

Australia is connected to the world by cables no thicker than a garden hose – and at risk from sharks, accidents and sabotage

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

## 1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. How are countries connected to (joined with) the rest of the world?
2. How easy / difficult is it to break that connection?
3. What could happen if a country stopped being connected?

## 2 Key words

a. Read the definitions and use the words from the wordpool to complete the sentences. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

backbone

cable

connect

data

satellite

1. to join two things or places together

*A small bridge \_\_\_\_\_ the island to the city.*

2. information in the form of text or numbers used by computers

*The hospital needed faster computers to work with their patients' \_\_\_\_\_.*

3. the main or strongest part of something

*Electronics is still the \_\_\_\_\_ of Silicon Valley.*

4. a device that travels around the Earth from space collecting and sending information

*The World Cup was seen in more countries than ever because of the use of \_\_\_\_\_.*

5. a wire covered by plastic that carries electricity, information, etc.

*There is a telephone \_\_\_\_\_ between my house and the street.*

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cease to exist

cause

damage

demand

intentional

6. to hurt or spoil something

*I packed the book carefully to protect it from \_\_\_\_\_ during delivery.*

7. a very strong request

*The company received a \_\_\_\_\_ for payment and a letter from lawyers.*

8. planned or intended

*Was it \_\_\_\_\_ to not say hello to her or did you forget?*

9. when something stops being present and comes to an end

*Farming in the US really depends on government money. Without it, farming would \_\_\_\_\_.*

10. to make something happen, especially something bad

*The bad weather can \_\_\_\_\_ several accidents on the roads.*

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*Last month, two Baltic Sea cables were damaged, and experts say Australia's cables are not immune from threats. How worried should we be?*

**Tory Shepherd**  
**1 December, 2024**

- 1 More than 1 million kilometres of cables lie across the world's ocean floor moving data between countries. These cords are about as thick as a garden hose. Australia is connected to 15 of them (that we know of). And they're in danger of attack, accidents, hacking and (very rarely) sharks.
- 2 Last month, two cables in the Baltic Sea – one between Finland and Germany, the other between Sweden and Lithuania were attacked. And experts say Australia's own cables are also in danger. These cables still carry 99 per cent of Australia's data.
- 3 The maritime security expert Sam Bashfield works at the University of Melbourne's Australia India Institute. He says satellites are important for far areas, and in wars, but the "backbone" of the internet are cables. "The global demand for data is also increasing at this crazy rate, so it still requires these submarine cables."
- 4 "Without them, the internet as we know it would cease to exist," Cynthia Mehboob, who is doing her PhD on the politics of undersea cables, says. Mehboob, who is in the Australian National University's international relations department, says Australia will depend on the cables even more in the future.
- 5 In 2014, Google announced it was protecting cables with a Kevlar-like material after a series of shark bites. A video showed a shark wrapping its teeth around a cable before swimming off.
- 6 But that's not the biggest danger. Bashfield says fish bites only cause 0.1 per cent of damage. It's damage from fishing boats that happens more often. Then sometimes, there are geological events, such as underwater landslides or volcanoes.
- 7 When two of the three cables connecting Tasmania to the mainland were cut by accident on the same day in March 2022, it gave an idea of the problems that can happen. Tonga, which has only one cable connecting it to the rest of the world, spent weeks without the internet this year.
- 8 Last week, Google Cloud announced its Australia Connect project. Australia has also announced it will spend 18 million US dollars over four years on cable connectivity. But it doesn't own the cables – they're owned by companies including Amazon, Meta and Google.
- 9 Mehboob says there is never an easy way to know if damage is intentional. "Identifying intentional sabotage on the sea bed has always been a challenge. It makes things a lot more murky."

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Roughly how many cables connect Australia to the internet?  
a. 10                                      b. 15                                      c. 20
2. Which common object in a house is as thick as an internet cable?  
a. a garden hose                      b. a garden gnome                      c. pantyhose
3. How much of Australia's data travels through these cables?  
a. 9 per cent                              b. 19 per cent                              c. 99 per cent
4. What did Google use Kevlar to protect its cables from?  
a. boats                                      b. sharks                                      c. videos
5. How much damage do sharks cause cables?  
a. 10 per cent                              b. 1 per cent                                      c. 0.1 per cent
6. Which country lost its connection to the internet because of a cable?  
a. Tasmania                                      b. Tonga                                      c. Australia
7. Who will own the new 18-million-dollar cables?  
a. Australia                                      b. the cloud                                      c. companies
8. Why is it difficult to know if cables are intentionally damaged?  
a. They are in bed.                      b. They are on the sea floor.                      c. They are in Australia.

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## 4 Key language

a. Write the words in the wordpool in order of frequency.

always

never

often

rarely

sometimes

### Low frequency

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### High frequency

b. Complete the sentences using the words from the previous activity.

1. Our teacher is \_\_\_\_\_ late, but she was on time all week.
2. We \_\_\_\_\_ eat fast food because it is so unhealthy.
3. My mother \_\_\_\_\_ watches football on TV, but this was an important match.
4. They are \_\_\_\_\_ very tired after running.
5. I go to school by car \_\_\_\_\_ and on other days, I walk.

c. Write about three things you do and how frequently you do them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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## 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- 'No country can completely protect itself from attack'.
- 'Countries should not have physical connections to the internet'.

## 6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, list the good things and the bad things about underwater cabling.
- b. Write a summary of the good and bad things about underwater cabling. Include the dangers that exist and how frequently these dangers happen. Use the sentence starters below to help you.

*Underwater cables can carry more data ...*

*We always want more data and ...*

*Fishing boats often ...*

*Sometimes, there are ...*