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Women for Survival

Women for Survival was an anti-nuke, anti-US bases protest group for women and was set up in 1983 during the Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp outside of Alice Springs in the NT, 8 - 25 November, 1983. The approximately 600 women from all parts of Australia and some from overseas who attended the women's camp at Pine Gap generated a great deal of activity. There were workshops on tactics, arguments about strategies, discussions with the local Aboriginal women about what was culturally appropriate, lots of music, 111 women were arrested, most of them going by the name of Karen Silkwood, (in honour of the US activist who died while working on exposing the dangers of nuclear power), friendships were made, lesbian visibility became an issue and some lesbians found lovers.

The protest at Pine Gap was so successful, both in terms of the wide publicity the campaign gained in the media for the anti-US bases cause and for the boost of energy it gave the feminist movement, that almost immediately afterwards Women for Survival began planning for their next action at Cockburn Sound, WA, 1 - 14 December, 1984.

The initial plan, to transport the participants across the continent from the east coast by train, fell through. But several hundred women still made it across the Nullabor Plain to set up camp at Cockburn Sound in order to highlight the increase in the incidence of VD and rape reported by the local women when the sailors in the US Navy disembarked at Fremantle on R&R. This was another highly successful action with women holding workshops and planning strategies and actions and being featured in the media as they climbed over the fence and were arrested.

Women for Survival held several national conferences, in Adelaide (1984) Melbourne (1985) and another huge camp in Canberra 12 – 26 October 1986 when the lease for Pine Gap was due for renewal (and where the term 'feral women' was coined as an insult by the media and taken up as a point of pride by the women concerned).

Women for Survival generated more activity in those few years during the 1980s than many women's activist groups at the time and by its highly successful actions not only enabled many women to become politically aware and active for the first time the group also brought the danger

of having US bases on Australian soil, with the potential for being a nuclear warfare target, to the attention of the Australian public.

Due to lack of energy the Women for Survival group in Melbourne folded in 1987.