

# Annual General Meeting Chairman's Address

25 October 2023

## Introduction and welcome

Good morning and welcome to the seventh WAM Leaders (ASX: WLE) Limited Annual General Meeting (AGM). This is a hybrid meeting, held both online and in person here at the Museum of Sydney. The hybrid meeting format allows those that cannot join us in person to participate.

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to Elders past and present. Thank you for joining us and for your support of WAM Leaders.

Before we officially open the meeting, I would like to say that our thoughts and prayers are with all people who are in conflict right now, particularly in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

I am Geoff Wilson, Chairman of the Board of Directors. I am joined today by my fellow Board members, Kate Thorley, Alexa Henderson, Lindsay Mann and Dr Ian Langford. Scott Whiddett, a representative from WAM Leaders' auditor, Pitcher Partners, will be available to address any questions relating to the Company's financial statements. We are also joined by Joint Company Secretary and Wilson Asset Management Chief Financial Officer Jesse Hamilton, who will act in the capacity of moderator, assisting us to address any questions received during the meeting.

## FY2024 update and outlook

### The Wilson Asset Management Leaders Fund

We recently announced the launch of the Wilson Asset Management Leaders Fund following growing investor demand for the current WAM Leaders (ASX: WLE) investment strategy to be made available outside of a LIC structure, since the inception of WAM Leaders in 2016. The new unlisted fund mirrors the WAM Leaders investment strategy, providing investors access to an actively managed investment portfolio comprised of large-cap companies with compelling fundamentals, a robust macroeconomic thematic and a catalyst.

### Company update

Since inception in May 2016, the WAM Leaders investment portfolio has increased 12.9% per annum, outperforming the S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index by 4.9% per annum. In the three months to 30 September 2023, the WAM Leaders investment portfolio decreased 3.7%. As at 30 September 2023, the Company had 31.6 cents per share available in its profits reserve, after the FY2023 final fully franked dividend of 4.5 cents per share which is due to be paid on 31 October 2023. Since the announcement of the Wilson Asset Management Leaders Fund on 31 August 2023, we are pleased to see that the share price premium to NTA of WAM Leaders has increased.

### Outlook

The WAM Leaders investment portfolio was defensively positioned with a focus on capital preservation during FY2023 – a volatile period for equity markets. It proved to be a much more positive year than predicted as the economy remained remarkably resilient, confronted with the fastest rate hiking cycle in history. However, there is a dislocation between the blue skies of rear-view data and the dark clouds on the horizon. Yield curves are inverted, manufacturing surveys are contractionary, and consumer and business optimism surveys are depressed. As we head into FY2024, the WAM Leaders investment team believes tighter policy and a softening economy, compounded by geopolitical risks, require a cautious approach and WAM Leaders' top-down, active and flexible investment process provides the framework to capitalise on important inflection points the team has identified and outperform through this market volatility. While the outlook for equity market remains challenging, the team remains committed to its investment process focused on identifying large-cap companies with a robust macroeconomic thematic, compelling fundamentals and supportive sentiment indicators. WAM Leaders' gross assets were \$1,729.5 million at 30 September 2023 and the Company currently has 25,828 shareholders. The investment portfolio was comprised of 81 equity positions as at 30 September 2023.

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## Listed investment companies sector

Recently the listed investment company (LIC) and listed investment trust (LIT) sector has experienced a challenging period as investors sought the perceived safe haven of term deposits and cash amid a volatile equity market. The yield on fixed interest and bonds has surpassed the average dividend yield for the Australian equity market for the first time in nearly 12 years, causing share price premiums to NTA to contract and discounts to widen.

The LIC and LIT sector has experienced numerous cycles of expansion and contraction since the first listing in 1868 in London.

During 2002 / 2003 the Australian LIC sector experienced significant growth which was followed by a period of consolidation. After the levelling of the playing field with the Future of Financial Advice (FOFA) reforms in 2012 the sector expanded significantly from 51 LICs and LITs in 2013 to a peak of 114 in 2018.

Recently a number of LICs and LITs have resorted to restructuring to open-ended managed funds or active exchange-traded funds (ETFs) with 24 LICs and LITs departing the sector since the peak in 2018. While we expect further consolidation in the coming years with LICs and LITs that have underperformed, or failed to properly engage with shareholders, choosing to or being forced into restructure, the sector will emerge from this period of consolidation stronger with a solid platform for growth.

## FY2023 in review

### Financial results

WAM Leaders reported an operating profit before tax of \$169.0 million for the year (FY2022: \$68.6 million) and an operating profit after tax of \$130.1 million (FY2022: \$65.8 million).

The WAM Leaders investment portfolio increased 13.5% in the 12 months to 30 June 2023, while the S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index rose 14.8%. Since inception to 30 June 2023, WAM Leaders has achieved an investment portfolio return of 14.0% per annum, outperforming the S&P/ASX 200 Accumulation Index by 5.6% per annum. WAM Leaders' pre-tax NTA increased 8.7% in the 12 months to 30 June 2023, including the 8.5 cents per share of fully franked dividends paid to shareholders during the year.

### Total shareholder return (TSR) and share price premium to NTA

TSR measures the value shareholders gain from share price growth and dividends paid over the period, before the value of any franking credits distributed to shareholders through fully franked dividends. The TSR for WAM Leaders was 5.5% during the 12 months to 30 June 2023 and was driven by the investment portfolio performance during the period, being offset by the decrease in the share price premium to NTA. As at 30 June 2023, the share price premium to NTA was 1.9% (June 2022: 4.9%). In this measure we do not value the potential benefit of franking credits distributed to shareholders through fully franked dividends.

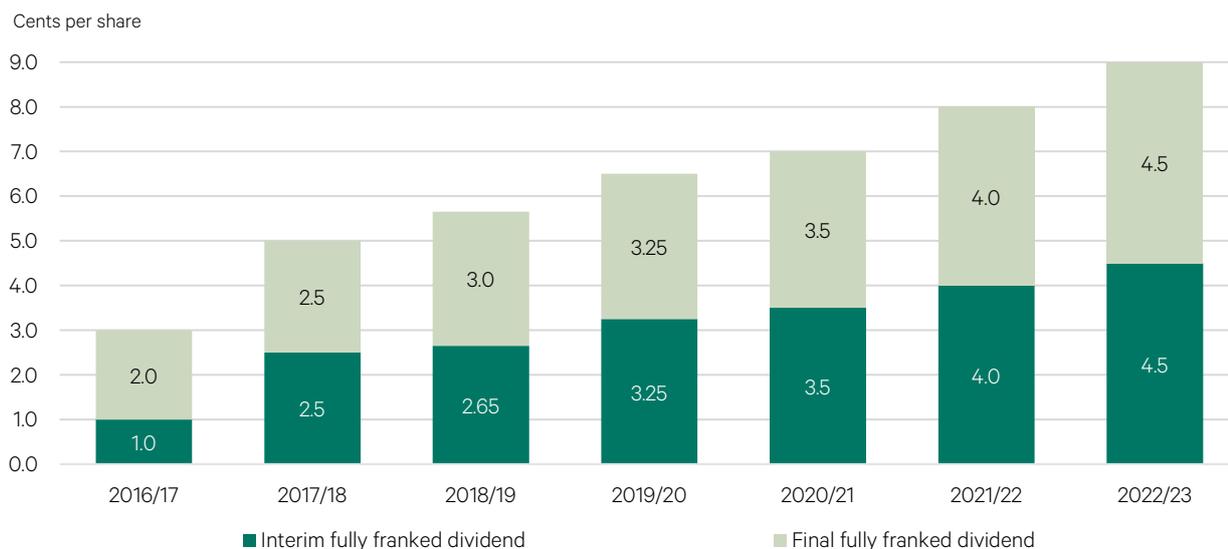
On 24 October 2023, the share price premium to NTA was 7.2%\*. Throughout its 7-year history, the Company's share price has traded at both premiums and discounts to its NTA.

### Fully franked dividends since inception

The Board declared a full year fully franked dividend of 9.0 cents per share, which represented an increase of 12.5% on the previous year. The full year fully franked dividend provides shareholders with a dividend yield of 6.2% on the Company's 30 June 2023 share price of \$1.455 and a grossed-up dividend yield of 8.9%\*. Since inception in May 2016, the Company has paid 39.65 cents per share in fully franked dividends to shareholders.

\*Based on the 30 September 2023 pre-tax NTA of \$1.35 per share, adjusted for the final fully franked dividend of 4.5 cents per share and the 24 October 2023 share price of \$1.40. The ex-dividend date for the final fully franked dividend was 17 October 2023.

^Grossed-up dividend yield includes the benefits of franking credits and is based on a tax rate of 30.0%.



### Capital management/corporate activity

In June 2022, WAM Leaders and Absolute Equity Performance Fund (AEG) announced that WAM Leaders would acquire 100% of the shares in AEG through a Scheme of Arrangement (Scheme). Under the Scheme, AEG shareholders received new WAM Leaders shares as consideration for their AEG shares. Following approval from AEG shareholders on 15 September 2022, and from the Federal Court of Australia on 21 September 2022, the Scheme was implemented on 4 October 2022. As a result, WAM Leaders issued 62.1 million shares to AEG shareholders. WAM Leaders has a relevant interest in 100% of the shares in AEG, which was delisted from the ASX on 5 October 2022.

On 14 April 2023, WAM Leaders announced the successful completion of a Placement to existing wholesale and sophisticated investors at an issue price of \$1.48 per share, a premium to the pre-tax net tangible asset (NTA) backing as at 31 March 2023, raising \$131.0 million.

WAM Leaders also announced a Share Purchase Plan (SPP) to existing shareholders in April 2023. The SPP provided the opportunity to acquire up to \$30,000 of fully paid ordinary shares in WAM Leaders without incurring any brokerage fees. The SPP was issued at \$1.458 per share, a 2.5% discount to the 5-day volume weighted average price at the issue date of 12 May 2023, raising \$99.0 million. The Placement and SPP raised over \$230 million, issuing 156.5 million shares.

## About Wilson Asset Management

Wilson Asset Management, WAM Leaders' Investment Manager, has been passionate about making a positive difference for our shareholders and the community for more than 25 years. In the 2023 financial year, the team continued to make a difference through various philanthropic initiatives, advocacy and shareholder engagement.

### Philanthropy

Geoff Wilson founded Future Generation Australia (ASX: FGX) and Future Generation Global (ASX: FGG) as Australia's first companies to deliver both investment and social returns. The companies seek to deliver a stream of fully franked dividends and capital growth to investors by giving them unprecedented access to prominent Australian and global fund managers. These managers generously waive their performance and management fees, which enables the Future Generation companies to invest 1.0% of net tangible assets each year in not-for-profit organisations. To date, the companies have donated more than \$75 million to organisations that support children and youth at risk and youth mental health. The team at Wilson Asset Management continue to support both companies.

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Wilson Asset Management is a member of the global philanthropic Pledge 1% movement, is a significant funder of many Australian charities and provides all team members with \$10,000 each year to donate to charities of their choice. During the year, Wilson Asset Management and Future Generation team members were proud to support over 90 charities across several cause areas such as homelessness, mental health and cancer research. All philanthropic investments are made by the Investment Manager.

We are honoured to provide continued support to Olympic athletes, through funds for the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) on a pro bono basis. The AOC provides crucial financial and institutional support to Australian athletes to compete at an Olympic level. All fees are foregone by the Investment Manager.

We also support a number of organisations through sponsorships and partnerships across a range of initiatives including; the 2022 Wollongong UCI Road World Cycling Championship, The Australian Shareholder's Association, Sporting Chance Cancer Foundation, Women in Super and many more. All sponsorships and partnerships are made by the Investment Manager.

### Advocacy and Education

As part of our focus on making a difference to shareholders and the community, our advocacy work for fair and equitable treatment of retail shareholders continues to be a priority. We firmly believe all shareholders, both retail and wholesale, should be treated equitably when investing in the Australian equity market.

Together we have been publicly fighting for the preservation of Paul Keating's franking system since the Labor party first proposed changes in 2018, a proposal that would unfairly deny refunds of franking credits to certain investors. Unfortunately, in September 2021, the Australian Labor Government announced proposed legislation changes to the Australian franking system, this time limiting the ability of Australian companies to pay fully franked dividends to their shareholders.

The first piece of legislation, *Schedule 4: Off-market share buy-backs*, will restrict a company's ability to undertake an off-market share buy-back with a fully franked dividend component, effectively reducing a company's ability to equitably manage its capital. It will also reduce the incentive for companies to list on the ASX due to a provision where if a listed company undertakes an off-market share buy-back or selective capital reduction in the future, they will lose their franking credits or be forced to pay franking deficit tax. Thus all public companies will be unfairly penalised and permanently lose the amount of franking that previously would have been distributed to shareholders. This will not apply to unlisted companies and therefore challenges the rationale for companies pursuing public listings.

The second piece of legislation, *Schedule 5: Franked distributions funded by capital raisings*, will stop companies paying fully franked dividends that in Treasury's view are directly or indirectly funded by capital raisings. This legislation will stop small growth companies from raising capital and paying fully franked dividends and encourage large companies to focus on minimising tax paid in Australia.

Following a public consultation period and our extensive engagement with Federal MPs and Senators, a Senate Inquiry was held to take a deeper look into the details of the proposed changes. This has now taken place and the committee acknowledged Schedule 5 of the Bill needs clarification, an important victory for us all including industry and taxation experts, lawyers and academics who agree that this legislation is flawed. Unfortunately, they did not grasp that Schedule 4 of the Bill also has significant unintended consequences and needs redrafting.

The Australian franking system has been part of the reason Australia has seen more than three decades of economic stability and growth. It has encouraged Australian companies and shareholders to invest in Australia, employ Australians, pay tax in Australia and in turn create more local jobs and ownership of Australian companies by Australians. We will continue to engage with Federal members of parliament, raising awareness about the long-term unintended consequences of the proposed legislation.

On 18 October 2023, we submitted a response to the draft Treasury Laws Amendment (Better Targeted Superannuation Concessions) Bill 2023 objecting to the taxing of unrealised gains and the failure to index the "large superannuation balance threshold" of \$3 million. We object to the proposed changes based on the significant stress

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they will place on Australian superannuants, who will be expected to pay tax on unrealised capital gains that may never be realised. Further, we object to the lack of indexing of the threshold, therefore transferring tax liabilities to younger generations. We also believe these changes place self-managed superannuation funds (SMSFs) at a significant disadvantage to large industry funds due to the practicalities of managing capital flows on taxed unrealised gains. We believe these changes will distort investment markets and alter the incentive for retirement plans. We will be monitoring this matter closely.

We also remain committed to education initiatives which advocate for change and progress in corporate Australia. We support the University of New South Wales' School of Mathematics and Statistics' Do The Maths program, which aims to inspire girls in high school to consider tertiary studies and careers in mathematics and statistics. We believe in the importance of gender diversity in the financial services industry, in particular funds management, which provides rewarding career paths. We regularly host Women's Investor Events which give likeminded women a platform to network and enhance financial literacy, while our Young Investor Events aim to inspire the next generation to begin their investment journey early.

All of our philanthropic and advocacy efforts are paid for by the investment manager Wilson Asset Management and not the listed investment companies we manage on behalf of shareholders. There has been recent media coverage on corporations spending shareholder money on political and advocacy campaigns. I confirm that WAM Leaders has not spent shareholder money on philanthropic or advocacy campaigns. We believe all publicly listed companies have a responsibility to report to their shareholders on any corporate ideological advocacy they undertake and that all Boards have a fiduciary responsibility to shareholders.

### Shareholder engagement and communication

Shareholders are the owners of WAM Leaders; Wilson Asset Management's responsibility is to manage the Company on your behalf and be available to report to you on a regular basis. We encourage all shareholders to communicate with us and share their feedback. Please visit our [website](#), subscribe to receive our regular updates and call or email us with any questions or suggestions you have regarding WAM Leaders or Wilson Asset Management.

### Vale Andrew Cormie

We would like to acknowledge the recent passing of fellow fund manager and good friend Andrew Cormie.

Andrew has been an important part of the Wilson Asset Management community. He helped guide me 26 years ago when I was in the process of articulating our investment process and was one of the founding fund managers for Future Generation Global Limited.

He has left us far too early and will be sadly missed.

### For more information

Further information on WAM Leaders can be found in the [FY2023 annual report](#) and [website](#).

### Thank you

Thank you for your support and for entrusting us with your capital. I would also like to thank the Wilson Asset Management team, who have worked tirelessly for our shareholders, as well as my fellow Board members, whose guidance and expertise make an invaluable contribution.