Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4354

Le Couteur, Caroline JP

(1952 -)

Born	19520414, Liverpool England
Occupation	Environmentalist, Parliamentarian

Summary

Caroline Le Couteur served two terms as a Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly. She represented the electorate of Molonglo from 2008 to 2012 and the electorate of Murrumbidgee from 2016 to 2020 as a member of the Greens Party. Le Couteur entered politics as a seasoned campaigner for environmental sustainability, ethical business and investment practices, and improvements in community and social lives. She was a founding director of Australian Ethical Investment, an ASX listed company, and worked as their information technology manager. She also served as the Executive Director of the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, a not-for-profit organisation that fights to improve the sustainability of Australian businesses. She was a national councillor of the Australian Conservation Foundation and active supporter of several environmental groups.

Caroline Le Couteur was inscribed on the ACT Women's Honour Roll in 2008.

Details

Caroline Le Couteur was born in England in 1952 to Kenneth James Le Couteur and his wife Enid Margaret (née Domville). The family came to Canberra in 1956 when her father was appointed as foundation Professor of Theoretical Physics at the Australian National University. Caroline was the oldest of four daughters (the others being Penelope, Mary and foster daughter Marion Chesher) and was educated in Canberra and completed an economics degree at the ANU. She later went on to complete a Bachelor of Business at the Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education (now Southern Cross University). She has one daughter and three grandchildren. Caroline is married to Guy de Vanny. Le Couteur moved to Nimbin after attending the Aquarius Festival there in 1973. Her daughter was born during the 11 years she lived in a community at Tuntable Falls, Nimbin. Becoming a mother led to Caroline joining with other parents to found a pre-school and primary school. She was an early adopter and advocate of renewable energy technology, becoming a retailer and installer of solar panels. Her experiences led her to become an active supporter from the 1980s of the Australian and New Zealand Solar Energy Society and the Alternative Energy Association.

In 1985 Le Couteur moved back to Canberra and worked for the federal and ACT governments, firstly in information technology and later in renewable energy policy. In 1991 she was one of the founders of now ASX-listed company Australian Ethical Investment. She was an executive director as well as its information technology manager. She remained a Director for over 17 years, seeing the company grow from one part-time employee to over 60 staff with over $600 million under management. Le Couteur's deep concerns about environmental sustainability and dangers of climate change led to her involvement in the Australian Conservation Foundation. She served as the ACT Councillor on the ACF's National Council from 1993 to 2008. In addition, she completed a Graduate Diploma in Environmental and Development Management at the Australian National University.

Le Couteur joined the Greens Party in the mid 1990s and first stood for election to the ACT Legislative Assembly in 1998, as a support Greens candidate to then incumbent Kerrie Tucker. She remained active in the Greens Party over the next decade, holding various offices including convening the Party's Donations Reference Group. She was elected to the seat of Molonglo in 2008. Three other Greens candidates also won seats at that election, giving the Party the balance of power. During her first term as an MLA, Le Couteur was the Greens spokesperson on planning, Territory and municipal services, business and economic development, Indigenous affairs, the arts, and heritage. She was Assistant Speaker; she also chaired the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee and was Deputy Chair of the Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services Standing Committee. Le Couteur, Bresnan and Hunter lost their seats at the 2012 election. In 2013 Le Couteur became the first executive officer of the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, a not-for-profit organisation that uses shareholder action to improve the sustainability of Australian businesses and held that position till 2016, when she stood for the Greens again and was re-elected to the Assembly – this time for the new seat of Murrumbidgee. In her second term, Le Couteur was one of two Greens representatives and the Party entered a power-sharing alliance with the Australian Labor Party which gave the latter government. Le Couteur chaired the Assembly's Planning and Renewal Committee, and sat on the Health, Aging and Community Services Committee and the Integrity Commission. Later she would express unease that the arrangement had diminished the Greens' independent scope of action and capacity to exercise a real balance of power.

In a 2019 interview with the Canberra Times announcing her retirement, Le Couteur pointed to her work on climate change as her proudest achievement in her time in politics. She helped pass the ACT's ground-breaking legislation to achieve 100% renewable energy and a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2020. She put improvements in tree-planting and support for household food composting solutions on the political agenda, and worked for better public transport and expansion of access to affordable solar power. In addition, she pushed for more community involvement in planning and helped secure commitments to increased accessible and affordable housing, especially in new land releases and urban renewal. She also pursued improvements in the treatment of victims of sexual assault, including legislation around sexual consent and abuse of intimate images – often called 'revenge porn'. In retirement Le Couteur continues her community work as a volunteer, in particular for the Friends of Mawson Ponds which aims to create a wildlife corridor in the Woden Valley. She is a member of the Brougham Street cohousing project and part of Cohousing Canberra.

Published resources

Caroline Le Couteur - Wikipedia,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caroline_Le_Couteur

LeCouteur-Caroline - ACT Legislative Assembly,
https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/ninth-assembly-members/murrumbidgee/lecouteur-caroline

Caroline Le Couteur | ACT Greens,
https://greens.org.au/act/person/caroline-le-couteur

Thank you for all your contributions, Caroline Le Couteur MLA, ACT Greens Member for Murrumbidgee | ACT Greens,
https://greens.org.au/act/news/thank-you-all-your-contributions-caroline-le-couteur-mla-act-greens-member-murrumbidgee

Caroline Le Couteur, the Greens politician with an activist investment portfolio, Kirsten Lawson, 2016,
https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6039459/caroline-le-couteur-the-greens-politician-with-an-activist-investment-portfolio

Greens MLA Caroline Le Couteur to leave ACT Legislative Assembly, Daniel Burdon, 2019

Greens in government in the ACT – reflections on successes and challenges from a former MLA, Caroline Le Couteur, 2022,
https://greenagenda.org.au/2022/04/greens-in-government-in-the-act

Former ACT MLA says party is now too close to Labor, paying a high price for cabinet positions, Lottie Twyford, 2022,
https://the-riotact.com/former-act-greens-mla-says-party-is-now-too-close-to-labor-paying-a-high-price-for-cabinet-positions/5497

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