

WONTHAGGI RESEARCH

Wonthaggi was born in 1909 as a child of the Victorian Railways. The country town is located 128 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. The settlement quickly grew into a wealthy mining town owing its existence then to the black-coal mining industry, such deposits being of limited extent in Victoria.

As the thicker seams were worked out, and with development of electric power from brown coal, so Wonthaggis fortunes declined. Coal-mining continued, though uneconomic, through the support of the Victorian Railways. But it became obvious that so far as this basic industry was concerned Wonthaggi was doomed. The population was 9,000 in 1934, trailing off to 4,500 in 1951 and mining finally ceased in 1968. A consultant called in to advise on its future could offer no real hope and dismissed the suggestion that the council could continue as a separate body.

To arrest the decling fortunes of the town, Wonthaggi made use of the optional powers given to councils under the Victorian Local Government Act to change the council rating basis from Net Annual Value to the Site Value. The effect, it was believed, would be to encourage property owners to outlay on improvements to their properties in the knowledge that they would not have to pay more than they would if their sites remained vacant. Rates for vacant site owners would of course rise substatntially.

A demand for a poll on this proposal was presented to Wonthaggi Council by the specified number of ratepayers. They were given comparisons of their rate liability under the two alternatives. Finally, in 1958, the Site Value alternative was carried at the poll by 1,328 votes to 418 votes, and has operated ever since.

The accompanying table shows the numbers of dwelling permits issued and the values of those permits under headings from year to year.

- Numbers of dwelling permits issued in the first six years following the change to Site Value rating were more than three times those recorded in the previous five years of N.A.V. rating.
- The values involved in the dwelling permits were approximately four times those recorded in the previous five years of N.A.V. rating.
- The values of all building permits in this period were approximately four times those in the previous five years of N.A.V. rating.
- From 1967 onwards to 1985, Wonthaggi Borough building performance has escalated enormously. In that period of 19 years the number of dwelling permits increased 30-fold. Values of those dwelling permits increased 100-fold. Other business building permits increased 300-fold.

Building permits shown for years 1967 to 1985 are taken from A.B.S. Catalogue Number 8703.2. Those for earlier years are from the relevant Victorian Year Books.

Year Dwelling Permits Houses and Flats \$000 Building Permits \$000

1964 25	116	178
1963 24	106	196

1962 18	76	106
1961 17	94	104
1960 17	92	114
1959 3	20	60
1958 6	26	40
1957 3	22	56
1956 7	42	60
1955 6	18	22
1954 9	30	30

From 1954 to 1958 buildings taxed. From 1959 to 1964 rated on site only.