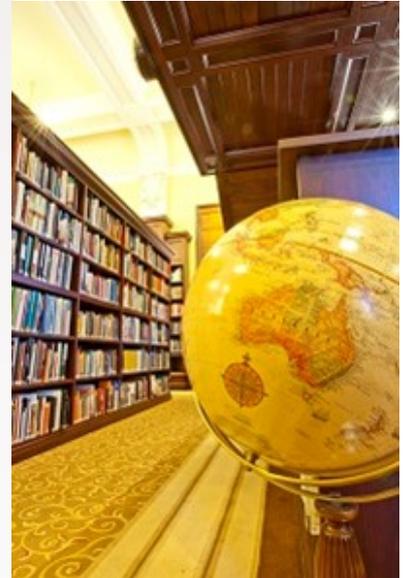


PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

History Notes: Women's Firsts Portraits—Carol Martin  
September 2022



# Women's Firsts Portraits: Carol Martin



*Carol Martin*  
Photograph: Parliament of Western Australia

## Carol Martin

Carol Martin was the first Indigenous woman elected to an Australian parliament. She was elected to the Parliament of Western Australia on 10 February 2001, in succession to the Hon Ernie Bridge, representing the Kimberley electorate. In her inaugural speech, she said:

‘I am more proud than I ever thought possible to be the first Aboriginal woman elected to Parliament in Australia’.

At the opening of the WA Parliament in 2001, the new Governor Lieutenant-General, John Sanderson acknowledged the traditional custodians of ancestral lands. An Indigenous ceremony was held on the front steps of Parliament House for the first time and in the Legislative Assembly, Martin, as the first Indigenous woman elected to an Australian parliament, was honoured by giving the Address-in-Reply Speech. Martin took her seat on 22 May and within three weeks, the Legislative Council passed a motion apologising to Indigenous people for earlier policies that took children away from their families.

From 2001 to 2005, Martin was Chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Health and member of the Parliamentary Services Committee from 2001 to 2005, and from 2008 to 2013. She was re-elected to her Kimberley electorate in 2005 and 2007. During her parliamentary career, she supported the controversial Woodside Petroleum \$30 billion liquefied natural gas hub project planned for James Price Point, 60 kilometres north of Broome. In April 2011, the majority of the Goolarabooloo/Jabirr Jabirr people voted in favour of the gas hub. A deal was signed in June, after the Kimberley Land Council negotiated a \$1.3 billion jobs and compensation package for Indigenous people in the Kimberley. Martin retired from parliament in 2013.

Carol Anne Pilkington was born on 31 October 1957 in Subiaco, WA, the daughter of Bernard Pilkington, machine operator and Rosemary Ogilvie. When she was 12 years old, she was removed from her family. A ‘care and protection application’ was issued which ordered that she be removed from her family until the age of 18. In 1973, after three years running away from her foster homes, she decided to move to Broome to live with her mother, ‘a decision that changed the entire direction of my life’ said Martin.

Martin went to various state schools in the Perth metropolitan area including Victoria Park, Highgate and Carlisle primary schools; and Kewdale High School. She attended the Pundulmurra Vocational Training Centre in Port Hedland and was awarded a Diploma in Office and Small Business Management in 1981. In 1993, she graduated from Curtin University with a Bachelor of Social Work. In the same year, she joined the Australian Labor Party and held the role of membership officer from 1995 to 2000. Following university, she worked as a counsellor, consultant and trainer with several organisations in the Kimberley. In Derby, 1984 she married her second husband, Brian Martin and they have two children.

Martin has been active in the community outside of parliament. In 1993, she was elected as a Councillor for the Derby-West Kimberley Shire Council. She has also been a member of the Advisory Board for Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, National Association for Loss and Grief in WA, Industry Training Board and the Support Group for Young Women’s Health Wise.

## Bibliography

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