

# **“MY RECOLLECTIONS”**

**LIFE DURING THE WAR YEARS: 1939 ~ 1945**

**Sixty Years Hence**

**By**

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**Born 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1923**



This is my recollection of events that happened as a result of the second world war.

I have related things I experienced during those years. I believe that the events I have recorded are correct but that was many years ago and there may be some discrepancies.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Prime Minister Menzies advised businessmen to revive the World War I slogan, "Business as Usual" but it became progressively harder to follow this homely advice as the government introduced price controls.

When petrol rationing was introduced in October, 1940 private cars were allowed only enough petrol to travel 16 miles a week. Hundreds of motorists turned to charcoal as a substitute fuel – when burned it gave off a gas that powered the engine. Clumsy Heath Robinsonish devices were fitted to cars and trucks. Some were hidden in the boot of the vehicle, while others were mounted behind and others waddled after on clumsy trailers!

The average range after one filling of fuel was 100 miles. Charcoal fuel was cheap – a Chevrolet sedan on a test run did 732 miles at a cost of 12 shillings and sixpence – but unpleasant – (add cost) = a gas producer was expensive to buy, from £42 - £72 (pounds) but economical to run. Another less popular fuel substitute was household gas carried on the roof of the vehicle in a balloon like container.

Towards the end of hostilities, three Chevrolet trucks were made available to growers in Wanneroo. They were 30 Tare suitable to take the produce to market. We were able to buy one as well as George Leach and Charlie Conti Sen. They cost £380 each. After the war they had doubled their price.

Many private car owners were forced to put their vehicles on blocks for the duration of the war.

Primary producers were allowed enough fuel to enable them to deliver their produce to the market or Army Depot.

Controls became more severe after Japan entered the war in 1941 and Australia moved to a total war economy.

To ensure that everyone in the community had access to goods, a system of rationing was introduced in 1942.

The ration book and its coupons were closely guarded possessions during the war years. Friends who came to stay invariably brought a gift of coupons, soldiers on leave were issued with books so that their families could feed them.

Food rationing followed. The scale varied from time to time. In 1944 the weekly ration scale for each adult was tea – 2 oz, sugar – 16 oz, butter – 6 oz and meat – 2 lbs. These amounts were for a one-week period.

When it was announced that clothes would be rationed, there was a spree of panic-buying regardless of the war effort. Rationing of clothing and footwear began in June, 1942.

Rationing stopped this - each adult received 112 coupons and each item of clothing had a particular coupon value. The coupons were expected to last from 9-12 months. To buy an item a person had to hand over so many coupons along with the money. Thirty-eight (38) ration coupons were required for a man's suit. Waistcoats and double-breasted coats were banned - it was considered an unnecessary waste of cloth.

Similar restrictions applied to women's clothing.

A National Council of Clothes Styling which included the singer, Gladys Moncrief and Miss F.M. Forde, wife of the Army Minister, fixed the maximum length of skirts and banned dolman, balloon and leg of mutton sleeves to save cloth. Belts could not be wider than two inches.

The manufacture of non-essentials was prohibited. The possibility of black market goods reared its head in spite of the possible penalty.

With Japan's involvement in the war, security became a priority. All windows had to be masked so that no light showed at night. Our windows were covered with black paper.

Motor vehicles had to have headlights dimmed and partly covered so that the beam shone straight down onto the road.

We were also told to have some form of air-raid shelter in case of an air-raid attack.

Our home was directly in line with the Pearce Aerodrome. Squadrons of planes often flew over our place on training runs. The sound of numerous planes approaching gave you an uneasy feeling – it could mean imminent disaster.

When the Light Horse regiment was stationed north of the Wanneroo Post Office, a checkpoint was installed at the corner of Dundabar and Wanneroo Roads to check all traffic to and from Perth.

I'll never forget the night war was declared. A number of well-wishers and friends were gathered at the Wanneroo Road's Board Hall to celebrate a special event in the life of Mr. & Mrs Alf Perry. I cannot recall if it was a special wedding

anniversary or a birthday celebration. The announcement came over the radio at 9.00pm that war was declared – it certainly put a damper on the proceedings!

At the outbreak of war I had only been married nine months. I was still very naïve about the ways of the world, trying to be an efficient housewife was enough of a challenge without the thought of war. My marriage was arranged according to the custom of my country of origin.

The man I married was ten years my senior. I agreed to the union, some Italian girls didn't ever have a say! Even so, how could I possibly understand the full implication of what lay ahead of me at the tender age of sixteen?

My husband was the son of a prominent Italian family who had been in Wanneroo since 1912 and market gardening was their livelihood. Growing produce for the armed forces was a priority so some of the men who contributed to the war effort in this way were not compelled to enlist. They were still called up and 'man-powered'.

With the advent of war many able-bodied men from Wanneroo responded to the call of duty. Some enlisted as part of the general call to arms and others volunteered. Four of the young men I knew personally were: Albert Barney Facey Jnr., Lacey Gordon Gibbs and William Herbert Gibbs and Jack Hastings.

The Gibbs boys were captured when Singapore fell to the Japanese. For a time they worked on the Burma Railway. They were onboard a Prisoner-of-War ship which was not identified as such and lost their lives when the vessel was bombed by American bombers.

Barney Facey lost his life when the truck he was driving received a direct hit in an air raid attack in Singapore.

Able Seaman Jack Hastings served in the Battle of Matapan, Coral and China Seas. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. He survived the battles but was killed in a traffic accident years after the war.

When the Mullaloo Surf Life Saving Club building was opened on January 23, 1966 it was dedicated to Mr. Hastings.

During the war, women were encouraged to enter the workforce, particularly as more and more men left to join the armed forces.

Women worked in factories and munitions plants and in roles traditionally reserved for men. Although they took men's places, they were not paid the same wages as the men. Some trade unions opposed the entry of so many women fearing that because they were cheaper to employ, they would displace the men permanently.

In 1941, women were allowed to join the armed forces and three major women's organisations emerged as a result. Women in these organisations performed essential duties in clerical areas, transport, signals and communications and freed thousands of men for active service overseas.

Apart from the Nursing Corps, none of the women's services were allowed to serve overseas.

In July, 1942 the Australian Women's Land Army was formed placing women on the land harvesting vital crops and managing livestock.

In every aspect of wartime life, women played a vital role. Many of these women had the added responsibility of a household to manage and children to care for. As many as 1.3 million women helped keep production going at home or worked in war industries. Another 45,000 women served in the Armed Forces.

In the early 1940's there was no regular bus service to and from Perth. The only other means of transport for me was the truck that took the produce to market. This meant there was only enough room for two people apart from the driver.

The family vehicle was a Fiat truck. The cab was open with little protection from the wind or rain. Furthermore, you had to plan ahead to make sure there was room for you in case another family had more important business to attend to.

There was no facility for shopping in Wanneroo at the time so if you forgot any important foot item you went without until the next market day.

Our home was situated about half a mile from the main road. It was a heavy sand track and sometimes the baker, who delivered the bread, would get bogged in the loose sand and have great difficulty getting out.

The summer months were the worst. Sometimes the baker had to leave our bread with the nearest neighbour to avoid the loose sand track. This could mean quite a long walk.

There were two bakers delivering bread at the time. Emmanuel's Bakery was located in Charles Street, North Perth about half a mile from Dog Swamp.

No-one could employ a servant for more than 24 hours per week unless the household included three or more children under ten years – or for a period starting six weeks before and ending six weeks after the birth of a child. In December, 1942 there were about 90,000 domestic servants in Australia.

My first child was born in 1940 at a nursing home in Newcastle Street, North Perth called "Nurse Bevan's".

This was a small maternity hospital which catered for about ten patients.

There was a number of these homely places in the metropolitan area run by experienced midwives.

With the advent and insecurity of war, many unplanned pregnancies resulted. This placed unprecedented demand on the facilities available.

When my second child was due in 1943, there were no vacancies where my first child was born however, I was able to get into "Niola Maternity Hospital" in Cambridge Street, Leederville which was near the Leederville Town Hall.

Travelling 14 miles in a 1920's model car while you are in an advanced stage of labour is not exactly a joy ride I can assure you. I felt every bump on the road but it certainly hurried the proceedings – my child was born within an hour of arriving.

The event was marred by the threat of a Japanese air raid coming over the city of Perth.

During the war years, Australia was still using the imperial system of currency and measure so I have related to things as £.S.D, miles, pounds and ounces.

Price control was also enforced for the sale of vegetables auctioned at the markets. Tomatoes, which realised a good price for quality, could not sell for more than 7.6d per  $\frac{3}{4}$  bushel case. A grower relied on getting a good price for quality during a shortage to enable them to recoup some of their losses during the lean times.

The price control applied to all the main group of vegetables grown and sold by auction. The advent of war created a shortage and a big demand for any goods not taken over by the army for the troops.

People on the land were more fortunate than city-dwelling folk because they had ready access to a variety of farm produce as well as milk, eggs and poultry. Most farmers in the Wanneroo area kept a cow and horse as well as raising their own chickens for home use.

Attempts were made to reduce spending on (alcoholic) drink. Hotel trading hours were shortened and the production of beer and other alcohol was reduced however, black markets flourished openly especially near military bases. Below is an example of some of the prices:-

Beverage	Legal Price	Black Market Price
Scotch Whiskey	£1.1 & 6d (375ml)	£9.0.0 (375ml)
Beer	.1s & 1d (per bottle)	5 shillings (per bottle)
Oz Whiskey	£3.12s9d	£3.6.0 - £4.0.0

### **Additional Information (from Library)**

Rationing and restrictions impose austerity.

Women during the war years.

Human resources regulations.

Black market in alcoholic drinks.

Substitutes for tea.

Control on servants.

Austerity dinners for 5 shillings.

Drycleaning of festive clothing prohibited.

### **Interesting Additional Information**

Pastry cooking trade rationalised – releasing 400+ men for other work.

Confectionery was also on the list. 6,049 varieties were reduced to 70.

Four thousand confiscated Chesterfield cigarettes auctioned by the Customs Office in Sydney realised an average of over sixpence each.

Meat and clothes rationing finished 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1948.

Petrol rationing ended 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1949.

Double bed sheets required 25-26 coupons depending on size. Towels required 3 coupons. The original issue was only 56 coupons and we had no idea when the next 56 clothing coupons would be made available.

### **Library References (City of Stirling Library, Scarborough branch)**

Experience of Nationhood

World at War (Page 181)

Australia's Yesterdays

Rosina G. Smallwood (July, 2005).doc

# Business not quite as usual

## Rationing and restrictions impose austerity

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Prime Minister Menzies advised businessmen to revive the World War I slogan 'business as usual'. But it became progressively harder to follow this homely advice as the government introduced price controls, commandeered factories for war production, restricted the sale of essential materials, and began to control imports, exports, foreign exchange transactions, even homing pigeons.

When petrol rationing was introduced in October 1940, private cars were allowed only enough petrol to travel about 16 miles a week. Hundreds of motorists turned to charcoal as a substitute fuel; when burned, it gave off a gas that powered the engine. Clumsy Heath-Robinsonish devices called gas producers were fitted to cars and trucks; some were hidden in the boot of the car, others were mounted behind, yet others waddled after on clumsy trailers. The average range with one filling of fuel was 100 miles.

Charcoal fuel was cheap—a Chevrolet sedan on a test run did 732 miles at a cost of 18s 6d—but unpleasant. A young woman who left Adelaide as a platinum blonde arrived in Melbourne as a brunette.

Another but less popular substitute fuel was

household gas, carried on the roof of the vehicle in a balloon-like container.

Controls became more severe after Japan entered the war in 1941, and Australia moved to a total war economy. Rationing of clothing and footwear began in June 1942. When the manufacture of cloth was standardised to one thickness, angry citizens pointed out that suits worn in a sweltering Townsville summer would be of the same weight as those worn in a freezing Hobart winter.

### One style of suit

More angry criticism followed the introduction in July 1942 of the 'victory suit', better known as the 'Dedman suit' after the efficient but unpopular Minister for War Organisation of Industry, Scottish-born John Johnstone Dedman. The 'Dedman suit' was restricted to one style: a single-breasted, two-button coat with no buttons on the sleeves, and cuffless trousers not more than 19 in. wide. It cost £7 7s, required 38 ration coupons out of an annual allowance of 112, and was expected to last from nine to 12 months.

Waistcoats and double-breasted coats were banned. 'Fancy a man who has worn a waistcoat all his life suddenly going without one,' wrote a typically indignant reader to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Eventually, after many such protests, waistcoats were added to the 'victory suit' in December 1942.

Riding breeches, too, were banned, and patterns on socks were prohibited.

Women did not escape. They were advised to substitute leg paint for stockings. A National Council of Clothes Styling—which included the singer Gladys Moncrieff and Mrs F. M. Forde, wife of the Army Minister—fixed the maximum length for skirts and banned dolman, balloon and leg-of-mutton sleeves to save cloth. Belts could not be wider than 2 in.

Because of the shortage of elastic, panties were to be substituted for bloomers, but *Madame Weigel's Journal* rose to the national emergency and published a pattern for bloomers that fastened just below the knee and required no elastic.

Dry cleaning of evening frocks, dinner suits, cream trousers and furnishings was prohibited. Permits to have evening frocks—which were no longer allowed to be made—and cream trousers dry-cleaned could be granted in 'specially urgent cases', but it was not clear what constituted special urgency.

### Black market in drink

Attempts were made to reduce spending on drink. Hotel trading hours were shortened and the production of beer and other alcohol was reduced. However, black markets flourished openly, especially near military bases. At one northern base, a bottle of Scotch cost £9 (legal price, £1 1s 6d).

Despite police vigilance, black market liquor flowed in seemingly inexhaustible supplies to nightclubs and cubarets, where transient servicemen were viciously exploited. Price did not matter to servicemen having fun. The Sydney black market price for beer was 5s (legal price 1s 7d); for Australian whisky or gin

£3 or £4 (legal price 12s 9d) and for Scotch £5 to £6. One American admitted spending £84 in less than a week on liquor and girls.

Sir Paul Hasluck writes in his official history of Australia during World War II: 'War-time experience makes it clear that beer and betting mean more than anything else in life to a considerable number of Australians.'

### Substitutes for tea

Tea rationing was introduced in July 1942, the limit being eight ounces a person for five weeks. Newspapers suggested substitutes; tea-tree, as used by the early settlers, maidenhair fern, red clover blossom and lucerne. The American troops' demand for coffee led to a search for coffee substitutes. W. S. Scully, Minister for Commerce and Agriculture, proudly served at Parliament House, Canberra, a dubious beverage brewed from bran, oatmeal and treacle, which he hoped would become popular. It was never heard of again.

Tobacco was in short supply, and musk leaves, cured gum leaves and 'native' tobacco were recommended as substitutes. Sugar rationing began in August 1942. The manufacture of non-essentials was prohibited. These included bath-heaters, lawnmowers, lounge suites and some other furniture, toys, dish-washing machines, men's evening wear, garters, suspenders, horse-racing equipment, swim suits and pyjamas. Even livestock felt the heavy hand of Dedman. Salt-licks were abolished and it was necessary to have a permit to buy salt for sheep.

### Controls on servants

Another of Dedman's decrees which brought much angry debate was one concerning domestic servants. In December 1942 there were about 90,000 domestic servants in Australia. Dedman decreed that from 1 January, 1943, no person without a permit

could employ a servant for more than 24 hours a week, unless the household included three or more children under ten years, or for a period starting six weeks before and ending six weeks after the birth of a child.

The Housewives' Association described the edict as a 'crowning act of madness to a mad career.' 'Calvinistic communism,' thundered the *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'A classical example of an authoritarianism run riot,' proclaimed the *West Australian*. 'Not a policy—a disaster,' said the leader of the United Australia Party, Billy Hughes.

Prime Minister Curtin defended his colleague's measures: 'There is only one way to get rid of wartime restrictions,' he said. 'Get on with the war and win it.' However, the restrictions were modified to state that a person could not employ more than one servant without approval of the Manpower Authority.

### 'Austerity dinners' for 5s

Austerity meals were announced, with maximum prices: breakfast, 3s; lunch, 4s; dinner, 5s. Some hotels tackled the price problem by serving half portions of 3s 6d dishes for 2s. For 5s, you could have asparagus soup, roast chicken and bacon, and ice-cream Melba; or *consommé claire*, grilled sirloin steak, and *bisquit glacé*—or you could spend your entire 5s on a grilled spatchcock.

Rg. D.1  
No. V. B 114421  
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## RATION BOOK

JUNE, 1943, ISSUE

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(BLACK LETTERS)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Citizen Identity No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Or Alien Registration No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age of 13th June, 1943 \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months  
(If not holder of Citizen Identity Card or alien registration certificate)

If this Book is found it must be returned at once to the  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF RATIONING  
for the State

SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR
D 43	D 38	D 27	D 22	D 11	D 6
SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR
D 44	D 37	D 28	D 21	D 12	D 5
SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR	SUGAR
D 52	D 45	D 36	D 29	D 20	D 13

The ration book and its coupons were closely guarded possessions during the war years. Friends who came to stay invariably brought a gift of coupons; soldiers on leave were issued with books so that their families could feed them.

## Human resources regulations

The *National Security Act* gave the government the power to control the human resources of the country. John Curtin put it bluntly when he said that 'anybody in Australia can be called upon to do whatever the government wants'. Certain occupations were classed as 'reserved occupations' and people in these jobs were not allowed to enlist. But the government had the power to direct labour wherever it was needed. Men and women were required to leave non-essential industries and work in essential industries. In January 1942 a Directorate of Manpower was established with the authority to allocate labour on the basis of the war need. It also actively encouraged women to join the work force. By the end of 1942 almost 400 000 Australian workers had been directed away from civilian non-essential industry to war-related industry.

## Rationing

To ensure that everyone in the community had fair access to goods and to prevent hoarding, a system of rationing was introduced in 1942. When it was announced that clothes would be rationed there was a spree of panic buying regardless of the war effort. Rationing stopped this. Each adult received a ration book with 112 coupons and each item of clothing had a particular coupon value. To buy an item a person had to hand over so many coupons along with money. Throughout 1942 more and more items were rationed including tea, butter, sugar, meat and cigarettes. Petrol had been rationed since 1940 forcing many motorists to garage their cars or find alternative fuels. Charcoal burners attached to the rears of cars were the most popular

alternative. They produced a gas capable of powering most car engines.

## Women during the war years

During the war women were encouraged to enter the work force, particularly as men left to join the armed forces. Women worked in factories and munitions plants, and in roles traditionally reserved for men. Even though they took men's places, they were not paid the same wages as men, and some trade unions opposed the entry of so many women fearing that because they were cheaper to employ they would permanently displace the men.

In 1941 women were allowed to join the armed forces and three major women's organisations emerged; the Women's Auxiliary Australia Air Force (WAAAF), the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) and the naval equivalent, the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS). Women in these organisations performed essential duties in clerical areas, transport, signals and communications, and freed thousands of men for service overseas. Apart from the Nursing Corps none of the women's services was allowed to serve overseas. Other women joined the Australian Women's Land Army. This organisation was formed in July 1942 and placed women on the land, harvesting vital crops and managing livestock.

In every aspect of wartime life women played a vital role. As many as 1.3 million women helped keep production going at home or worked in war industries. Another 45 000 served in the armed forces. Many of these women still had the added responsibility of a household to manage and children to care for.

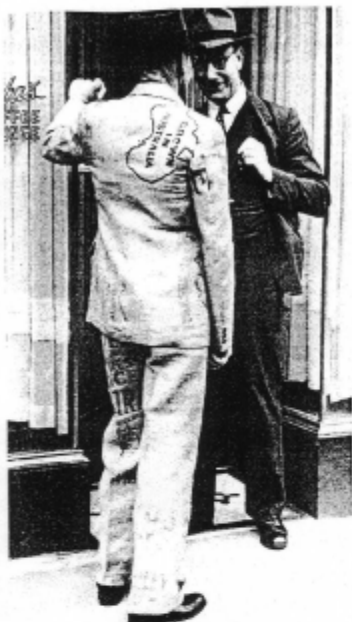


A ration book and ration cards became essential items of life in wartime Australia

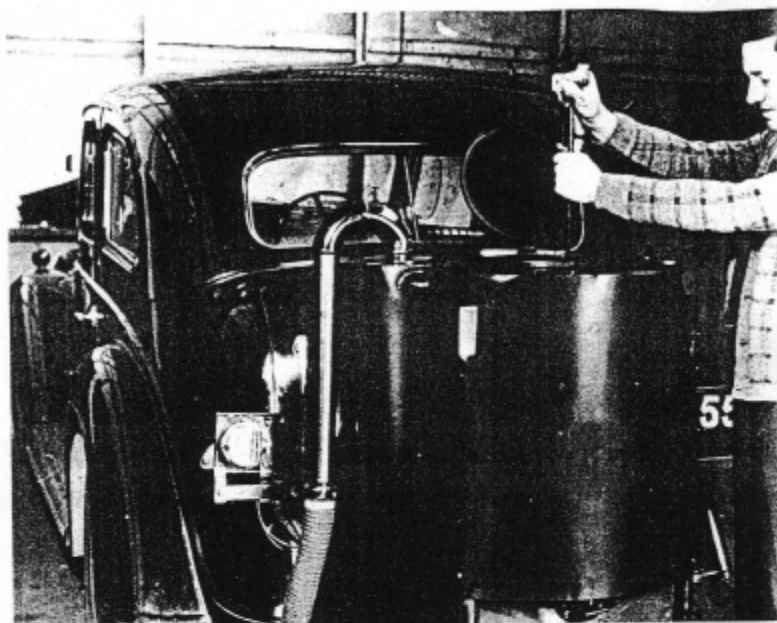


Customers at a Melbourne store queue for knitting wools with their ration books in hand

1. Why was the ration system introduced?
2. How did it operate?



A Melbourne maker of 'personality clothes' produced this suit made from sugar and rice bags, brands and all, to emphasise austerity fashions



Many motorists overcame petrol rationing by fitting their car with a gas producer like this. It burned charcoal, which gave off a gas that powered the engine. A gas producer was expensive to buy — from £42 to £72 — but economical to use. One filling of charcoal fuel took a car about 100 miles

In the crisis year of 1942, Brisbane people surrendered many of the customary freedoms of daily life. All civilians were required to register for the war effort and were issued with personal identity cards. Children were issued with identity disks. Travel out of Brisbane was restricted, and censorship of publications and private correspondence was enforced. The opening hours of Brisbane's pubs were shortened and their beer supplies were cut back. Schools closed and housewives became used to standing in long lines to get everyday food supplies.

Furniture and essential equipment was in short supply. The military requisitioned tables and chairs from government offices, suburban schools and the Army requisitioned all binoculars, even those of racetrack stewards. Newsprint was rationed from mid 1940 and General MacArthur's press officers strictly controlled battlefield news.

In March 1942 the manufacture of all non essential items including perfumes, nail lacquers and eye make-up was banned. Petrol was rationed through fuel licences and even essential services such as the Police had strictly limited supplies. Anyone wanting to buy a new car needed a special purchase order. Families started to collect aluminium and rags for recycling.

After 15 June 1942, a coupon system rationed clothing and footwear. Fashionable Brisbane people could buy 'Victory' clothing, for example, suits which saved cloth by having neither jacket lapels nor trouser cuffs.

To pay for the war, families were encouraged to contribute to Freedom, Victory and Liberty Loans. So keen were Australians to buy these that even when the war ended the government continued with Security Loans, building a fund for public investment. The Federal Government strictly controlled interest rates, profit levels, wages and the prices of most goods and services. It endeavoured to stamp out the inevitable wartime black market and profiteering.

In 1942 schools closed for several months and could only re-open when they had trenches dug around their playgrounds. School children spent part of their week practising air raid drills. A Dig for Victory program was introduced and many school yards were planted with hard-to-get vegetables.

By 1943 home deliveries of groceries came to an end and without refrigerators, families were dependant on ice when available. Housewives needed ration cards to obtain their strict quota of tea, meat, sugar and butter ration.



Rationing of clothing began in June 1942 and food rationing followed. The scale varied from time to time. In 1944 the weekly ration scale for each adult was: tea 2 ounces; sugar 16 ounces; butter 6 ounces; meat 2 pounds. All rationing ceased by July 1950. Source: Australian War Memorial 042770



Leaflet encouraging the Australian public to help the war effort by growing their own vegetables, 1942. Source: Australian War Memorial RC00613