REALM INVESTMENT HOUSE

**AUGUST 2024** 

# **FUND OBJECTIVE**

The Realm High Income Fund is a fixed income strategy, that invests in domestic asset backed securities, bankissued securities and corporate & government bonds. The objective of the Fund is to deliver investors a consistent return (net of fees and gross of franking) of 3% over the RBA cash rate through a market cycle.

# **FUND DETAILS**

**Distribution Frequency:** 

Monthly

Liquidity: Daily

Buy/Sell: 0.05% / 0.05% Inception Date: 26.9.2012 Fund size: AUD \$1.91 billion Management Fees (Net of GST):

Ordinary Units -1.1182% Wholesale Units -0.7175% Adviser Units -0.7175% mFunds Units -0.7175%

# **Direct Minimum** Investment:

Ordinary Units -\$25,000 Wholesale Units -\$1,000,000 Adviser Units -\$25,000 mFund Units -\$10,000



# **NET PERFORMANCE**

Period	Ordinary Units (incl. franking)	Wholesale Units (incl. franking)	RBA Cash Rate Return
1 Month	0.60%	0.64%	0.36%
3 Month	1.94%	2.04%	1.06%
6 Months	4.57%	4.79%	2.15%
1 Year	10.61%	11.07%	4.30%
3 Years p.a	5.50%	5.93%	2.68%
5 Years p.a	4.93%	5.37%	1.73%
10 Years p.a	4.43%	4.87%	1.72%
Since Inception p.a*	4.98%	5.11%	1.88%

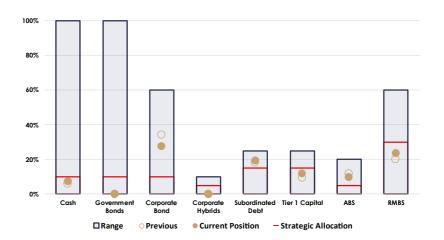
<sup>\*</sup> Past performance is not indicative of future performance. \*Ordinary units Inception 26 September 2012. Wholesale units Inception 2 October 2013.

## **FUND STATISTICS**

Running Yield	6.06%
Yield to Maturity	6.69%
Volatility†	1.20%
Interest rate duration	0.30
Credit duration	2.91
Average Credit Rating	A-
Number of positions	415
Average position exposure	0.11%
Worst Month*	-1.99%
Best Month*	2.09%
Sharpe ratio∂	2.20

Calculated on Ordinary Units unless otherwise stated. \*Since Inception 26 September 2012.

## SECTOR ALLOCATION

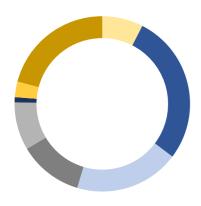


<sup>†</sup>Trailing 12 Months Calculated on Daily observations. <sup>a</sup>Since Inception Calculated on Daily observations

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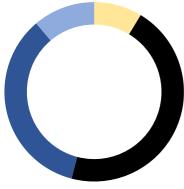
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# PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION



- Cash (7.55%)
- ■Government Bonds (0.00%)
- Corporate Bond (27.72%)
- Corporate Hybrid (0.05%)
- ■Subordinated Debt (19.30%)
- ■Tier 1 Capital (11.83%)
- ABS Public (8.83%)
- ABS Private (0.96%)
- RMBS Private (2.87%)
- RMBS Public (20.90%)

# CREDIT DURATION PROFILE



- At Call to 6 Months (8.67%)
- 6 Months to 3 Years (45.39%)
- 3 Years to 5 Years (34.75%)
- 5 Years to 10 Years (11.19%)
- 10 Years + (0.00%)

# **FUND UPDATE**

**Cash and Short-Term Liquidity:** ↑ The allocation to highly liquid assets (cash and government bonds) increased from 6.08% to 7.55%. This reflected a reduced allocation in corporate bonds and ABS, which was partly offset by higher allocations to RMBS, subordinated debt and Tier 1 capital.

Corporate Bond, Corporate Hybrids & Subordinated Debt: ↓ Weighting to corporate bonds, corporate hybrids and subordinated debt decreased from 52.52% to 47.07%. Australian credit spreads remained resilient, providing scope for profit taking in corporate bonds for reinvestment into other emerging opportunities. This included new transactions from Macquarie and BNP which saw the fund modestly increase its allocation to T2 capital. Primary activity in Australia picked up generally as issuers emerged from self-imposed "blackouts" for August corporate profit reporting.

Interest Rate Duration Position: ↓ IRD positioning decreased from 0.37 to 0.30 years. Month of August was relatively benign, with the US 10-year trading range decreasing to 35bps and ending the month at a yield 6bps lower. The bull steepening continued, mostly influenced by the US unemployment rate – which pundits argued had triggered the "Sahm Rule" indicating an imminent recession. However, stronger economic data, namely retail sales and initial jobless claims, failed to completely reverse the bond rally. Domestically, the Australian bond market was driven by global markets. Most notable data release was the unemployment rate increasing by 0.1% due to an increase in the participation rate. Derivatives markets continue to price a 70% chance of a rate cut by December – contrary to Governor Bullock's hawkish statements. Global central banks remained in a dovish stance and in line with overall portfolio risk settings, IRD was slightly reduced.

Residential Mortgage-Backed Securities (RMBS): ↑ Weighting to RMBS securities increased from 20.09% to 23.77% over the month. Structured markets continued their rally over the course of the month, with a substantial number of new transactions announcing new mandates to the public market. This was across regional banks, prime non-banks, non-conforming non-banks and auto lending, with spreads across all sub asset classes tightening between 15-30 bps in portion of the capital structure. Investors continue to bid against each other for access to new stock in mezzanine (A-BBB rated) and junior mezzanine tranches (Sub investment grade rated), shown through the very high ratios of bids to available stock with around 6-8 counterparties bidding for each tranche. Secondary market volumes remain very low, with mezzanine and junior mezzanine investors refusing to sell assets, preferring to hold for the capital appreciation and yield.

With respect to market performance, Prime arrears as reported by S&P's SPIN index for July improved 1bp to 0.94%. Nonconforming arrears increased to 4.19%. Both results remain strong in comparison to both market expectations and historic index levels.

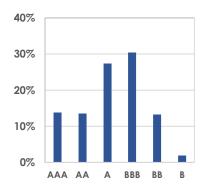
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# **ISSUER DOMICILE**



- Australian/NZ Domiciled Issuer (73.77%)
- Foreign Domicilied Issuer (18.68%)
- Cash (7.55%)

# **CREDIT QUALITY**



# PORTFOLIO ESG RISK LIMITS

Sector	Portfolio Exposure	Portfolio Limit
Fossil Fuels	2.60%	10%
Non- Renewable & Nuclear Energy	0.00%	10%
Alcohol	0.10%	10%
Gambling	0.10%	10%

**Tier 1 Capital:** ↑ Weighting to T1 capital increased from 9.40% to 11.83%. Global T1's sold off at the start of the month in sympathy with a weakening macro backdrop in the US, along with ramifications of the yen carry trade unwinding. We took this as an opportunity to increase our allocation to dislocated and investment grade rated USD AT1's. Market volatility meant primary AT1 supply was anaemic.

**Asset Backed Securities (ABS):** ↓ ABS allocation decreased from 11.92% to 9.79%. These assets are typically very short dated, continue to offer healthy yields and remain highly sought after by market participants.

**Targeted risk across the Fund**: ↓ Targeted portfolio risk decreased marginally from 1.66% to 1.45%. This reflected a move to lower interest rate duration (from 0.37 years to 0.30 years). Credit duration also declined (from 3.12 years to 2.91 years).

### **FUND OVERVIEW**

The Fund benefited from the recovery in spreads following an outcome in the French elections which settled the market. The return of 0.64% exceeded the return on cash of 0.36%.

The portfolio increased its exposure to sub-debt over the month but the primary feature of the portfolio is an overweight position in corporate bonds. As the available foreign issuer capacity is largely allocated to exposures in AT1 and Tier2, where return expectations are highest, the corporate bond exposure is largely Australian oriented. It is focused on well capitalized financials and highly rated A-REITs.

With credit markets offering limited value in aggregate, the Fund seeks to invest in a set of names where return prospects are above average. Nonetheless, the YTM of 6.85% and current credit market conditions suggest that targeted returns are less likely to be achieved in the near term.

As recent events relating to the French elections and a recent disappointing US Non-Farm Payroll outcome show, markets are prone to sharp sell-offs given the small margin of error provided in current credit spreads. Taking this into account, the portfolio is conservatively postured with IRD and CD each towards the lower end of our historical practice. These metrics are further complemented with a robust BBB+ (cusp A-) credit rating. Although market conditions are challenging, the prospects for a negative return over a 12-month period are low.

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# PLATFORM AVAILABILITY

- Australian Money Market (Retail Units)
- AMP North
- BT Wrap
- BT Panorama
- Credit Suisse
- Crestone
- First Wrap
- Hub24
- Macquarie Wrap
- Mason Stevens
- MLC Navigator/Wrap
- Netwealth
- Powerwrap
- Praemium
- uXchange
- Xplore Wealth
- mFund: RLM03

# OTHER FUND DETAILS

# **Responsible Entity:**

One Managed Investment Funds Ltd

Custodian: State Street

Australia Limited

Unit Pricing and Unit Price History:

https://www.realminvestm ents.com.au/ourproducts/ Realm-high-income-fund/

### **FUND OUTLOOK**

The Fund outperformed cash this month despite volatile and uncertain market conditions. Australian credit markets were more resilient than their offshore counterparts. However, the lower spreads on offer within our available universe of investments makes it challenging for the Fund to achieve its targeted margin of outperformance in the near term. As per prior cycles where conditions were similar, we will not reach for yield at a time when we believe markets to not offer compelling value. The YTM of 6.69% remains favourable in an absolute sense and, with the RBA guiding to no cuts in the near term, expected gains from our trading activity offers a reasonable prospect that overall returns could exceed this.

Overall portfolio credit quality averages A-, and this reflects contextually high ratings across all key asset classes. Whilst the portfolio maintains a  $\sim 15\%$  exposure in sub-IG, the majority of this is held in global money-center banks and structured credit which can withstand extreme events.

The corporate bond exposure was reduced but remains the Fund's most significant overweight position. This component of the portfolio is AUD focused as our foreign issuer allocation is deployed into higher returning bank subordinated debt and structured credit.

Although portfolio performance can suffer from deteriorating market conditions, the likelihood of recording a negative return over a 12-month period is low as risk bearing is towards the conservative end of our historical practices.

## **OVERALL OBSERVATIONS**

It was an eventful month as several drivers moved markets in opposite directions. The markets began the month on edge. The Bank of Japan continued the process of reversing its ultra-loose monetary policy with another hike in cash rates last month. Extremely loose financial conditions have been a key element of its policy prescription since Abenomics was implemented in 2012. This contributed to increased volatility in FX and domestic asset markets. There was also considerable angst about the form and magnitude of any retaliation which Hezbollah and Iran would release on Israel following recent leadership assassinations. France had yet to appoint a Prime Minister. It was against this backdrop that a much weaker than expected US Non-Farm Payroll result created a sharp sell-off which included an element of liquidation-style activity. Some of the moves were attributed to levered multi-strategy quant funds and this was reminiscent of 2008.

US Fed officials subsequently soothed the market in relation to the NFP reading. Further, Hezbollah's retaliatory missile and drone attack against Israel was ultimately scaled to communicate a desire for de-escalation. Fed Chair Powell's speech at the annual Jackson Hole conference was also well received when he declared that "the time has come" for a policy pivot towards lower rates. Markets regained their footing by month's end as the soft-landing scenario for key Western economies re-emerged as the consensus position. Indeed, inflation risks have now fallen from the top of the list of key market concerns.

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## **KEY MARKET DEVELOPMENTS**

The Nikkei 225 fell by 20% (MTD) at one point when the markets were most disorderly. Other major equity markets fell as well but Western markets subsequently recovered to a near-flat outcome. However, the Chinese equity markets did not enjoy a recovery as economic conditions remained difficult. A softer Chinese outlook and the prospect of an easing in OPEC+ production cuts contributed to a weaker oil price.

Bonds rallied overall as inflation continued to recede as a key concern. Credit markets moved similarly to equities. The NFP-induced sell-off was largely recovered by mid-month and key credit synthetics finished slightly tighter. Moves in the VIX followed a similar pattern. For a brief time, the VIX reading approximated levels seen during the most acute part of this market's reaction to the covid outbreak in March 2020.

The USD weakened as certainty around the US monetary pivot grew. The gold price rose as the prospect of lower funding costs improved and the geopolitical environment remained unstable.

### CREDIT MARKET DEVELOPMENTS

The Bloomberg US Corporate Baa-rated Option Adjusted Spread closed the month nearly unchanged at 1.15%, which masked a tumultuous period inbetween. Spreads remain tight by historical standards, and we believe they will widen from here. Optimism about a soft landing in the US and Europe is contributing to narrow spreads. However, a high all-in yield and ongoing Fed commitments to protect against a disorderly softening of labour market conditions also underpin this reading for now. The BBB-BB spread was stable through the month but is also towards the low end of history. Overall issuance volumes in the corporate bond market have been very strong of late.

Although optimism is evident at the level of aggregate spreads, this is not equally shared within the sub-IG names where the dispersion of spreads amongst these is commensurate with other times when market stresses were highly elevated. US levered loan default rates are also in the vicinity of those recorded during covid and the tech-wreck. These superficially contrasting readings are also reflected in credit options markets where implied volatilities are around 5-year averages but there is an elevated risk priced for a credit event.

Domestic structured credit issuance has also been very strong as issuers term their private warehouse exposures out into cheaper public funding. As search for yield effects strengthen in this market, the profile of spreads across IG notes is extremely flat and differences between sub-classes (eg. non-conforming vs regional issuers) are also very narrow. This is making mid-mezzanine notes expensive. Whilst sub-IG notes offer better relative value, strong demand for these notes has also emerged recently.

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LEVEL 17, 500 Collins street Melbourne VIC 3000

LEVEL 6, 31 Market Street Sydney NSW 2000 Spreads on CLOs are tightening along with those of other parts of the credit market. The narrow market spreads continue to create strong incentives to refinance outstanding notes where possible. As high cash rates pressure the finances of issuers in the levered loan market, the recycled notes are coming with a higher proportion of CCC-rated collateral.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS**

The economic outlook contains many contrasts. One theme includes an expectation for the convergence of economic growth rates. However, whilst the US is expected to slow from above trend rates and would welcome it, China's outlook has been downgraded and it now seems unlikely to meet its targets. European and Australian growth rates are expected to accelerate towards trend. Whilst most Western nations seek lower rates of inflation to reach target levels in the coming years, Japan wishes to see recent higher readings continue although this appears unlikely. China's inflation readings are an outlier to the low side due to a combination of excess supply together with weak domestic consumption and investment activity. Whilst covid drew economic activity down and harmonized the economic cycle for a time, the subsequent reflation has produced very different outcomes.

Markets continue to expect a soft landing in the United States as consumer demand slows despite easing cost of living pressures and slower government spending. Lower domestic demand is anticipated to further limit wage increments and this will contribute to reducing services inflation. The labour force will continue to grow, but not at a sufficient rate to absorb the expanding number of available workers, and this will see unemployment rise gradually towards a more balanced level. Harris accepted the Democratic Presidential Nomination and moved to a narrow lead in opinion polls versus Trump.

Although consumer confidence (UMich Aug 67.9, prior 66.4, expected 66.9) remained very weak, the resilience of household consumption showed through in the core retail figures (ex Auto, Aug MoM 0.4 p0.5 e0.1) which surprised to the upside. The 2nd GDP estimate (Q2 SAAR 3% p1.4 e2.8) was also supported by a strong consumption component, along with a buildup of inventory. Availability of bank credit remained constrained as lending standards tightened further, but at a slower rate. The ISM readings (Manu Aug 47.2 p46.8 e47.5; Services Aug 51.4 p51.4 e51.1) suggest that growth is moderating.

The surprisingly low Non-Farm Payrolls figure (Jul 114k p179k e175k) shook markets but was temporarily affected by Hurricane Berryl. A weaker than expected labour market was also evident in a range of associated statistics including lower Average Hourly Earnings (Jul MoM 0.2% p0.3 e0.3) and a higher-than-expected unemployment rate (U-3 Jul 4.3% p4.1 e4.1). The much-vaunted Sahm-rule, which linked the weakening labour market with imminent recession, was triggered although commentators were quick to point out that the route to higher unemployment is not like prior recessions where on outright decline in the workforce occurred. The annual revision of the Non-Farm Payrolls saw the workforce estimate reduced by a large 818k as the high level of illegal immigration made accurate statistics harder to compile.

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LEVEL 17, 500 Collins street Melbourne VIC 3000

LEVEL 6, 31 Market Street Sydney NSW 2000 Favourable inflation readings (Core PCE Q2 SAAR 2.8% p3.7 2.9; Core PCE Jul YoY 2.6 p2.6 e2.7) were well received. Whilst the Fed held rates, Powell's Jackson Hole speech outlined that inflation risks had receded, but employment risks have risen, and the magnitude of these competing risks are now balanced.

House prices (S&P/Shiller MoM Aug) rose 0.6% although activity remained weak (Permits Jul 1.4m; Starts 1.24m).

In Australia, growth is anticipated to accelerate towards potential as weak household consumption recovers along with real wages and lower interest costs. As with the US, the unemployment rate is expected to rise via excess supply. Inflation is expected to be back within the RBA band by 2025 and in the mid-range again in 2026. Whilst the RBA held rates, Governor Bullock pushed back against suggestions, including via market pricing, that a rate cut is on the cards for 2024.

At present, consumer confidence (Westpac Aug 85.0 p82.7) remains extremely weak due to cost-of-living pressures. Early indications suggest that the Stage 3 tax cuts have largely been saved. Business conditions (NAB Jul 6 p4) improved although wage costs jumped due to a rise in the minimum wage. Business Confidence also improved (NAB Jul 85.0 p82.7). The PMI readings (Manu Aug 48.5 p47.5; Services Aug 52.5 p50.4) suggests modest growth was recorded this month.

The unemployment rate rose unexpectedly (Jul 4.2% p4.1 e4.1) as the participation rate rose (Jul 67.1 p66.9 e66.9). These moves are attributed to the high rate of immigration. Whilst wage growth was softer (Q2 QoQ 0.8% p0.9 e0.9), price inflation remained stubbornly high (Monthly CPI Jul YoY 3.5% p3.8 e3.4).

The expected European economic trajectory is one of a slow recovery of growth rates, from near recessionary levels last year, towards trend rates again. As the base effects of lower energy prices pass through, inflation readings will rise for a few quarters before settling back at the ECB target trajectory by end 2025. Unemployment is expected to remain steady.

The most recent GDP (2nd Estimate Q2 QoQ 0.3% p0.3 e0.3) was a reasonable base to build from. However, retail sales (Jun -0.3% p0.1 e-0.1) weakened and consumer confidence (Aug -13.5 p-13 e-13.4) broke a trend of improving readings. Industrial production (June MoM -0.1%, p-0.9 e0.5) was also to the low side of expectations. However, unemployment was steady at 6.5%. The PMI readings (Manu Aug 45.8 p45.8 e45.6, Services 52.9 p51.9 51.9) support the view that growth is gradually improving.

As inflation readings remained on track (Core Aug Flash YoY 2.8% p2.9 e2.8), the ECB was widely expected to cut by 25bps in September and did so as it brought the deposit rate to 3.5%. The Bank of England eased the cash rate to 5%.



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LEVEL 17, 500 Collins street Melbourne VIC 3000

LEVEL 6, 31 Market Street Sydney NSW 2000 The outlook for China is growing dimmer. The Official PMI readings (NBS Manu Aug 49.1 p49.4 e49.5; NBS Non-manu Aug 50.3 p50.2 e50.0) suggested a moribund growth rate. Credit growth (TSF Jul CNY770B p3300B e1100B) is limited and housing prices have fallen -4.9% this year. Foreign capital continues to leave the country (FDI Jul YTD YoY -29.6%). The unemployment rate rose (5.2% p5.0 e5.1). Baowu Steel warned that conditions in this key market were worse than those during the GFC and disruption to growth in 2015. Property developers remained burdened with unsold and incomplete inventory with only small state-based efforts to overcome this.

The PBoC made further attempts to steepen the yield curve, which has been influenced by low inflation readings (Jul YoY 0.5%, PPI Jul YoY -0.8%). Interest rates were unchanged.

Japanese policy makers continue to hope for an economic revival following a welcome burst of wage-price inflation. It is hoped that increasing spending power will lead to a sustained level of economic growth.

There has been promising progress towards these aims as reported in the Q2 GDP (QoQ 0.8% p-0.6 e0.5) as private consumption rose for the first time in 5 quarters after strong wage rises were awarded. Core Inflation (Jul YoY 2.7% p2.6% e2.7%) readings boosted the BoJ's hopes for ongoing monetary normalization.

Market expectations aren't as optimistic that inflation can be sustained at desired levels. The unemployment rate (Jul 2.7 p2.5 e2.5) surprised to the upside. The Balance of Trade (Jul JPY -622B p224B e-331B) was lower than expected. Further, retail sales (Jul YoY 2.6% p3.8% e2.9%) were lower than hoped.

In other developments, the Bank of Canada also cut rates by a notch to 4.75%. The government also implemented a 100% tariff on Chinese EVs. Ukraine launched an incursion into the Kursk region. For a time, natural gas prices in Europe spiked as concerns rose that supplies would be cut off at a transfer station within this region. Ukraine is suspected in relation to the sabotage of European gas supplies. The mPox virus spread to Vietnam and efforts were made to scramble vaccines to Africa and elsewhere as the WHO declared a global health emergency.

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