by now that we are unapologetically proud of our people and are committed to empower them to be as successful as they choose.

We want our workforce to be engaged, diverse and representative of our community.

I have always believed training and education are the building blocks to driving sustainable change.

The future geologists, engineers and data analysts are sitting in classrooms across Perth right now. I want them to be inspired to study STEM and pursue a career in the mining sector, because it is a challenging and exciting industry.

We are currently seeing advances in technology at a rate previously thought impossible – in energy, machine learning, robotics and AI.

To truly harness the benefits and opportunities of this new era of innovation, we need everyone – young and old, men and women.

We need to give our people the opportunity to learn, retrain and expand their knowledge base. We also need to ensure our future workforce has the integrity and ethics to handle technology safely and for the betterment of the community.

And I am not concerned. I have absolute faith in our people, at Fortescue and across this State.

Time and time again West Australians have proved themselves to be pioneers and the best in their field.

And I believe it’s our job, as proud West Australian companies to encourage this – to test technology and drive innovation, to provide a pathway to something new and an opportunity to provide for our families, our communities and our State.

Because it comes back to people – each of us doing what we can to make the world a better place for our loved ones.

So I want to give the last word to Jade and Troy, two Fortescue team members who last year graduated from our Trade Up program, which provides a pathway to an apprenticeship for our female and Aboriginal team members.

At a ceremony in December, nine Trade Up participants joined 15 other apprentices, together with our Chairman Dr Andrew Forrest, in celebrating the completion of their apprenticeship and successfully gaining permanent employment with Fortescue.

The graduation was one of the final events for what was a very busy 2019 and it was a wonderful example of how education and training drives sustainable change in people’s lives, careers and communities.

It reminds me of why we do what we do and what makes our State great.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.