

## Podcast 14 - Turning on the Tap - Clean Water in Australia

by Rob McCormack - Wednesday, May 08, 2013

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Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

*Podcast Number 14 – Turning on the Tap – Clean Water in Australia*

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Hi,

Sometimes we don't appreciate the good things we have. We complain about having a bad day, or perhaps we wish we had a new car or a new computer. One of the good things we have in Australia is our water. It's clean and it's always there. You just turn on a tap and it comes out. In this podcast I would like to tell you a little about our water here in Melbourne.

Australia is a land of contrasts. We have areas with lots of rain and we have areas with very little rain. In fact, in many parts of Australia it doesn't rain very much at all. So not having enough water can be a problem. In 2009, Melbourne's water supplies got very low. There had been poor rains in the winter for several years and our water storage levels were below 30% full. The truth is, we didn't use our water well. We wasted a lot of water. So our government started an advertising campaign to help us all to use less water. This advertising campaign told us to try and use no more than 155 litres of water, per person, per day. The people of Melbourne heard the message and our use of water went down. That was a great result. Over the last 3 years we have had good rains in winter and, together with using less water, our water storage levels are now back to over 70% again. We are all happy about that.

The city has ten large reservoirs for water. The largest is the Thomson Dam, which holds more than one billion litres. That's enough water to fill 427,000 Olympic swimming pools. These reservoirs are in the Yarra Ranges near the city. Five of these reservoirs have catchments. A catchment is a large area of land around the reservoir where the rain can run off the land, into creeks, into rivers and finally into the reservoir. For example, the Thomson Dam has a catchment area of 48,700 hectares. That's 487 square kilometres. From these five reservoirs with catchments, some of the water is pumped to the other five reservoirs, so that, in total, Melbourne has ten reservoirs to hold its water.

But of course it's not only about having enough water. The water must be clean. Well, Melbourne's water is very clean. About 80% of Melbourne's water comes from catchments which are closed. A closed catchment means that the forest and bush in those catchments is undisturbed – that means that no people live there and people are not allowed to go there. It is completely natural forest and bush. Water which flows from these catchments into those reservoirs is already very clean. Melbourne is one of only 5 cities in the world which has closed catchments.

About 20% of our water still comes from open catchments. Open catchments are not closed to the public.

These catchments are downstream from towns and farms. Therefore treatment of our water is required to make sure it is clean and safe for people to drink and to use. There are 3 treatment plants in Melbourne. One of them is the Winneke Treatment Plant and I can ride there on my motorcycle in about 30 minutes.



It is next to the Sugarloaf Reservoir, one of the ten reservoirs which Melbourne has.



Like many reservoirs, it has a great area where you can take the family for a barbeque. When our children were young, we took them there for a barbeque and we really enjoyed it.



The water is treated in 3 steps. First, it is filtered. Filtering removes 95% of solids and microorganisms. Microorganisms can make people sick and must be removed to make the water safe. Second, a small amount of chlorine is added. The chlorine kills any remaining microorganisms not removed by the filtering. The water is now safe to drink. Third, flouride is added. Flouride is a chemical which helps prevent tooth decay.



From there, the water is sent down large pipes to 40 smaller service reservoirs around Melbourne. From there, it is sent down smaller pipes straight to houses and to businesses all around Melbourne. So all you have to do is turn on a tap and out it comes.



If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at [rob@slowenglish.info](mailto:rob@slowenglish.info). I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

### Vocabulary

advertising campaign = a number of advertisements are shown, usually on TV, radio or posters

appreciate = to realize the value of something

billion = 1,000,000,000

businesses = where people sell things or services to make money

complain = to tell someone that you are not happy about something

contrasts = differences, when two things are not the same

creeks = water running down a valley

downstream = down the river, the water always flows downstream

farms = where people grow crops and keep animals

government = the country is run by the government

natural = has not been changed by people

not allowed = when you are not able to do something

per = each

pipes = long round tubes which carry water

prevent tooth decay = stop people's teeth going bad

public = the people who live in your country

remaining = what is left after something is taken away

removed = when something is taken away

required = when something must be done

reservoirs = a place which stores a very large amount of water, usually a dam

result = the outcome

several = more than one

tap = something at the end of a water pipe. You can turn it on or off

treatment = when something is changed, usually to fix a problem

truth = when something cannot be denied

undisturbed = has not been changed by people

wasted = when something is not used as it should be

water storage levels = how much water there is. For example, full, empty, high, low, 50%

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