Yarra Investment Fund

Gross returns as at 30 June 2023

	1 month %	3 months %	1 year %	3 years % p.a.	5 years % p.a.	10 years % p.a.	Since inception* % p.a.
Yarra Investment Fund^	1.26	2.25	22.00	14.56	7.20	8.69	5.75
S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index†	1.76	1.01	14.78	11.12	7.15	8.55	7.40
Excess return (before fees)‡	-0.49	1.24	7.23	3.44	0.05	0.14	-1.65

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Taxes payable by investors have not been taken into account. The figures shown have been provided for illustrative purposes – they are unaudited and subject to change. The total returns shown are gross of all fees, meaning they do not reflect the deduction of any investment management fees which would reduce returns and assume reinvestment of all distributions. Investment in the fund is not available on a fee free basis and this should be factored into any analysis of past performance.

Net returns as at 30 June 2023

	1 month %	3 months %	1 year %	3 years % p.a.	5 years % p.a.	10 years % p.a.	Since inception* % p.a.
Yarra Investment Fund^	1.13	1.84	20.02	12.71	5.46	6.93	9.79
S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index†	1.76	1.01	14.78	11.12	7.15	8.55	7.40
Excess return (after fees)‡	-0.63	0.82	5.25	1.59	-1.69	-1.63	2.39

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Taxes payable by investors have not been taken into account. The figures shown have been provided for illustrative purposes – they are unaudited and subject to change. The total returns shown are prepared on an exit to exit basis – they include all ongoing fees and expenses and assume reinvestment of all distributions.

* Inception date Yarra Investment Fund: December 1984.
^ This Fund is no longer available for new investment. The Reinvestment of distributions is still allowed where an existing Reinvestment instruction is in place.
† Since April 2008 the benchmark for the Yarra Investment Fund is the S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index
‡ Excess return: The difference between the Fund's return and the benchmark return (S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index).

Market review

The Australian equities S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index generated a +1.0% return during the June quarter, with Information Technology – buoyed by AI developments globally and strong company specific updates – the top-performing sector and Health Care the weakest sector performer as market leader CSL disappointed with an earnings downgrade. On the global scale, the MSCI World Index recorded an increase of +7.0% for the period.

From an interest rate perspective, Australia's 10-year government bond yield rose to +4.0% during the quarter on the back of hawkish RBA commentary and surprise cash rate hikes from Australia's central bank. The Australian 2-year yield increased more than the 10-year over the quarter, resulting in the yield curve now being inverted.

Information Technology (+19.3%) rallied strongly over the period, with Xero (XRO, +33.0%) being the primary source of outperformance after announcing strong results in May on the back of increased subscriber numbers and earnings running ahead of estimates. Wisetech Global (WTC, +22.5%) was another notable outperformer for the quarter.

Utilities (+5.5%) also generated a strong positive return, with AGL (AGL, +34.3%) the key contributor following a positive earnings update which was driven by supportive wholesale energy markets.

Conversely, Health Care (-3.2%) was the weakest performing sector, with CSL (CSL, -3.8%) the main detractor after confirming FY24 earnings guidance would be ~10% lower than consensus. The weaker outlook was mainly driven by prolonged cost pressures in its core blood plasma business, Behring, and concerns around increased future competing products for its Behring and Vifor businesses.

Portfolio review

Key Contributors

Xero (XRO, overweight) – the online accounting software provider outperformed during the quarter after announcing a solid result, with subscribers and revenue in line with expectations and EBITDA ahead of estimates. The result saw XRO's new CEO provide more detail about the company's shift towards more disciplined growth, with an increased focus on yield as a growth lever along with subscriber growth.

Insurance Australia Group (IAG, overweight) – our position in Australia's largest personal lines insurer added value over the period following a positive investor day update, which demonstrated more conservative setting around reinsurance and perils allowances, de-risking the growth outlook. Importantly, personal insurance providers are continuing to demonstrate excellent pricing power this CYTD (with double-digit premium rate increases y/y) which is offsetting increased cost inflation and supporting margin trajectory. This, in turn, is supporting an appealing stock valuation (16.0-times forward P/E).

NEXTDC (NXT, overweight) – following the announcement of the data centre operator's largest ever individual contract in April and subsequent regional expansion into Malaysia and New Zealand, NXT continued to outperform as the market's conviction in Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications as a driver of demand growth grew. Most notably, global leading specialist chip maker Nvidia's commentary around AI driven demand growth supported previous comments made by NXT management.

Reliance Worldwide (RWC, overweight) – the manufacturer and distributor of plumbing and heating parts outperformed over the June quarter following the release of the company's March-quarter trading update in late April, coupled with supportive updates from trade distribution peers in the USA. These trading updates have been broadly positive, demonstrating the resilience of RWC's repair-focused end markets (total sales growth of +14.2% for the nine months ending March 2023) and robust margin outlook supported by a cost-out plan and easing raw material cost pressures. We regard RWC as a compelling opportunity, with the market pricing for a significant decline in earnings (P/E of only 14.2times vs 17.0 times mid cycle) whereas we remain constructive on the demand environment given the defensive nature of RWC's revenue base, the majority of which relates to non-discretionary repair driven sales.

CSL (CSL, underweight) – our underweight to the globally focused biotechnology company contributed positively to performance in the June quarter following the company updating earnings guidance which was below market expectations (around 10% lower than consensus for group FY24 NPATA). The weaker operating outlook was driven by lower growth in the core blood plasma business, Behring, as cost pressures push out the margin recovery story. We retain our cautious outlook for Behring, driven by increased competition, elevated and prolonged cost pressures, adverse relative product growth rates and longer-term product substitution risk. Trading on 29.1-times forward P/E, we retain an underweight position.

Key Detractors

Link Group (LNK, overweight) – the diversified superannuation administration provider underperformed over the period following an adverse update in late June specific to its Retirement & Superannuation Solutions (RSS) business which confirmed that a superannuation customer representing approximately 4% of the business' revenue would not be renewing their contract in FY25. Notwithstanding LNK calling out that FY23 was overall tracking ahead of expectations, the share price weakened as investors queried if LNK may need to trade off margin for renewal certainty in future years.

United Malt (UMG, overweight) – the global commercial malt processor and distributor underperformed during the period. UMG received a takeover bid from peer Malteries Soufflet priced at $5.00/share (+45% premium to prior closing price) in late March but has retraced modestly from its highs as a degree of deal risk began to be priced. Our view has been that Malteries Soufflet has required time to undertake sufficient due diligence and that the likelihood of a deal proceeding remains high. Positively, following end of the June period on 3 July, UMG received confirmation of the bid proceeding at $5.00 subject to a number of deal requirements. This saw the stock up +8.6% on the first trading day in July.

Tyro (TYR, overweight) – the domestic payments provider underperformed through the June quarter, a period which included the cessation of takeover negotiations with Potentia. During the nine-month period that TYR had been under takeover, the stock delivered four upgrades to it FY23 operating earnings guidance, demonstrating strong operating leverage and allaying prior concerns on the ability of the business to grow profitably. The stock now trades on 13.4times FY24 EV/EBITDA which we regard as relatively undemanding given the company's growth profile.

James Hardie (JHX, underweight) – the leading fibre cement sheeting manufacturer to the housing industry outperformed in the period following the release of its FY23 financial results. While the result was broadly in-line with expectations, the company provided forward profit guidance for the June-quarter that was 10% ahead of market expectations, underpinned by solid volume and margin outcomes. While JHX is a quality building materials name, we remain cautious of the sustainability in its end markets (a portion of discretionary renovation spend), making it difficult to support the stock at its current valuation of 20.9 times forward P/E. Instead, we maintain a preference for plumbing supplies company Reliance (RWC), which trades on 14.2 times forward P/E.

Chalice Mining (CHN, overweight) – our overweight position in metals explorer Chalice was a source of underperformance during the quarter. The company undertook a $70m equity raise during May to help fund additional drilling at its Julimar prospect in WA. Concerns on the company's ability to fund a project development weighed on the stock in our view. However, we continue to like Chalice and see upside from further resource additional at its world-class Julimar asset. The size and scope of Julimar should also make it attractive to major mining houses, and as a result we view M&A is a source of potential upside to CHN.

Key Purchases

Tabcorp (TAH) – we initiated a position in the wagering operator during the quarter, reflecting our view that TAH will be a net beneficiary of the upcoming Victorian wagering license tender and regulatory alignment between retail and digital operators. In our view, TAH also remains well positioned to benefit from its refreshed TAB25 strategy and gradual consolidation in the sector, which we expect will assist in delivering on the company's medium-term 10% ROIC target.

Chorus (CNU) – we established a position in the high-quality regulated telecommunications utility during the quarter, which trades on a 5.8% FY24 dividend yield. As the build out of its fibre network comes to an end, CNU will move to strong free cash flow generation, with a balance sheet that is under levered vs target gearing, and strong line of sight on regulatory revenues. Based on current market metrics, CNU would earn a nearly 300 bps higher regulatory return in the next regulatory period from July 2024, providing further upside to the medium-term dividend yield.

Region (RGN) – we initiated a position in the suburban shopping mall owning REIT in the period. We believe RGN's retail asset base, which comprises 96 predominantly neighbourhood shopping centres, will prove to be resilient during the consumer downturn. This is supported by its high skew to supermarket/anchor tenant income (46% total Net Operating Income), affordable specialty rents (8.7% average occupancy cost) and high overall portfolio occupancy (98%). The stock valuation is attractive, at 0.86-times net asset backing and offering a dividend yield above 6%.

Vicinity Centre (VCX) – we initiated a position in the shopping mall owning REIT in the period. Key supportive factors include VCX's asset mix, with over half its asset base exposed to more advantaged segments of retailing (i.e. luxury, DFO outlets in recovering CBDs), more resilient in-place leases with high occupancy and fewer holdovers. Further, VCX has a strong balance sheet (gearing 25.7% as at Dec-22) and attractive valuation, with the stock trading at 0.80-times net asset backing and offering a dividend yield above 6%.

Key Sales

Qantas (QAN) – we completed the portfolio's exit of Qantas during the month. The airline has experienced a period of unprecedented profitability with high demand and limited capacity coming out of COVID. While we believe some of the improvements in market structure that QAN is enjoying will persist, it is clear that profitability will reduce from current peak levels, warranting exiting the position.

Evolution Mining (EVN) – we exited our position in the gold miner during the quarter. With gold prices trading close to US$2,000/oz, we see limited additional commodity price upside at these levels. EVN has rebounded strongly following downgrades and disappointing news during mid-2022, and while we favour the company's improved balance sheet and free cash generation, we now regard EVN as being fully valued. Our preferred exposure in the gold sector is through peer Northern Star Resources (NST), which offers better production growth from its long-life, low-cost assets.

Aristocrat Leisure (ALL) – we exited our position in the gaming content developer as the stock continued to re-rate higher, with evidence of a normalisation in Digital momentum after a period of elevated trading through COVID. We retain a positive view of the company given its position in Land-Based gaming and expectations that Digital revenues will likely continue to stabilise in coming months. However, we remain wary that expectations for the business are elevated (consensus EPS growth +18%/+8% in FY23/24) and P/E multiples are approaching long-run averages (19-times vs 21-times 10-year avg.). As a result, we believe better opportunities can be found elsewhere at this time.

Key Active Overweights

Reliance Worldwide (RWC) – the market is showing elevated concern for a weaker demand environment for the manufacturer and distributor of plumbing and heating parts, with RWC's FY23 earnings estimates now lowered following recent market updates. We view RWC as a compelling opportunity; while the market is pricing for a significant decline in earnings (P/E of only 14.2-times vs 17.0 times mid-cycle), we remain constructive on the demand environment given the defensive nature of its revenue base, the majority of which relates to non-discretionary repair activity.

Insurance Group (QBE) – the general insurer remains our preferred insurance exposure, which we expect will deliver strong earnings growth in 2023 and beyond driven by the delivery of sustained strong premium rate growth and the beneficial impact of higher interest rates on investment earnings. QBE has substantially improved its underwriting discipline and product focus over the last five years, and we believe it's 15.0-times FY23 earnings multiple excessively discounts the risks inherent in its business model.

United Malt (UMG) – the portfolio is overweight the global commercial malt processor and distributor. UMG received a takeover bid from peer Malteries Soufflet priced at $5.00/share (+45% premium to prior closing price) in late March, but retraced modestly from its highs as a degree of deal risk began to be priced. Our view has been that Malteries Soufflet has needed time to undertake sufficient due diligence and that the likelihood of a deal proceeding remains high. Positively, following the end of the period, UMG received confirmation on 3 July of the bid proceeding at $5.00 subject to a number of deal requirements. This saw the stock up +8.6% on the first trading day in July.

Worley (WOR) – we remain overweight the leading provider of global engineering services. WOR's earnings recovery is in its early stages following COVID-19 impacts across FY20-22. Revenue is expected to grow 13-15% in FY23, with leading indicators (Factored Sales Pipeline +36%, Rolling 12 Month Bookings +28%, Backlog +8%) and structural drivers (capital investment required to decarbonise) pointing to strong top-line growth ahead. Margins are also set to accelerate over the coming years as WOR benefits from a more consolidated industry structure, operating leverage, and active mix management.

Woodside Energy (WDS) – we are overweight oil & gas producer Woodside. We are attracted to the company's strong growth profile that remains on budget and schedule to increase production by more than 30% over the next two years. Sector leading exposure to LNG prices should continue to support earnings with global gas markets expected to remain short until after 2025 ahead of new project commissioning. 2023 production guidance is conservative in our view and point to two production upgrades during the course of 2022 as evidence of upside risk to guidance across 2023.

Key Active Underweights

CSL (CSL) – we retain an underweight to the globally focused biotechnology company. Underpinning this position is our view that earnings growth from the core blood plasma division (approximately 65% of group earnings) will be more difficult moving forward due to elevated and sticky cost pressures, increased competition, relative product growth rates away from higher margin specialty products and longer-term product substitution risk. While the more recently acquired business, Vifor (now approximately 15% of group earnings) does provide differentiation, we regard the business as lower quality than the core plasma franchise. Considering this operating outlook, we do not believe the current valuation (29.1-times forward P/E, 19.8-times EV/EBITDA) is overly attractive and maintain a preference for the global sleep apnoea device supplier ResMed (RMD) in the large-cap Healthcare space.

National Australia Bank (NAB) – we remain underweight the Australian bank reflecting our negative sector view. The favourable dynamics around expanding net interest margins (NIM) due to higher interest rates are now well understood, and we do not expect gains to be sustained into the medium term. Further, Australian banks are facing material earnings offsets through elevated expense growth and a normalisation in bad debt expenses, meaning sector EPS is likely to be at peak levels.

Macquarie Group (MQG) – we remain underweight the stock based on our view that the recent earnings uplift is driven by its lower quality and highly cyclical businesses, which we view as unsustainable into the medium term. We see significant downside risk to consensus forecasts beyond FY23, which currently reflect a strong contribution from lumpy items including trading revenue in its commodities business, gains on sale, performance fees and low loan-loss provisions. We do not expect growth in its more stable businesses to be able to offset this. As a result, we regard MQG's headline forecast P/E multiple of 14.9-times consensus forward earnings as unattractive.

Wesfarmers (WES) – we retain an underweight position in the diversified conglomerate, driven by a recalibration of expectations for the core Bunnings business (43% group sales, 61% EBIT) as it moves into a period of softer housing demand. Indeed, we believe the 1H23 result provided a preview of more challenging operating conditions to come, with EBIT margin compression of -60 bps (y/y) indicative of discounting activity in a weakening consumer environment. With the company still trading on a forward earnings multiple of 22.0-times P/E (vs long term average of 23.0-times) we believe better opportunities can be found elsewhere at this time.

Woolworths (WOW) – we retain an underweight position in the supermarket, led by concerns that softer than expected volumes and cost pressures may temper margin benefits from food inflation. While the 1H23 result demonstrated robust margin expansion as WOW cycled COVID costs (Australian Food EBIT margins +80 bps to 5.9% in 1H23), consensus earnings expectations remain elevated, with margins expected to grow to 6.2% over the next three years (vs 5.3% in FY22). With the stock trading at 26.0-times P/E (vs long-term average 17.0-times P/E), we believe WOW's premium multiple is unwarranted relative to our growth expectations for the business.

Market outlook

We have been of the view that the June quarter 2023 will mark the top of the interest cycle for most of the developed world, however, global central banks are seemingly prepared to continue hiking interest rates despite evidence inflation is moderating, lending availability tightening and economic growth faltering. With respect to the latter, we have received confirmation that the Euro Area entered recession and the Federal Reserve staff have retained their forecast that a modest recession in the US is likely. Nevertheless, it seems the appetite for policy makers to persist with the tightening cycle into Q3 has remained, with central bankers seemingly perplexed at why services inflation has yet to ease and why the labour market has yet to ease appreciably. It is possible that a pause in the hiking cycle in June by the Fed will set the scene for a pause across most of the developed world, however, the risk of overtightening and even weaker economic activity is now a real prospect. We believe the US labour market is set to post more modest employment gains from mid-23 which in concert with improving labour supply will continue to moderate wage growth and help underwrite the commencement of a gradual easing cycle in the US by the end of 2023. However, we have to acknowledge that the message from most central banks is that further hikes may be required and an interest rate easing cycle is not in prospect.

This weak economic growth narrative in concert with enthusiasm over the potential impacts from AI has seen large cap ‘growth’ stocks drive a narrow but strong equity market rally. This has largely hidden from view an ongoing negative earnings revision cycle which in concert with rising bond yields is leaving aggregate market valuations looking more challenging.

Economic growth has also slowed in Australia, recording just 0.3%qoq growth in the March quarter and much of this growth can merely be traced to strong population growth and ongoing engineering construction projects. It is clear the prior tightening of monetary policy is having a material impact on the interest rate sensitive parts of the economy. Nominal retail sales have slowed to 0% six -month annualised, following on from declining volumes in recent quarters. Building approvals continue to decline and are likely to decline further in coming months as declining housing affordability outweighs the impact of an under supplied housing market. Moreover, it is also clear that despite the Federal Budget forecast to return to surplus, that government demand growth is waning even faster than private demand growth.

Nevertheless, after describing the May decision to increase interest rates as finally balanced, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) followed up with a further hike in June and a pause in

July, but has flagged that further tightening may be required. The RBA has clearly shifted its focus to worrying about weak productivity growth and high unit labour costs as the main reason for fearing inflation may be higher than it forecasts. We think this ignores the fact that average compensation per hour has not risen sharply, and the main reason for high unit labour costs is a surge in hours worked and employment as the influx in immigration is absorbed into a slowing economy. While this shift in the RBA's focus risks a further hike in August, in our view the RBA would have been better served to pause after the May rate hike, rather than risking a harder economic landing.

Australia should still be able to avoid a technical recession due to four key reasons:

1. Australia has been a net beneficiary of global commodity shortages and the prior surge in commodity prices. Commodity prices are now off their peaks, and although they remain very elevated from a historical perspective, the impact of moving through the peak will be for nominal GDP growth will slow quickly over the next 6 months, removing some of the cushion that has protected corporate profits, tax receipts and wage growth.
2. The household sector continues to hold a significant buffer of excess savings which can be used to smooth consumption growth amid acute cost of living pressures. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that the residual of the savings buffer skews to older households, leaving younger and more indebted households exposed. As such we remain particularly cautious on discretionary retail spending.
3. Australia remains incredibly well placed to benefit from the global energy transition. Lithium is already a A$10bn export industry for Australia and Australia is the world's dominant producer. Electric Vehicle sales are forecast to increase 10 times by 2030 and Australia has the world's 2nd largest copper resource. LNG is an important energy transition fuel, and currently accounts for 23% of global electricity generation. Australia just happens to be the world's equal largest exporter of LNG. The limiting factor nearer term is that escalating costs and project delays risk pushing out the economic benefits.
4. Net migration into Australia contracted in 2021 for the first time since 1945. However, a very strong recovery was recorded through 2022 and a record level of net migration has occurred in recent months, ensuring that Australia's population growth will exceed 2% in 2023. This will be the primary mechanism keeping Australia out of recession, yet it comes with the complication of exacerbating the rental shortage evident across all capital cities.

While the RBA has been later than most other developed nations, we believe financial conditions are now firmly in the restrictive zone. From our perspective, the RBA's focus on global growth, trends in household spending and the outlook for inflation and labour markets in informing their future decisions suggest that multiple additional hikes are unlikely to be required. While interest rate hikes in Australia will remain a month-to-month proposition for the next six months, our bias is that the RBA should have concluded its hiking cycle, yet an ever-shifting RBA framework suggest they may hike again in August. It is unlikely that policy easing will be delivered in 2023, however, we do expect that the RBA will commence a modest easing cycle in 1H24.

The A$/US$ had been under downward pressure as markets grappled with a seemingly more hawkish Fed and a relatively more dovish RBA. However, the RBA has recently sounded more hawkish than the Fed the A$ has started to appreciate. With Australia's external accounts remaining in excellent health, our expectation that Australia's economic growth will prove more robust, and the prospect the US$ down trend will persist as the Fed pivots from its hiking strategy to an easing cycle in 2023, we expect the A$/US$ will appreciate to the mid70s towards the end of 2023.

We are most overweight stocks within the Communication Services, Information Technology and Utilities sectors, and are underweight Financials, Health Care and Real Estate.

Sector allocation

	Portfolio %	Benchmark %	Active %
Communication Services	11.34	4.06	7.28
Consumer Discretionary	7.49	6.45	1.04
Consumer Staples	2.58	4.96	-2.37
Energy	5.43	5.31	0.12
Financials	20.64	27.90	-7.26
Health Care	4.22	9.72	-5.50
Industrials	8.23	7.00	1.24
Information Technology	8.57	2.52	6.05
Materials	25.42	24.56	0.86
Real Estate	1.76	6.01	-4.25
Utilities	3.02	1.52	1.50

Top 5 holdings

	Portfolio %	Benchmark %	Active %
BHP	11.02	10.71	0.31
Commonwealth Bank of Australia	5.96	7.95	-1.99
Woodside Energy	5.43	3.07	2.36
Westpac Banking Corporation	4.66	3.52	1.14
Telstra	3.98	2.33	1.65

Key active positions

Overweights	Portfolio %	Benchmark %	Active %
Reliance Worldwide	3.03	0.15	2.87
QBE Insurance	3.83	1.10	2.74
United Malt	2.58	0.06	2.53
Underweights			
CSL	1.55	6.29	-4.74
National Australia Bank	0.00	3.89	-3.89
Macquarie Group	0.00	3.03	-3.03

Portfolio holdings may not be representative of current or future investments. The securities discussed may not represent all of the portfolio's holdings and may represent only a small percentage of the strategy's portfolio holdings. Future portfolio holdings may not be profitable.

Income and growth

	1 year %	3 years % p.a.	5 years % p.a.	10 years % p.a.
Growth return	9.34	0.45	-5.79	-3.88
Distribution return	10.69	12.26	11.25	10.81

The Growth Return is measured by the movement in the Fund's unit price, ex-distribution, and can be positive or negative as the unit price can fluctuate with changes in the underlying market value of the Fund's assets. The Distribution Return is the amount that is paid to unitholders by way of income distribution in a 12-month period. It does not include capital distributions.

Features

Investment objective	To outperform the S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index over rolling 3-year periods
Recommended investment time frame	5 + years
Fund inception	December 1984
Fund size	A$7.3 mn as at 30 June 2023
APIR codes	JBW0005AU
ARSN code	090 047 662
Estimated management cost	1.65% p.a.
Buy/sell spread	+/- 0.15%

Applications and contacts

The Yarra Investment Fund is no longer available for new investment. The reinvestment of distributions is still allowed where an existing reinvestment instruction is in place.

Website www.yarracm.com

Investor Services Team 1800 034 494 (Australia) +61 3 9002 1980 (Overseas) IST@yarracm.com