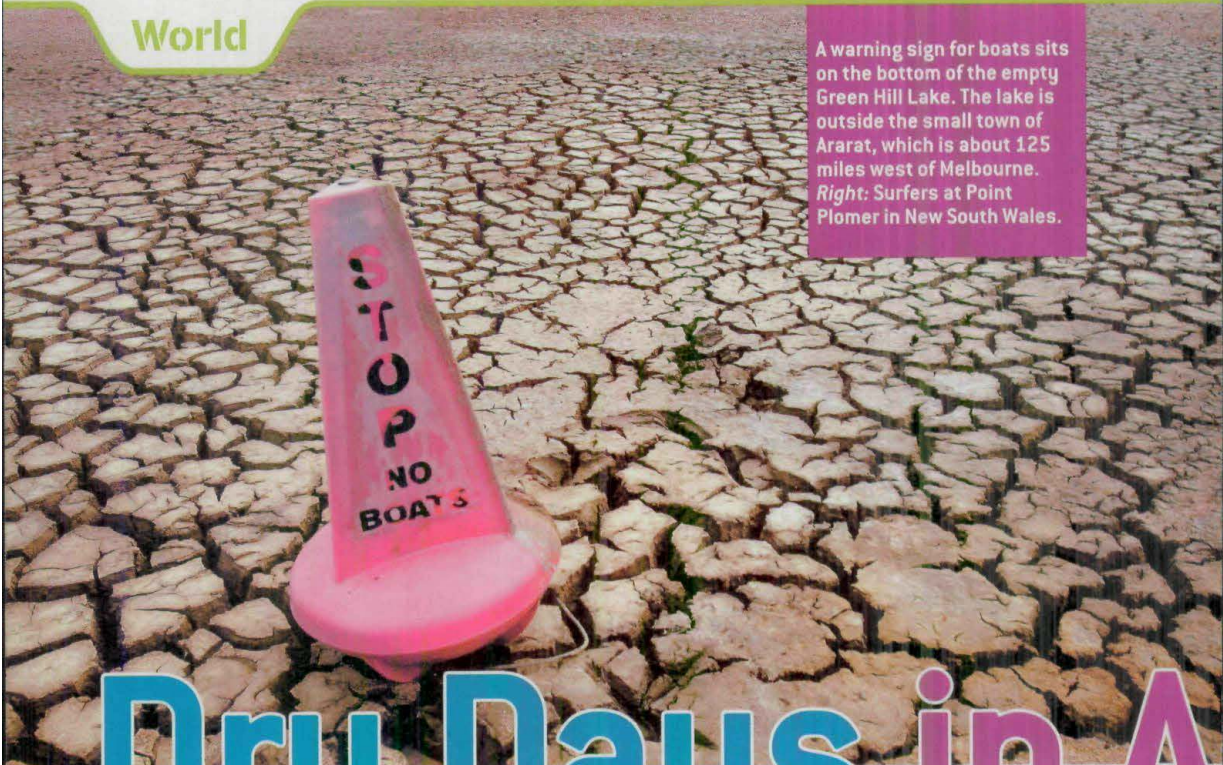


A warning sign for boats sits on the bottom of the empty Green Hill Lake. The lake is outside the small town of Ararat, which is about 125 miles west of Melbourne. *Right:* Surfers at Point Plomer in New South Wales.



Dry Days in A

SEVERE DROUGHT HAS MILLIONS OF AUSTRALIANS COPING WITH WATER RESTRICTIONS

by Ann Weil in Melbourne, Victoria

In Australia, most people live within a 30-minute drive of the ocean. For many of them, going to the beach is a part of everyday life. So are severe **drought**, and laws that dictate how and when water can be used.

Words to Know

- **down under:** nickname for Australia, so-called because it lies so far south of the equator.
- **drought:** a prolonged, abnormally dry period when there is not enough rainfall to meet normal or expected needs.

Lachlan McDonald, 14, and his 16-year-old brother, Mitchell, live with their parents and younger sister in Beaumaris (*boh-MAR-iss*).

Their hometown is an attractive suburb of Melbourne, with spacious ranch houses on tree-lined streets. The brothers love to surf. But restrictions on freshwater have changed their routine—including the long hot showers they used to take afterward. “When you go surfing and it’s freezing and

you want to have a hot shower, you can’t,” Lachlan tells *JS*. “When you can, it’s too short to really warm up.”



Lachlan

How Much Longer?

The past decade has been the driest on record for the state of Victoria, which includes Melbourne, one of Australia’s largest cities. Research into Melbourne’s future water supplies is not encouraging. A recent study commissioned by local water officials identified climate trends that include more hot, dry days and less rain overall,

WILLIAM WEST/APPHOTO IMAGES VIA WIREIMAGE.COM (DROUGHT); COURTESY OF ANN WEIL (LACHLAN); TONY BECHTOLD/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (SURFERS); COURTESY OF ANN WEIL (BOAT BUOY); WIREIMAGE.COM (CRACKED EARTH)



ustralia

but with more flooding during storms.

For Australia—which is a continent as well as a country—drought is nothing new. Its “red center,” or desert, has always lacked enough water to support farming or the needs of large communities. But the current drought is more widespread.

Some experts believe that climate change is contributing to Australia’s dry spell. Others see it as part of the continent’s long-term weather pattern.

More than a century ago, a meteorologist named Clement Wragg persuaded his local government in the state of Queensland to build rain-making guns and fire them at passing



clouds. Wragg was convinced that this would create a whirlwind inside the clouds, resulting in rain. On a cloudy day in 1902, the guns were aimed at the sky, and the mayor gave the order to fire. A few drops of rain began to fall, followed by a light shower. But the next time the guns were fired, they blew up. The experiment was abandoned.

Laying Down the Law

The current drought is affecting people all over the country. Australians no longer take water for granted. “I used to drink water straight from

Continued on next page →

At a Glance

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES LIVED IN AUSTRALIA FOR MORE THAN 40,000 YEARS BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF EUROPEANS. Though treated by white settlers as a single group, Aboriginals were of many cultures, and spoke about 200 different languages. They still suffer from discrimination.

AUSTRALIA’S FIRST EUROPEAN SETTLERS WERE BRITISH CONVICTS, SENT THERE IN 1798 AS PUNISHMENT. Many were paupers who had committed petty crimes, such as stealing food. Australians were once sensitive about that ancestry, but today most are proud of their heritage.

KANGAROOS, A FAMILIAR SYMBOL OF AUSTRALIA, DO NOT GIVE BIRTH IN TIMES OF SEVERE DROUGHT.



Instead, an embryo’s development halts until the drought ends. After a good rainy season, a kangaroo may give birth to

two joeys (baby kangaroos) of different ages!

AUSTRALIA IS IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. Its name comes from a Latin word meaning “of the south.” When North America is experiencing winter, it’s summer **down under**. Many Australians celebrate Christmas by going to the beach.

**TEEN
DIARY**
 A REPORT
 FROM
 AUSTRALIA


Ellie Vandestadt

"One Bath All Year"

I've had only one bath all year, and I felt guilty about it. I have two-minute showers, but it's pretty easy [to stick to], and you don't wash your hair every day.

I [went] on a bike trip called the Great Victorian Bike Ride. We rode about 600 kilometers [about 373 miles] over nine days and slept in tents. We rode through areas that were in stage-four water restrictions. [Even though] we were covered in dirt and sweat, we weren't allowed to shower.

[This drought] is scary. So many people who live in the country, they don't have what they need to make a living. [You save water] because if you don't do it, you're a bad person, and you feel guilty. But you don't really need that long in a shower anyway. It's no big deal. Two minutes is enough.

—Ellie Vandestadt, 18

the tap," Mitchell tells *JS*. "But now I use a cup. We are always conscious of the amount of water we use."

Victoria lawmakers introduced water-saving rules in 2005. Additional water restrictions kick in whenever water reserves fall below specified

levels. Current restrictions put strict limits on lawn-watering. People may water their gardens only at certain times on certain days, using only watering cans or hoses with trigger-spray nozzles.

Many Australians keep buckets in the shower to catch the cool water while they wait for it to get warm. Then they tip the cool water out in the yard to water plants and trees. They also use a bucket of water to wash their cars, because doing it with a handheld hose is now illegal.

"We used to have a sprinkler on the lawn that we would play in," recalls Lachlan.

"But we couldn't do that now."

Using Less

Most Australians—about 90 percent—live in big cities hugging the coasts. The population continues to grow, so farmers must produce more food. Since many of them irrigate with river water, waterways are being reduced to muddy trickles. The price of food has skyrocketed.

"I am scared about the drought," Mitchell admits. "I think everyone is. When I was much younger, my family and I were down at the beach. I saw a tap that was broken, and we could not turn it off. I went to sleep crying, because I was so scared that

we would have no water left.

"If the drought keeps up the way it's been going, many people will have to move away or we will have no water," Mitchell adds. "I do think my future will be affected by the drought. I am looking to be an architect, so if I become one, I will have to design houses that are water-saving houses."

Australians are encouraged to use water-saving showerheads that limit the flow of water. Some have timers in their bathrooms to remind family members to take shorter showers.

Although people may be fined for using sprinklers or washing their cars, the government is not peeking into people's bathrooms to see how long they are in the shower. So why don't they cheat?

Lachlan says that he feels a moral responsibility. "You see people on the news, and they don't have water, and they can't grow stuff. I am not taking all the water for myself. I can use a little less and get by." **JS**



A prolonged drought has led to more bush fires (above) and flooding storms (below).

