

# CoreSeries Defensive

Portfolio performance to the month ended 30 April 2024

## Portfolio details

### Investment Objective

The portfolio aims to achieve an Inflation (Consumer Price Index "AUCPI") + 1.5% pa objective over rolling three year periods by taking exposures to a mix of growth and defensive asset classes.

### Investment Strategy

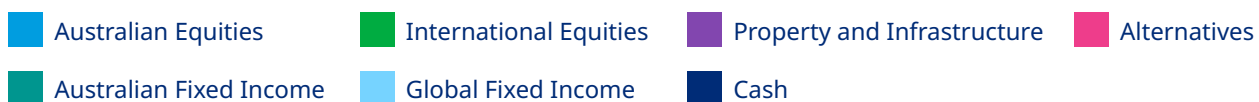
The strategy is an actively managed diversified portfolio investing in both growth asset classes such as equities, property and infrastructure, and defensive asset classes such as cash and fixed interest securities. The portfolio's exposure will typically be 30% growth assets and 70% defensive assets; however over time these allocations may deviate within a range due to market movements and asset allocation decisions. These exposures are expected to provide a return in excess of inflation over the long-term and aim to minimise the impact of shorter-term market volatility through asset diversification, manager selection and risk management.

	APIR code	1 Mth (%)	3 Mth (%)	6 Mth (%)	YTD (%)	1 Yr (%)	3 Yrs p.a. (%)	5 Yrs p.a. (%)	Since inception p.a. (%)*
CoreSeries Defensive	WFS7916AU	-1.7	0.7	7.4	1.1	4.8	1.5	2.5	3.4
AUCPI + 1.5%	-	0.4	1.3	2.4	1.7	5.1	6.7	5.3	5.1
Excess return**	-	-2.1	-0.6	5.0	-0.6	-0.3	-5.2	-2.8	-1.7

\* Performance since 30 November 2018.

\*\* Please note that the performance figures as at the 30th April 2024 includes the changes made to Wholesale Plus funds within the portfolio as at 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024. This does not account for any delays in the application and redemptions from the existing funds into the new funds. For further information on the changes made to the Wholesale Plus funds, please refer to the 'Portfolio Commentary' on the following page.

### Actual Asset Allocation



## Market Commentary

The portfolio delivered a return of -1.7% over April compared to its benchmark of 0.4%.

The latest inflation reading was stronger than the consensus forecast among economists. Similar to other regions, goods inflation was broadly low whilst services inflation remained elevated. The underlying details however pointed to boosts to inflation from government administered services such as health and education, with these items tending to reset at the start of the year. Meanwhile, the picture on growth remained broadly resilient with businesses in most sectors indicating resilient conditions. Challenging condition however evident in the construction sector, whilst retail sales declined in March with sales in most categories declining in the month.

Australian Shares returned -2.9% in April, giving up some of the gains made year to date, as risk aversion rose following the recent inflation readings. This reversal of strong year-to-date performance was partly evident in sector performance with Real Estate (-7.7%) and Consumer Discretionary (-5.3%) amongst the worst performing sectors. Meanwhile, Utilities (4.8%) benefited from both the rise in risk aversion among investors as well as concerns around the inflation outlook, whilst Materials (0.6%) outperformed other sectors boosted by the recovery in iron ore prices. The reversal of performance theme was also somewhat evident at the stock level with the Commonwealth Bank (-4.8%) and Goldman Group (-6.2%) among the main detractors for the month. Australian Small Caps modestly underperformed Australian Shares, returning -3.1% for the month. There were similar themes to Australian Shares, with Resources (2.0%) benefited from the rising commodity prices whilst Industrials (-5.0%) weakened against a challenging market backdrop.

International Shares corrected in April, returning -3.3% in both hedged and unhedged Australian Dollar (AUD) terms. Concerns around the outlook for inflation and its impact on the likelihood of interest rate cuts was a key driver, with the resulting rise in bond yields negatively impacting interest-rate sensitive sectors such as Real Estate (-6.8%). Information Technology (-5.3%) was also a laggard, with valuations negatively impacted given the long-dated nature of its cashflows, whilst at a company level, not even the "Magnificent 7" were able to escape the correction, albeit still outperforming the rest of the market. Rising tensions in the Middle East was another factor negatively impacting investor sentiment, with concerns around inflation and geopolitics ultimately outweighing the encouraging growth backdrop, including Q1'24 US earnings results to date.

Emerging markets outperformed developed markets over April, with Emerging Market Shares producing a 0.9% return for the month. China's Shanghai Composite (2.1%) performed well following encouraging signs from businesses, notably in service-related industries, as did India's BSE 500 (3.4%) against a backdrop of strong economic growth momentum.

April proved to be a challenging month for International Listed Property and Australian Listed Property, down 5.3% and 7.6% respectively, with the reduction in interest rate cut expectations and rising bond yields negatively impacting these asset classes. International Listed Infrastructure fared better, down 0.8% for the month, partly buffered by the stronger performance of Utilities which benefited from rising risk aversion and concerns around the outlook for inflation.

The recent inflation readings combined with more cautious rhetoric from Fed members saw international government bond yields end April higher, resulting in a -1.6% return for International Government Bonds for the month of April. The extent of the rise in bond yields however varied by region with the US experiencing larger moves compared to Europe reflecting differences in both trends in recent inflation readings and expectations for near term interest rate changes. As of the end of April, markets had pared back expectation of interest rate cuts by the Fed this year from over 2 cuts to 1 cut, whilst expectations for cuts by the European Central Bank reduced only modestly with more than 2 cuts still expected this year. International Credit returned -1.8% for the month of April, also negatively impacted by the rise in bond yields.

Australian government bond yields also ended the month higher resulting in a -2.0% return for Australian Government Bonds, influenced by a combination of both developments in global bond markets as well as the firm local CPI reading. The latter saw markets move to expect no interest rate cuts by the RBA this year compared to almost 2 cuts expected at the end of March.

### Portfolio changes over the month:

As part of the ongoing strategic review of the CoreSeries portfolios to better align the portfolios with Mercer's investment philosophy and process, Mercer has replaced the following funds across the CoreSeries Defensive portfolio.

The Magellan Infrastructure Fund has been replaced with the ATLAS Infrastructure Fund. ATLAS seeks to provide a portfolio of high-quality infrastructure assets with the goal of delivering strong absolute returns over an investment cycle.

The Kapstream Absolute Return Income Fund has been replaced with the Perpetual Diversified Income Fund. The Perpetual strategy provides exposure to predominantly Australian investment grade credit and aims to generate alpha from credit sector rotation and security selection.

## Underlying Fund Returns

	1 Mth (%)	3 Mth (%)	1 Yr (%)	3 Yrs p.a. (%)	5 Yrs p.a. (%)
<b>Australian Equities</b>					
Fidelity Australian Opportunities MPS Fund	-2.2	2.8	5.1	4.0	6.4
Platypus Australian Equity MPS Fund	-3.0	6.3	16.1	-	-
Realindex Australian Shares MPS Fund	-2.9	0.7	11.1	9.5	9.4
Solaris Core Australian Equity MPS Fund	-2.4	2.9	10.5	7.6	6.5
<b>International Equities</b>					
Blended Global Equities Hedged MPS Fund	-3.1	4.0	13.2	0.3	6.4
Guardcap Global Equity MPS Fund	-3.3	1.4	6.8	5.6	7.3
T. Rowe Price Global Focused Equity MPS Fund	-3.8	8.4	25.5	5.3	13.5
Wellington Global Equity MPS Fund	-2.6	4.7	11.8	10.3	11.4
<b>Property and Infrastructure</b>					
Mercer Indexed Australian Listed Property Fund	-7.7	5.9	18.7	7.3	5.3
Principal Global Property MPS Fund	-5.0	-2.1	-0.3	-4.9	-2.0
ATLAS Infrastructure Fund	-1.8	-0.8	-5.7	5.2	5.4
<b>Alternatives</b>					
Mercer Multi-Strategy Alternatives Fund	0.4	1.5	6.6	-	-
<b>Australian Fixed Income</b>					
Macquarie Australian Bond MPS Fund	-2.0	-1.2	-0.4	-2.0	-0.1
Janus Henderson Australian Fixed Interest MPS Fund	-2.3	-1.3	0.2	-2.1	0.1
Perpetual Diversified Income Fund	0.6	1.9	8.3	3.6	3.5
Pendal Australian Fixed Interest MPS Fund	-1.9	-1.1	-0.3	-2.3	-0.2
<b>Global Fixed Income</b>					
PIMCO Global Fixed Interest MPS Fund	-1.6	-1.1	2.2	-2.6	0.1
Wellington Global Bond MPS Fund	-1.8	-2.1	-0.4	-3.2	-0.9
Western Asset Global Bond MPS Fund	-2.3	-2.8	-0.7	-3.5	-0.5
<b>Cash</b>					
Advance Cash Multi-Blend Fund	0.4	1.1	4.4	2.3	1.7
Platform Cash	0.3	0.9	3.5	-	-



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