

Vanguard Funds

# Proxy voting policy for Australian and New Zealand portfolio companies



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## Introduction

The information below, organised according to the Vanguard Investment Stewardship's four pillars, is the voting policy for companies domiciled in Australia and New Zealand and details the general positions of the funds advised by Vanguard<sup>1</sup> (the "funds") on recurring proxy proposals.

It is important to note that the following positions will be applied to the particular facts and circumstances of individual proposals in the best interests of each fund and its shareholders.

Companies should abide by the relevant local laws and regulations of the market in which they are listed and follow any applicable local corporate governance codes and best practices. These local corporate governance codes form the basis of the funds' country-specific guidelines. However, they may differ and, in some cases, require a higher level of governance best practice than the local corporate governance code.

**"If not, why not" in Australia and "comply or explain" in New Zealand.** Local practice in Australia and New Zealand allows companies to deviate from recommended corporate governance practices so long as they provide an explanation for the deviation. Vanguard supports this underlying principle of corporate governance best practice. We expect companies to "explain" any deviations from recommended governance practices, including providing an explanation of what they do instead of the recommended practice and why their alternative approach and/or processes are in the best interests of shareholders.

**Multi-jurisdictional companies.** When a company is listed on multiple exchanges or incorporated in a country different from where it is listed, the company should follow the applicable laws and listing rules of the market(s) in which it has its primary listing, as well as apply any local corporate governance codes. If a company deviates from any market standards or local corporate governance codes, it should explain the reasons for such deviations.

**Case-by-case votes.** Certain proposals that necessitate a facts-and-circumstances analysis based upon a more expansive set of factors will generally be voted on a case-by-case basis in the best interests of each fund, consistent with its investment objective. The voting policy for these case-by-case items sets forth the general framework for this analysis. Proposals for which specific guidelines are not defined will likewise typically be voted on a case-by-case basis in the best interests of each fund, consistent with the principles articulated in this policy and each fund's investment objective.

<sup>1</sup>This voting policy details the general positions of the funds for each portfolio advised by Vanguard, including Vanguard index funds and ETFs and the fund assets managed by Vanguard Quantitative Equity Group. The board of trustees for each of the US mutual funds advised by Vanguard retains proxy voting authority.

## Australia and New Zealand Guidelines

### Pillar I: Board composition and effectiveness

A fund's primary interest is to ensure that the individuals who represent the interests of all shareholders are independent, committed, capable, diverse and appropriately experienced. Diversity of thought, background and experience, as well as of personal characteristics (such as gender, race and age), meaningfully contributes to a board's ability to serve as effective, engaged stewards of shareholders' interests.

#### Board independence

A fund will generally vote against the nominating committee and all nonindependent, nonexecutive board members of a company if that company does not maintain a majority independent board. In the second year that a board is not majority independent, the fund may vote against all board members up for re-election.

A fund will generally vote against the nominating committee and nonindependent, nonexecutive directors if the board of a "non-widely held company" and/or a "controlled company" does not maintain a level of board independence proportionate to, and reflective of, the ownership structure. In the second year, a fund may hold all board members up for re-election accountable.

In addition, when analysing the overall level of board independence, only board members who are elected by shareholders will be taken into account.

Outlined below are common factors which can impact independence:

- *Current and former employees.* Directors who are current or former employees (other than chief executive officer) may be considered independent five years after they terminate their employment relationship.
- *Former CEOs.* Former CEOs will generally never be considered independent, unless they held only an "interim" CEO position for less than 18 months. An interim CEO who held the temporary position for 18 months or less may be considered independent three years after leaving the interim CEO position.
- *Cross-directorships and CEO interlocks.* Any directors who hold cross-directorships or have significant links with other directors through involvement in other companies or bodies will generally not be considered independent. In addition, CEOs who sit on one another's boards will generally not be considered independent.
- *Shareholder representatives.* Representatives of shareholders will generally not be considered independent.
- *Business connections.* Any director nominee who has had within the last year a material business relationship with the company – either directly or as a partner, shareholder, director or senior employee of a body that has such a relationship with the company – will generally not be considered independent.
- *Familial relationship and other personal relationships.* Any director who has close family ties with any of the company's advisers, directors or senior employees will generally not be considered independent.
- *Performance-related pay.* Any director who participates in a performance-related pay scheme will generally not be considered independent.
- *Tenure.* Excessive tenure of a director (that is, tenure that exceeds local market best practice, where applicable) can potentially impact independence, especially in a scenario where a board is not majority independent. However, excessive tenure exclusively may not result in a director being considered nonindependent.
- *Other factors.* If it is determined, through engagement or research, that director independence has been compromised, that director may not be considered independent.

## Key committee independence

The expectation is that key committees are chaired by independent directors and that companies maintain 100% independent key committees where market practice and/or local corporate governance codes call for such composition. However, a fund will generally vote against nonindependent directors that serve on the following key committees (or their equivalent) if the majority of the committee is not independent:

- Audit committee
- Remuneration committee
- Nominating committee

If a company, regardless of its ownership structure, does not maintain majority independent key committees, a fund will also hold the nominating committee chair accountable in addition to the nonindependent directors serving on the key committees. In the second year, a fund will hold the entire nominating committee accountable. In both instances, if nominating committee members are not up for election in a given year, a fund may vote against another relevant board member.

## Board chair independence

Generally, a fund will vote for management proposals to create an independent chair position or to otherwise separate the CEO and chair positions.

In evaluating shareholder proposals calling for the creation of an independent chair or for the separation of CEO and chair, certain factors are considered:

- *Presence of a lead/senior independent director role.* A strong lead/senior independent director may provide sufficient independent perspective to balance against a nonindependent chair. Consistent with this perspective, structures that do not provide a strong counter-voice to insider leadership warrant independent oversight.
- *Board accessibility.* Shareholders' ability to communicate directly with independent board members, including a lead/senior independent director or committee chairs, is an important means by which they can share perspectives. Restrictions on access to independent board members may prevent the board from receiving comprehensive feedback from shareholders to incorporate into corporate practices. They may also contribute to a culture of entrenchment of management by controlling the messages the board receives.
- *Overall board independence.* High affiliated representation on the board may outweigh independent voices and further entrench the insider leadership. Enhancing the role of independent directors may offer a counterweight to the nonindependent voices on the board.
- *Governance structural flaws.* Certain governance practices and corporate structures may create an environment more favourable to potential entrenchment by management and other nonindependent board members. Specifically, multiple share classes with different voting rights limit the voice of shareholders, and key committees that are not fully independent restrict a board's role in oversight of management.
- *Responsiveness to shareholders.* A pattern of being nonresponsive to shareholders may indicate that a board is entrenched, and an increased independent role may provide a needed remedy to this.
- *Governance failings.* Governance crises may indicate management entrenchment or that the board is not receiving sufficient information from management to appropriately serve its oversight role. Additionally, unfriendly shareholder decisions by the board may indicate that a board does not properly value shareholder rights.

## Director capacity and commitment

Directors' responsibilities are complex and time-consuming. As no two boards are identical and time commitments may vary, a fund will vote on director elections on a case-by-case basis when the number of directorship positions a candidate has accepted make it challenging to dedicate the requisite time and attention to effectively fulfill his/her responsibilities at each company.

## **Director attendance**

A fund will generally vote against directors who attended less than 75% of board or committee meetings (in the aggregate) in the previous year unless acceptable, extenuating circumstances are disclosed or they have served on the board for less than one year.

## **Directors' names and biographies**

A fund will generally vote against any director whose name and biographical details have not been disclosed sufficiently in advance of the general meeting.

## **Diversity and qualifications disclosure**

Well-composed boards have perspectives that are informed by a range of backgrounds, skills and experiences. The expectation is that public boards consider board diversity and disclose the diversity of their boards on factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity and national origin, at least on an aggregate basis. Companies that do not have diverse boards should demonstrate a commitment to achieving board diversity and provide insights on progress across multiple factors and prioritise adding diverse voices to their boards.

A fund will vote against the nominating committee chair if there are not directors of both genders serving on the board of directors, and from 2022, the expectation is that there is no less than 30% of either gender serving on the board of directors, consistent with the ASX Corporate Governance Council Principles. If the nominating committee chair is not up for election in a given year, a fund may vote against another relevant board member.

Increasingly, shareholders are using the proxy ballot to ask corporations to provide details on a board's diversity and its additional diversification plans.

In addition, there is an expectation that corporations make a "skills matrix" available to give shareholders a big-picture view of directors' attributes and how they fit together. Shareholders can then assess how well-suited director nominees are in light of the company's evolving business strategy and risks and the overall mix of director skills and experiences. They will thus be able to make better-informed proxy voting decisions.

A fund will generally vote for a shareholder proposal if:

- The proposal seeks disclosure related to directors' diversity of personal characteristics (including gender, race/ethnicity and national origin) or skills and qualifications, and this information is not already disclosed.
- The proposal asks companies to adopt policies designed to ensure appropriate diversity on boards, and appropriate policies do not already exist.
- The proposal is not overly prescriptive as to what skills should be included or how this information must be presented.

## **Escalation process: Director and committee accountability**

In certain instances, a fund may vote against a director because of governance failings or as a means to escalate other issues that remain unaddressed by a company.

- *Lack of board independence.* A fund will generally vote against ("hold accountable") nominating committee members of a widely held, noncontrolled company if the board is not majority independent and will vote against nominating committee members of a non-widely held and/or controlled company if it does not maintain a level of board independence proportionate to, and reflective of, the ownership structure. In the second year, in both instances, a fund may vote against other relevant board members up for re-election.

- *Lack of key committee independence.* A fund will generally vote against nonindependent key committee directors and the nominating committee chair if a company does not maintain majority independent key committees (audit, remuneration and nominating). In the second year, a fund will also hold the entire nominating committee accountable in addition to the nonindependent directors serving on the key committees. In both instances, if nominating committee members are not up for election in a given year, a fund may vote against another relevant board member.
- *Audit failures.* A fund will generally vote against audit committee members when non-audit fees exceed audit-related fees without sufficient disclosure or when the fund votes against an audit-related management proposal. A fund will generally vote against audit committee members in instances of a material misstatement or concerns about the integrity of the accounts. In both instances, if audit committee members are not up for election in a given year, a fund may vote against another relevant board member.
- *Remuneration-related situations*
  - A fund will generally vote against remuneration committee members when the fund votes against a pay proposal for two consecutive years, unless meaningful improvements have been made.
  - In the case of a board spill resolution (for Australian companies), a fund will generally vote against the resolution unless egregious pay practices persist. A fund will instead vote against remuneration committee members or other individual directors.
- *Oversight failure*
  - A fund will generally vote against directors who have failed to effectively identify, monitor and manage material risks and business practices that fall under their purview based on committee responsibilities. These risks may include material environmental and social risks.
  - When a specific risk does not fall under the purview of a specific committee, a fund will generally vote against the lead/senior independent director and/or chair.
- *Lack of board progress on diversity*
  - A fund will generally vote against the nominating committee chair, or another relevant board member if the nominating committee chair is not up for re-election, if both genders are not represented on the board.
- *Limited shareholder rights.* A fund may vote against the chair, lead/senior independent director and/or any other relevant director(s) if the company has abused minority shareholder rights and/or somehow meaningfully limited shareholder rights.

Generally, a fund will vote for new directors who would otherwise fail under any of the preceding circumstances regarding committee accountability but have served for less than a year, unless a given director fails to carry out the basic responsibilities that would be expected for even a new director.

### **Contested director elections**

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on shareholder nominees in contested director elections. The analysis of proxy contests focuses on three key areas:

- *The case for change at the target company*
  - How has the company performed relative to its peers?
  - Has the current board's oversight of company strategy or execution been deficient?
  - Is the dissident focused on strengthening the target company's long-term strategy and shareholder returns?

- *The quality of the company and dissident board nominees*
  - Is there reason to question the independence, engagement or effectiveness of the incumbent board?
  - Has the board delivered strong oversight processes with long-term shareholders' interests in focus?
  - Are the directors proposed by the dissident (whether the full slate or a subset) well-suited to address the company's needs, and is this a stronger alternative to the current board?
- *The quality of company governance*
  - Did the board engage in productive dialogue with the dissident?
  - Is there evidence of effective, shareholder-friendly governance practices at the company?
  - Has the board actively engaged with shareholders in the past?



## Australia and New Zealand Guidelines

### Pillar II: Oversight of strategy and risk

Boards are responsible for effective oversight and governance of the risks most relevant and material to each company and for governance of the company's long-term strategy.

They should take a thorough, integrated and thoughtful approach to identifying, quantifying, mitigating and disclosing risks that have the potential to affect shareholder value over the long term. Boards should communicate their approach to risk oversight to shareholders through their normal course of business.

#### Capital structures

- *Dividends.* A fund will generally vote for proposals to allocate income and for proposals to allow a stock (scrip) dividend, unless the proposal does not allow for a cash option or is not in line with market standards.
- *Share issuance requests.* The total dilution to existing shareholders and the company's history of issuing capital will be considered.
  - A fund will generally vote for routine ratifications of past issuance of shares without pre-emptive rights up to a maximum of 15% of the current issued share capital, provided that the issuance occurred within the 12-month period and in line with market practice.
  - A fund will generally vote for routine capital issuance requests without pre-emptive rights up to a maximum of 15% of the current issued share capital, provided that the issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed and in line with market practice.
  - A fund will generally vote for routine capital issuance requests with pre-emptive rights up to a maximum of 50% of the current issued share capital, provided that the issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed and in line with market practice.
- *Debt issuance.* A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on proposals to issue debt and/or restructure debt, taking into account:
  - any convertible features and the potential effect on dilution;
  - the company's financial position; and
  - the company's ability to take on the proposed debt.
- *Share repurchase*
  - For Australia, a fund will typically vote for routine authorities to repurchase additional shares up to 10% of the current issued share capital (20% in total, including the 10% in a 12-month period allowed under the Corporations Act), so long as the terms of the repurchase appear to be in the best interests of shareholders, there is no history of abuse of such authorisations, and the pricing premium is equal to or less than 5% of fair market price.
  - For New Zealand, a fund will typically vote for routine authorities to repurchase additional shares up to 5% of the current issued share capital (20% in total, including the 15% in a 12-month period allowed under the NZX Listing Rules), so long as the terms of the repurchase appear to be in the best interests of shareholders, there is no history of abuse of such authorizations, and the pricing premium is equal to or less than 20% of fair market price.
- *Reverse stock split.* A fund will typically vote for a reverse split of outstanding shares if the number of shares authorised is proportionately reduced and the difference in reduction results in dilution equal to or less than 100%. Regardless of the level of dilution, it will generally vote for a reverse split if it is necessary for the company to remain listed on its current exchange.
- *Preferred stock.* A fund will typically vote on a case-by-case basis on proposals to create/amend/issue preferred stock, taking into account the reason for the issuance, the ownership profile of the company, any historical abuses of share issuances and the company's general approach to shareholder rights.

## **Mergers, acquisitions and financial transactions**

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on all mergers, acquisitions and financial transactions.

The strategic, operational and financial benefits (and drawbacks) of the transaction are evaluated based on a number of criteria, including the following:

- Board and management oversight of the deal process.
- Valuation.
- Prospects for long-term enterprise value under a standalone/alternate scenario.
- Market reaction.
- The surviving entity's governance profile.
- Fairness opinions from independent financial advisers.
- Effect on stakeholders, if relevant to long-term value.

In evaluating board oversight, the fund will consider independence, potential conflicts of interest and management incentives.

## **Related-party transactions**

In general, companies should refrain from entering into related-party transactions with nonexecutive directors, executive directors and shareholders because of the potential conflicts of interest that can arise. If a company does decide to enter into such a transaction, the expectation is that the company will comply with the relevant corporate law in its jurisdiction and/or the listing rules on the exchange on which it is listed. The company should ensure the related party does not vote on the relevant resolution and all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure the related party's associates do not vote on the relevant resolution.

When evaluating related-party transactions, considerations include:

- whether the transaction is part of the normal course of business;
- clear disclosure of the details of the transaction, including who is involved, the price and any financial conditions, and the board's justification of the transaction;
- whether there has been independent verification of the transaction, either by a third party (that is, an auditor) or an independent board committee; and/or
- the length of the approval process of the transaction (preferring annual approval).

A fund may vote against a related-party transaction if:

- it is a substantial transaction with a nonexecutive director (especially when the company classifies such director as independent) and there are concerns about the level of independence on the board;
- the disclosure provided by the company is incomplete or is lacking detail;
- the approval length for the transaction is excessive;
- there are serious concerns about the independent verification and/or pricing of the transaction; and/or
- the transaction may not be in the interest of minority shareholders and/or it diminishes shareholder rights.

## **Independent auditors**

*Auditor appointment and auditor's fees.* A fund will generally vote against the appointment of the auditor and setting the auditor's fees in instances where tax and all other fees exceed the audit and audit-related fees and/or a reasonable amount, unless the company's disclosure makes it clear that the non-audit fees are for services that do not impair independence and/or the imbalance was due to an event that was transactional and one-off.

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on the auditors' appointment/reappointment when there is a material misstatement of financials or other significant concern regarding the integrity of the company's financial statements.

A fund will generally vote for the appointment of a new auditor unless there is a compelling reason why the new auditor selected by the board should not be endorsed.

## Australia and New Zealand Guidelines

### Pillar III: Remuneration

Compensation policies linked to long-term relative performance are fundamental drivers of sustainable, long-term value for a company's investors. Providing effective disclosure of these practices, their alignment with company performance, and their outcomes is crucial to giving shareholders confidence in the link between incentives and rewards and the creation of long-term value.

#### Advisory votes on executive remuneration

Because norms and expectations vary by industry type, company size, company age and geographic location, the following guidelines are intended to represent preferences for executive remuneration and are not a "one-size-fits-all" tool.

For that reason, a fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on the approval of the remuneration report and will support those that enhance long-term shareholder value. It may also vote for remuneration proposals that reflect improvements in practices, even if the proposals are not perfectly aligned with all these guidelines but are clearly in the interests of long-term shareholder value.

Considerations fall into two broad categories:

- *Pay-for-performance.* This is mainly assessed through analysis of three-year total shareholder return and realised pay over the same period. If there are concerns that pay and performance are not aligned, a fund may vote against a pay-related proposal.
- *Structure.* Plan structures should be aligned with the company's long-term strategy and should support pay-for-performance alignment. Where a plan includes a number of structures which could lead to pay-for-performance misalignment, a fund may vote against a pay-related proposal.

Additional considerations:

- *Fixed pay.* The expectation is that salary is reasonably set based on the role scope, the industry and the region, as well as benchmarked against an appropriate peer group (based on company size and complexity). If fixed pay is significantly increased, a compelling rationale should be disclosed.
- *Variable pay*
  - *Long-term focus.* Plans should generally be weighted towards long-term outcomes rather than short-term outcomes; therefore, long-term plans should make up the majority of variable remuneration. Long-term plans should generally have performance measured over multiple years, ideally for a period of three years or more.
  - *Metrics.* Remuneration plans should incorporate rigorous metrics aligned with corporate strategy and long-term company performance. Since pay should ultimately align with relative performance, incorporating relative metrics (particularly relative total shareholder return) into plans is preferred. Prospective performance metric disclosure, including targets, is expected where possible to allow shareholders to assess the rigor of the plan.
- *One-off awards.* Payments that occur in addition to the regular incentive plan(s) may indicate that the current remuneration structures may not be working as designed. The expectation is that one-off awards are granted in exceptional circumstances only. If a one-off award is granted, disclosure of a compelling rationale is expected and will be scrutinised.
- *Disclosure.* Shareholders should be able to easily understand pay expectations and outcomes. Therefore, a company should clearly articulate the compensation plan's structure and the compensation committee's processes for determining that structure. Retrospective disclosure is generally expected for performance achievements. Effective disclosure may include:
  - award limits for an incentive plan;
  - the weightings of each metric in an incentive plan;

- the performance metrics and targets used to evaluate performance in an incentive plan (ideally including the minimum, the maximum and the target performance for each metric); and
  - a clear description of any qualitative metrics used in an incentive plan and how the remuneration committee evaluated whether they were met.
- *Malus and clawback.* Such provisions are expected to be adopted and detailed in a company's incentive plans. When necessary, malus and clawback provisions should be exercised by the remuneration committee.
  - *Severance.* The expectation is that such arrangements should be set in line with market best practice and are double-trigger. Generally, severance arrangements should not be more than one year's base salary, taking into account any specific market best practice or nuances.
  - *Discretion.* The remuneration committee should feel empowered to exercise discretion when formulaic pay outcomes do not align with company and share-price performance or shareholders' experience. A remuneration committee should provide enhanced disclosure when exercising discretion, clearly explaining the rationale for such discretion and how the committee arrived at this decision.
  - *Responsiveness to shareholders.* If pay proposals receive low support or shareholder feedback, especially year over year, the board and remuneration committee should demonstrate responsiveness to shareholder concerns.

Factors considered "red flags" when evaluating a company's remuneration structures and plans may include:

- pay outcomes that are higher than those of peers, but total shareholder return that is lower than those of peers;
- a target for total pay that is set above the peer-group median;
- a long-term plan that makes up less than 50% of total pay and/or an annual bonus that accounts for the majority of executives' variable pay;
- incentive plans that do not have clearly disclosed limits;
- a long-term plan that has a performance period of less than three years;
- performance targets for incentive plans that are reset, retested or not rigorous;
- a lack of malus and/or clawback provisions;
- one-off awards where there is unclear disclosure or a lack of compelling rationale for their use; and
- a remuneration committee that shows a lack of responsiveness to shareholder dissent in relation to pay.

Factors considered "yellow flags" may include:

- a peer group used to benchmark pay that is not completely aligned with the company in size or strategy;
- incentive plans that use absolute performance metrics only;
- long-term plans that do not have an additional holding period once the performance period ends;
- a lack of disclosure of performance metrics, targets and actual pay outcomes, particularly in retrospective situations;
- a lack of a shareholding requirement for executives or one that is out of line with peers or market practice;
- severance arrangements that are excessive or out of line with market best practice; and
- the remuneration committee's use only of positive discretion and/or holding of excessive authority to use discretion to determine pay outcomes.

A fund will generally vote against remuneration committee members when voting against the remuneration report in two consecutive years unless meaningful improvements have been made. If no remuneration committee members are up for election, a vote against the board chair may be considered. A fund will generally vote against a board spill resolution, unless egregious practices persist or there are other exceptional circumstances.

### **Equity remuneration plans**

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on equity remuneration plans for employees.

In general, a fund supports companies adopting equity-based compensation plans for employees, so long as the plan or plans align with long-term shareholder interests and value. When evaluating equity remuneration plans, three main factors are considered:

- dilution to shareholders;
- the company's grant history; and
- alignment with market practice.

### **Nonexecutive director remuneration**

In general, a fund will vote for nonexecutive director fees which seem reasonable, are in line with peers and take into account the amount of time required of the nonexecutive directors to fulfill their roles.

A fund will generally vote against the approval of any nonexecutive director fees where nonexecutive directors receive performance-related remuneration as part of their remuneration package. A fund will also generally vote against retirement benefits for nonexecutive directors.

### **Termination payments**

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on termination benefits.

In general, a fund may vote against termination benefits in Australia if:

- the termination benefits beyond the 12-month cap have not been fully explained and justified to shareholders;
- they are paid out in instances of inadequate performance or voluntary departure without valid justification to shareholders; or
- where unvested variable incentives are allowed to vest without respect of time elapsed or performance achieved.

## **Australia and New Zealand Guidelines**

### **Pillar IV: Shareholder rights**

Governance structures empower shareholders and ensure accountability of the board and management. Shareholders should be able to hold directors accountable as needed through certain governance provisions.

#### **Board size**

A fund will generally vote against proposals to limit the number of directors on the board or declare a “no vacancy”.

#### **Supermajority voting**

A fund will generally vote against any proposal to extend supermajority voting requirements to decisions that are not stipulated by law and/or not in the best interest of minority shareholder rights. It will vote on a case-by-case basis on shareholder proposals asking to remove supermajority voting requirements where not required by law.

#### **Additional share classes**

This guideline applies when a company issues more than one class of stock, with different classes carrying different voting rights. The funds’ approach to this issue is principled yet practical. It remains philosophically aligned to “one-share, one-vote” but also is mindful of the need not to hinder public capital formation in the equity markets. To that end, alignment of voting and economic interests is a foundation of good governance. The approach supports the idea of a newly public, dual-class company adopting a sunset provision that would move the company towards a one-share, one-vote structure over time. A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on proposals to eliminate dual-class share structures with differential voting rights.

#### **Amendments to articles of association**

A fund will generally vote for minor amendments that include any administrative or housekeeping updates and corrections. When evaluating all other amendments to the articles of association, the following will be considered:

- any changes to corporate law and/or listing rules which may require an amendment to the articles of association;
- whether the amendments may result in corporate governance structures and/processes that are not best practice or are a regression from what the company already does (taking into account any explanation provided by the company for the change); and/or
- whether the amendments are detrimental to shareholder rights generally.

In Australia, a fund is likely to vote against shareholder proposals submitted to amend the company’s constitution to facilitate the submission of nonbinding shareholder resolutions. This process should, in general, be addressed through regulatory changes that could establish a common framework and safeguards, rather than through private ordering and modifications of the company’s constitution.

#### **Reincorporation/Change of domicile**

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on proposals to reincorporate to another country and/or proposals for companies to change their primary listing.

A fund will consider the reasons for the relocation, including the company’s history, the company’s strategy and the company’s shareholder base, along with any differences in regulation, governance and shareholder rights.

## Shareholder proposals

A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on all shareholder proposals, including proposals that focus on environmental and social issues, such as requests of disclosures, setting of targets or goals, or adoption of policies and practices.

Clear, comparable, consistent and accurate disclosure enables shareholders to understand the strength of a board's risk oversight. Recognizing that sustainability disclosure is an evolving and complex topic, in considering related proposals, a fund's analysis aims to strike a balance between avoiding prescriptiveness and providing a long-term perspective. Engagements with the company and/or the shareholder proponent may be necessary to determine each fund's vote.

Each proposal will be evaluated on its merits, with particular attention to the wording of the proposal, and in the context that a company's board has ultimate responsibility for providing effective oversight of strategy. This includes sector- and company-specific sustainability risks and opportunities that have a demonstrable link to long-term shareholder value.

A fund is likely to support proposals that:

- address a shortcoming in the company's current disclosure relative to market norms;
- reflect an industry-specific, materiality-driven approach; and
- are not overly prescriptive about time frame, cost or other matters.

## Shareholder meeting rules and procedures

- *Approve "other such matters that may come before the meeting" or "any other business."* A fund will generally vote against a proposal to approve "other such matters that may come before the meeting."
- *Adjourn meeting to solicit more votes.* In general, a fund will vote for the adjournment if the fund supports the proposal in question and against the adjournment if the fund does not support the proposal.
- *Bundled proposals.* A fund will vote on a case-by-case basis on all bundled management proposals.
- *Change of date, time or location of Annual General Meeting.* A fund will typically vote for management proposals to change the date, time or location of the annual meeting if the proposed changes are reasonable.
- *Virtual meetings.* A fund will generally support proposals seeking to conduct "hybrid" meetings (in which shareholders can attend a physical meeting of the company in person or elect to participate online). A fund may vote for proposals to conduct "virtual-only" meetings (held entirely through online participation with no corresponding physical meeting taking place). To date, data show virtual meetings can be an effective way to increase shareholder participation and reduce cost. Virtual meetings should not curtail shareholder rights, for example by limiting the ability for shareholders to ask questions. A fund will consider support if:
  - meeting procedures and requirements are disclosed ahead of a meeting;
  - a formal process is in place to allow shareholders to submit questions to the board;
  - real-time video footage is available and attendees can call into the meeting or send a prerecorded message; and
  - shareholder rights are not unreasonably curtailed.

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