

# BBC Learning English

## 6 Minute English

### *Australia's war on drugs*



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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- Chris:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Chris.
- Rosie:** And I'm Rosie.
- Chris:** And today we are going to talk about a proposal in Australia to legalise the possession of soft drugs. Rosie, let's start with a question for our listeners. When was the first international treaty to combat the sale and use of drugs signed?
- Rosie:** That's a difficult one. Go on, give me a clue.
- Chris:** Well, you'll have our usual three options. So listen carefully. When was the first international treaty to combat the sale and use of drugs signed? Was it in:  
a) 1962  
b) 1945  
c) 1912
- Rosie:** It helps to think about historical facts that took place at the time. So in the 60s we had the hippies and the so called counter-culture; in 1945, the end of World War II and in 1912... well, the Titanic sank!
- Chris:** OK, think about it. The answer will come by the end of the programme. Have a crack at it!
- Rosie:** Crack?! Oh, to have a crack at something means to have a go or to try something. In this case it means to try to guess the answer to the quiz. But it's also the name given to a particular kind of drug sold on the streets. And one considered very harmful to a person's health.
- Chris:** Yes it is. And it is not defined as a soft drug. Often drugs are classified, or organised, according to the potential harm they can cause people. Hard drugs are those that are classified as most harmful or addictive, such as cocaine or heroin. Crack cocaine would be one of them.
- Rosie:** And the soft ones are those that are sometimes seen as being less harmful, such as marijuana and ecstasy. These seem to be the ones now being discussed in Australia.
- Chris:** That's right. The Australian foreign minister has announced that he would like to see soft drugs decriminalised, or made legal.
- Rosie:** That's very controversial. Why has he decided to say this?
- Chris:** Well, let's listen to the BBC correspondent Duncan Kennedy in Sydney. See if you can hear what personal experience the Australian minister has of drugs.
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**BBC Duncan Kennedy:**

*Bob Carr is known to be a **straight talker** on many subjects. Now Mr Carr says that when it comes to what he calls soft drugs, there should be a policy of **decriminalisation**. Mr Carr, whose younger brother died from a **heroin overdose**, says that police are wasting their time and resources trying to stop individuals carrying these drugs.*

**Chris:** So it has to do with his brother and a **heroin overdose** – he took an excessive amount of this drug and died.

**Rosie:** Yes, his tragic experience of losing his brother to drugs has motivated him to call for soft drugs to be legalised. And, as the reporter says, he seems to be a **straight talker** indeed – someone who likes to speak very honestly and directly.

**Chris:** But not everyone agrees with him. Let's hear from the BBC correspondent in Australia.

**BBC Duncan Kennedy:**

*Mr Carr's boss, the Prime Minister Julia Gillard, said she didn't want to see any drugs decriminalised. Ms Gillard said that people should continue to get help for their **addiction** and the police should carry on trying to stop drug usage.*

**Rosie:** Ahhhh. Now I remember where I've heard this name! It was in the news. She is the foreign minister's boss – Julia Gillard is the Australian Prime Minister!

**Chris:** And she didn't agree with him. She wants people to get help for their **addiction** or their dependence on drugs but she does not want the **decriminalisation** of any drug.

**Rosie:** But Bob Carr is not alone in his thinking, Chris. I've heard that there is a **think tank** in Australia that believes he has a point. This organisation conducts research into social or economic issues for the government and it wants the introduction of a **carefully controlled** system to deal with these drugs.

**Chris:** In countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands they have organised **carefully controlled** programs where drugs users are given small amounts of drugs, such as heroin, to help them.

**Rosie:** Yes, it's a risky strategy as heroin is highly **addictive** but by providing drugs in a controlled and legal way they believe it can help to reduce crime and the health risks associated with drugs. But, you know, I see the point of people worried about the harm drugs can cause. It's a difficult subject, Chris.

**Chris:** It is.

**Rosie:** Let's see what happens with this war on drugs during the next few months. But for now, I am curious about the quiz. Chris, I still haven't answered the question.

**Chris:** And the question was: When was the first international treaty to combat the sale and use of drugs signed? And I gave you three options. Was it in:  
a) 1962  
b) 1945  
c) 1912

**Rosie:** It must have been in 1962 because in the 60s there seemed to be many drugs around.

**Chris:** How about 1912?

**Rosie:** No, I think that's a bit too early.

**Chris:** The answer is 1912! You see, 100 years ago, narcotics passed from country to country with minimal interference from the authorities but that all changed with the International Opium Convention signed in the Hague. From then onwards, countries were **committed** to stopping the trade in opium, morphine and cocaine.

**Rosie:** Really? Was it that early?

**Chris:** Yes. And unfortunately we are now late by the way; we have to finish the programme now. But we leave you with today's words.

**Rosie:** Yes, of course. They are:  
**a straight talker**  
**decriminalisation**  
**a heroin overdose**  
**boss**  
**addiction**  
**think tank**  
**carefully controlled**  
**committed**

**Chris:** Thanks very much Rosie. And that's all we've got time for today. Bye for now.

**Rosie:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>a straight talker</b>	a person who speaks honestly and simply
<b>decriminalisation</b>	legalising certain drugs
<b>a heroin overdose</b>	taking an excessive amount of the hard drug derived from the opium poppy
<b>boss</b>	manager, person who gives orders
<b>addiction</b>	dependence (on drugs)
<b>think tank</b>	research organisation which makes recommendations to the government
<b>carefully controlled</b>	deliberately restricted
<b>committed</b>	promised

More about drugs:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional\\_health/mental\\_health/drugs\\_use.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional_health/mental_health/drugs_use.shtml)

Read about the 1912 International Opium Convention:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16681673>