

Can you drink your bore water?

by Rosanne Hood

(Originally printed in the Stoney Creek Gazette, July 2004)

In February 2003 we emptied our leaky, sieve-like watertank so it could be fixed. In March 2003 we had a bore sunk. We then had a situation of a completely empty watertank, a forecast of never-ending drought and more water underground than the garden would ever need. Could we drink our bore water? It certainly looked clean, smelt clean and tasted quite reasonable, but before using it to fill up our very empty 25,000-gallon house watertank, I thought we should get it tested for drinking water suitability.

I looked for a water testing service in the Yellow Pages. Nothing. I rang the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, who told me that they used to do it, but didn't any more. I rang the Health Department, but they had no idea. Nor did the CSIRO and nor did the company who drilled our borehole. I rang the Council who said they could probably arrange it but it would be very expensive, including me having to pay for one of them to come out here and collect the sample, and they quoted some indefinite amount greater than \$200. Somebody suggested that I could try a place that tested blood as they might know another place that tested water. It seemed like a long shot. But as our water situation became worse and worse with the looming risk of needing to buy tanker loads of water, while the vegetable garden grew bigger and better vegetables than it ever had before, now that it was being regularly watered by the bore, I was prepared to try long shots.

I rang Capital Pathology in Deakin to ask if they knew how to get water tested. Indeed they did. They didn't do it themselves; they were a collection agency for Sonic Health in Sydney who had a water testing service. They gave me the phone number of Sonic Health so I could ring them and make inquiries. The very informative gentleman at Sonic Health told me that they tested bore water for pH, a range of minerals and salts and assessed its suitability for drinking according to the guidelines set out by the National Health and Research Council for drinking water quality in Australia.

Capital Pathology told me to collect a sample in a sterilised bottle, to note the time of collection, to put the bottle in an esky to keep it cool and to deliver it to them in Deakin as soon as possible the same day. I washed my 1 litre glass bottle well, rinsed it out and baked it dry in the oven to sterilise it. I filled it from the tap in the bore pump house after letting the water run for about a minute, and delivered it in an esky as instructed, the same day. After I had filled out a form to request the tests for bore water, it went to Sydney the same day and was tested the next day. The report took about three weeks to come back to Deakin, but knowing there was also a Capital Pathology unit in Queanbeyan, I arranged

to pick the report up from Queanbeyan and to pay for it there.

The very comprehensive report cleared our bore water as being totally within all the guidelines for safe drinking water. For example, the pH was near enough to a perfect 7, there was absolutely no iron in the water but it was harder than rainwater, meaning that soap would not lather so well in the shower. However, the medical information sheets we also received with the report suggested that moderately hard water was better for health than very soft water. The level of 92mg/l of sodium in the water was well under the maximum advisable level of 180mg/l for drinking water. The cost for this testing was \$140.

Martin installed the pipes to connect the house watertank to the bore, and we filled it up, not only for immediate use in the house, but also to see if the watertank repair job had been successful. Now with a 25,000-gallon tank brimful of water, there was not a single drip from any of the previously, continuously weeping cracks. Our water woes were solved.

If you are going to drink your bore water, it is suggested that you get it tested once a year. So I have just had ours tested again, before filling the house tank for the second time from the bore. This time, being wise to this business now, I rang Capital Pathology in Deakin and arranged for them to send all the necessary paperwork to Queanbeyan to enable me to deliver the water sample to Queanbeyan. The mineral levels in the water, after a year of pumping, had changed only very marginally and the water was still perfectly healthy to drink. The cost of this test was again \$140.

As there is still no information in the Yellow Pages about how to get water tested, and if you are interested in connecting your watertank to your bore in these never-ending days of insufficient rain, then you may find my experience helpful. These are the phone numbers you need.

<p>6285 9800 for Capital Pathology in Deakin to arrange for the paperwork to be delivered to Queanbeyan. 6297 3600 for Capital Pathology in Queanbeyan to book a time to deliver the water sample. 1800 048 993 to ring Sonic Health if you need further information about water testing.</p>
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I have a few brochures about water testing if anyone wants them, and my number, if you have any further questions, is 6238 2124