

Nomination and Citation for Honorary Life Membership

Geoffrey Cousins AM

NOMINATION PROPOSED BY:

Nadia McLaren (Vice President)
Piers Verstegen (Vice President)
Susan Richardson (Councillor)

David Hood (Councillor)
Jonathan Miller (Councillor)

In July 2018, following a resolution of support by the Board, Council endorsed the nomination of Geoffrey Cousins for Honorary Life Membership of the Australian Conservation Foundation. Council recommends the nomination and its accompanying citation to members through the proposal of the following resolution on the Agenda of the 2018 Annual General Meeting.

Resolution: That Honorary Life Membership of the Australian Conservation Foundation be bestowed on Geoffrey Cousins AM, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the organisation.

Citation

Fearless eco-warrior

Geoffrey Cousins was elected ACF President in 2014 already bearing distinction as a corporate eco-warrior. He had led the successful campaign to reject the Gunns paper pulp mill in Tasmania and was prominent in resisting the construction of the proposed gas hub at James Price Point in Western Australia.

"He's fearless. "With the pulp mill he walked straight on to the battlefield," [Bob] Brown says, "and the bullets were flying in all directions. He strode right into the middle and said, 'I am on their side.' We are seeing a repeat performance of that in the Kimberley. He is extraordinarily brave." ([Greg Bearup, Sydney Morning Herald, March 2016](#))

Governance excellence

As President and Chair of the Board, Geoff guided ACF through a time of extraordinary change for the organisation. Geoff presided over the finalisation of a comprehensive governance review in 2014-15, which resulted in a range of constitutional changes – significantly, greater clarity around the respective roles of Council and the Board. Geoff's stewardship as Chair of Council then assisted the new, and smaller, 2015 Council to move more surely into its strategic role, helping guide ACF direction and transformational change.

Geoff's facilitative leadership and rich board experience raised the calibre and focus of the Board. While upholding ethical and exacting performance standards, he encouraged the Board and the organisation to be bold and brave and to embrace important strategic campaign opportunities, even when the financial risk was high.

Forthright leadership

As a former Howard government advisor, successful businessman, CEO and company director, Geoff brought to ACF a heady mix of experience, combined with a visionary, strategic and sometimes challenging approach to environmental campaigning.

Geoff stood strongly supportive of the Board's decision to pursue one of its rare Court cases as part of the fight to stop the Adani Carmichael coal mine; and contributed his expertise to a workshop to develop the campaign strategy. His dedication to the Stop Adani campaign continued in a private capacity through his recruitment of well-known business people and sports stars and a trip to India; then on his return to launch the #StopAdani campaign with Bob Brown and other notable community leaders.

At Geoff's initiative, a forum of distinguished business, academic and community leaders was formed with UNSW in 2016, which developed and delivered to the, then, Minister for Environment and Energy, the report - [OUR ENERGY FUTURE: A plan to transition Australia to clean energy](#) .

Faith in people power

Geoff came to us with an already established media presence and national profile for public leadership. But we like to think that his very visible and vocal representations on behalf of ACF – on TV and radio and on the ground at community meetings and campaign sites – enabled a special fusion of his love of nature and trust in the common good sense of Australian people. In his own words:

“the power of the people will always win over the politicians...Personally I think [social media] a tremendously positive influence. It means power is no longer held by people like me and you and heads of companies. It's much more widely spread.”

Geoff's down-to-earth commentary and encouragement revitalised ACF membership. His strong support for the development of the organisation's innovative Change Strategy, with ACF's then new CEO, Kelly O'Shanassy, sparked unprecedented growth and success of ACF's People Power movement, with supporter numbers rocketing to over half a million people by the end of his three year Presidency.

Inspirational touchstone

Organisational culture takes its signals from the top. Geoff presided over a time of enormous workplace culture development in the organisation. He strongly supported the new CEO to undertake significant organisational review which put in place structural and cultural changes that have revitalised the organisation. His disarming combination of charm and strong convictions enabled him to develop a good relationship with the CEO, Executive Team and the wider staff and set the tone for heightened engagement and cohesion of purpose of the entire organisation.

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