

Podcast 94 – State Government in Australia

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

Podcast Number 94 – State Government in Australia

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast94.mp3>

Hi,

People often complain about the government. Despite that, I think we all know that governments are important. Without them, our society and our lives would be chaotic and unsafe. In Australia, there are 3 levels of government. The highest level is called Federal or Commonwealth government. The lowest level of government is called Local government. I have talked about these two levels of government in previous podcasts (podcast 21 and podcast 81). In this podcast, I would like to talk about the middle level of government in Australia, being State and Territory government. Like the other two levels, decisions made by State and Territory governments affect many important aspects of Australians' daily lives.

In Australia, we have six states and 2 large territories. Our six states are New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. I live on the outskirts of Melbourne in the state of Victoria. The two large territories in Australia are the Australian Capital Territory (ACT for short) and the Northern Territory. The ACT is where Canberra, Australia's capital, is located, about 280 kilometres from Sydney. The Northern Territory is very large and lies in the northern part of Australia. Its capital is Darwin.

While we also have 8 other territories in Australia, they are relatively small (for example Christmas Island). I will only talk about the two largest mainland territories, which in many ways are treated just like states here in Australia. During my life so far I have lived in Western Australia (where I was born), the ACT (in Canberra), New South Wales (in Sydney) and lastly in Victoria. I must confess that I have not yet visited the Northern Territory. I will get there eventually however, as I am keen to visit Uluru and also see the Kakadu National Park, both of which are in the Northern Territory.

Each state and territory government has its own parliament and elected politicians. The government leader of a state is called the Premier. For the ACT and the Northern Territory, the leader of the government is called the Chief Minister, although their job is just like that of a Premier. All states except Queensland have two houses of parliament. The lower house is the most powerful, as this is where the party with the highest number of seats becomes the government. The upper house is there to provide a review of the laws which are proposed by the lower house. The ACT and the Northern Territory only have the lower house of parliament (like Queensland). Elections are held every four years in each state and territory. This is different to the Federal government, where lower house elections are held every three years.



The State Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.

By Donaldytong (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

So what things are the responsibilities of State and Territory governments? As a general rule, they look after things which the Federal government doesn't control. There are some areas where both Federal and State governments are involved, but it is always clear what each level of government is doing. For example, public schools for all children are the responsibility of State and Territory governments. The Federal government does provide around 25% of all schools' funding, but the State and Territory governments provide the rest and they make all the decisions about the building and management of public schools.

Another important area is health, where the State and Territory governments have a major role, along with the Federal government. State and Territory governments build and manage the hospitals, manage the ambulance services, build and manage community health centres and manage the immunization programs. While it's true that the Federal government

provides a lot of funding for hospitals, it is the State and Territory governments which build and manage the hospitals. The Federal government also provides funding to the States and Territories for other health related areas, but it's the State and Territory governments which are actively involved in running these programs and facilities. People understand the role of State and Territory governments in health. You can imagine that, when state and territory elections are held, hospitals and ambulances are important topics for discussion.

Transport is another major area for State and Territory governments. This includes major highways and roads, railways, buses, trams, traffic laws and their enforcement and other transport related things. Getting around in Australia is important, since we are such a big country. So if the State or Territory government is not doing a good job in this area, people very quickly become unhappy. Our rail system, especially between cities, is not very large, so a good road system is important in Australia. In my view, our major roads are pretty good, with major highways being quite well maintained, although I would say the Europeans do a better job in that regard. Our local bus and tram system here in Victoria is pretty good, in my opinion, so I think the State government here is doing well on that.

Other major areas of State and Territory government responsibility include water and sewerage. The State government here in Victoria has an extensive network of dams and pipes to make sure our water and sewerage are always available (see podcast 14). We can always have our say at a state election if we are not happy with these. Energy is an area where State and Territory governments also play a role, although in this case they work together with the Federal government to ensure electricity and gas continue to be available to Australians.

Community safety is another state and territory government responsibility. This includes the police force and the

prisons. For example, our state government here in Victoria has responded to some people's concerns and has increased the number of police officers employed. Other aspects are the firefighting services and also emergency services which help people during natural disasters such as fires, floods and storms. These are especially important here in Victoria, given our record of damaging bushfires and floods.

Lower cost housing is also an important role for State and Territory governments. For example, in Victoria the State government will spend around \$2 billion in 2017/18 to provide assistance to first home buyers and for public housing for people with lower incomes, so they can obtain permanent housing.

Of course I have not discussed all areas of State and Territory government responsibilities and you should check other resources such as <https://www.peo.gov.au/> if you want further information.

There are some people who say we are over-governed in Australia, with too many levels of government. On balance, I think our system of government works reasonably well. Even so, there is always room for improvement.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at 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. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 94 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

ambulances = a van, car or truck which takes sick or injured people to hospital

as a general rule = when something is mostly true (but not always)

aspects = parts of an idea

billion = 1000 lots of 1 million

chaotic = when everything is unorganized, when things are going very badly

community = all the people who live in your town or area

complain = when you are not happy with a product or service and you tell someone else

confess = when you admit something is true

control = when someone can decide what will happen

damaging = when things can be broken

despite = even though, nonetheless, notwithstanding

disasters = when things go very badly wrong, such as in a storm

elected politicians = people chosen in an election to make

laws

emergency = when something happens that is dangerous, when someone's life may be in danger

employed = to be given a job

energy = (here) something you use to make machines work, such as electricity, gas

enforcement = when you make sure a rule or law is followed

eventually = after a time

except = when something is not included

extensive = when there is a lot of something

facilities = buildings or equipment which make it easier to do something

funding = money

government = the people who make decisions for everyone, who run the country

held = (here) takes place

hospitals = a place where you go when you are sick, in order to get well again

immunization = when you are given medicine which stops you getting a disease

improvement = when something can be made better

involved = be part of something, or part of a process

keen = when you want something

located = where something lies

mainland = not on the island

maintained = when something stays at the same level

manage = to control something, to make decisions about how something will work

management = (here) when you control something, when you make decisions about something

middle = in between two others, in the centre

on balance = when you think about the pros and the cons

outskirts = on the edge

parliament = a place where the government meets to make laws

permanent = something which does not stop

police force = people who make sure the law is followed

powerful = when something is strong

previous = the one before

prisons = a place where you go when you have broken the law

proposed = when someone puts an idea forward for others to think about

provide = to give

public housing = cheaper houses or apartments which are owned by the government

related = it belongs with something else

relatively = when compared to other things of the same type

responded = answered

responsibilities = things that you must do

review = to look at something again

role = what tasks you do, what your job is

seats = (here) the number of people elected to go to the parliament as a politician

sewerage = a system to carry away human waste

topics = themes, names for groups of things

unsafe = when something is not safe