A colonial space: women spacefarers of the Antipodes

Dr Alice Gorman
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The Seven Sisters

Painting by Stella Wheildon (Kamilaroi, NSW)
1940s: Protesting the rocket bomb

- Alliance of Aboriginal activists, women’s groups, Communist Party, disarmament and peace movement

Doris Blackburn, MP
Aborigines Advancement League

Margaret Tucker, Wiradjuri
Australian Aborigines League

Woomera rocket range
Woomera: wives, mothers, servants, computers

- 1948: 1200 men /8 waitresses
- 1950s: ‘computers’, ‘half-caste’ domestic servants
- 1960s: highest birth rate in Australia
- 1970s: end of Australia’s space age

1950s – WREDAC computer

**Half-Castes May Work At Woomera**

Half-caste girls may be employed as domestic servants at Woomera soon.

The SA Protector of Aborigines (Mr. C. Bartlett) said yesterday there was a fair demand for domestics at Woomera.

The native Patrol Officer (Mr. W. B. McDougall) was at present taking a survey in the area to see whether half-caste girls could be sent there after they had finished a course in domestic service at the Fullarton Salvation Army Home.

**Women’s Interest in Woomera**

Melbourne. — Australian women are keenly interested in jobs at the Woomera Rocket Range.

More than 70 women and girls have applied to the Long Range Weapons Board of Administration for forty computing jobs.

Most sent written applications to Salisbury (SA), but some wrote and applied personally to officers of the Commonwealth Department of Supply and Development in Melbourne and Sydney.

Women will be paid between £5/3/ and £7/2/- a week and girls, between £3/8/- and £5/17/-. Their job will be to compute and dissect the result of rocket experiments.

1954

Operating the cinetheodolite
Where are we now? Australian women in STEM
Australian Space Research Conferences

- Under 30% female participants
- Presentations in proportion to attendance
  
  \textbf{Strategies:} childcare, live streaming, financial support, avoid ‘manels’

- Change from ‘science’ to ‘research’ to increase non-STEM participation
- Indigenous Sky Knowledge sessions
  
  \textbf{Strategy:} use as gateway to Indigenous women’s participation

\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
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\textbf{16\textsuperscript{th} ASRC (2016)} & \textbf{15\textsuperscript{th} ASRC (2015)} & \\
\hline
\textbf{Delegates} & & \\
\hline
Male & 128 & 145 & \\
73.6% & 75.9% & \\
Female & 46 & 45 & \\
26.4% & 23.6% & \\
Total & 174 & 191 & \\
\hline
\textbf{Talks} & & \\
\hline
Male & 86 & 89 & \\
71.1% & 74.8% & \\
Female & 35 & 30 & \\
28.9% & 25.2% & \\
Non binary & 1 & 0.5 & \\
Total & 121 & 129 & \\
\hline
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From Horner et al 2017

The Gender Balance of the Australian Space Research Community: A Snapshot from the 16\textsuperscript{th} ASRC, 2016
Women in space industry

- Space Industry Association of Australia
  - Board – 1/5
  - Advisory Council – 3/15

Strategies: recruit more women members.
Mentor women onto Council and Board

- Space start-ups founded by women
  - Fleet Space
  - Ozius Spatial
  - Quberider

Strategy: encourage accelerators/incubators to have explicit policies about female employment

- Astronaut candidates
  - MarsOne - 1
Australian Space Agency: a new beginning?

• Build in equity goals
• Reject rather than replicate colonial values/language/history
• Recognise differential impacts of space technology on women, Aboriginal people and Aboriginal women
• Recognise creative ways women, including Aboriginal women, engage with satellite technology
• A place at the table – and a voice

Edna Dale / Imintji Moon Rising Wandjina. Credit: Artlandish Gallery
When we’re back again
perhaps girls will get the chance
to pilot and walk.

To Young Girls.

remember
the sky will not always be blue

it gives to the beyond
and
many a far-off object shining

calls you