

# Platinum International Fund



**Kerr Neilson** Portfolio Manager

## Disposition of Assets

REGION	MAR 2011	DEC 2010
Europe	27%	27%
North America	25%	24%
Asia and Other	19%	21%
Japan	18%	20%
Australia	1%	0%
Cash	10%	8%
Shorts	13%	15%

Source: Platinum

## MSCI World Index Sector Performance (AUD)

SECTOR	QUARTER	1 YEAR
Energy	13%	14%
Industrials	5%	7%
Telecommunications	5%	7%
Healthcare	4%	-6%
Financials	3%	-6%
Materials	2%	7%
Consumer Discretionary	1%	6%
Information Technology	1%	-3%
Utilities	0%	-7%
Consumer Staples	0%	-1%

Source: MSCI

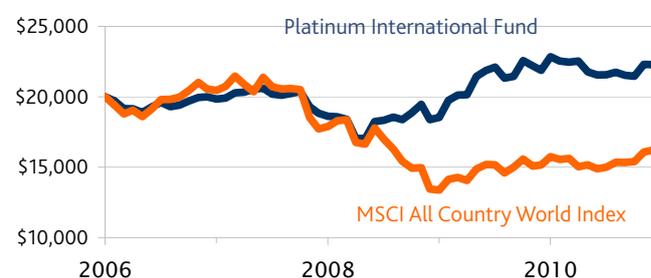
## Performance

The quarter was marked by some quite remarkable events, most notably the civil unrest that toppled regimes in North Africa and is looking to threaten others. There was also more pressure on the structure of the European community as the crushing burden of debt on the periphery tested the political resolve of the centre. Then came the massive earthquake off the East Coast of Japan that wrought physical havoc compounded by a huge tsunami that has left an estimated 27,000 people dead or missing. A tragedy of immense proportions that has been further exacerbated by nuclear leaks and contamination, still to be remedied, but which leaves the country deficient in electrical generating capacity and hence rolling power-shedding arrangements.

Within Asia, the cost of locking into US monetary policy via tightly managed exchange rates revealed itself. While these economies have evident strong endogenous growth drivers, their refusal to allow their currencies to appreciate is exposing them to the full brunt of tight commodity supplies which is being reflected directly in the rising cost of food and energy. Though inflation is being targeted via interest rates and some tacit price controls, they are hostage to their currency management policy but in the meantime have been trying to slow growth to ameliorate the threat.

## Value of \$20,000 Invested Over Five Years

31 March 2006 to 31 March 2011



Source: Platinum and MSCI. Refer to Note 2, page 6.

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For all these reverses, came the good news of economic expansion in the leading developed economies to the extent that some members of the US Federal Reserve system were proposing an early exit from quantitative easing and preparing for interest rate rises.

Against this background, the stock markets, led by the developed world, rose in aggregate though some Asian markets were down for the quarter, among them India, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. By industry, there was still a pro-growth bias in the leading sectors but the differences were less stark than in preceding quarters with the likes of healthcare, financials and telcos keeping pace with the average. For the quarter the MSCI World Index rose by 3.5% and is now up by 1.3% for the year in terms of Australian dollars.

The Fund continues to lag principally because of our heavy exposure to defensive sectors like healthcare (Johnson & Johnson, Merck) and to specific IT stocks like Microsoft and Cisco which are being classified as cheap but ex-growth (selling at a fraction of previous valuations). The Fund declined in aggregate by 5% over the year and returned 1.1% for the quarter. (For more commentary on Japan post the earthquake and tsunami, please refer to the Platinum Japan Fund quarterly report on page 22 and 23).

Our attribution analysis suggests that for the year we made around 7% on the longs in native currencies but that currency translation into AUD cost us about 7% and our shorts cost 4.8%. In geographic terms, stock picking in Europe and Japan led to strong outperformance but it was the reverse in the US and in Asia, where India and China were weak.

For all our disappointment with this last year's performance, we do wish to remind investors that the Fund is above its pre-Lehman levels which is very rare among global funds available in Australia.

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## Currencies

Nearer the end of the quarter we sensed a gradual change in sentiment towards the Asian currencies and shifted our exposures from the US dollar towards Asia.

Though the Australian dollar has been strong in bilateral terms versus the US dollar, for the last three months it has actually lagged behind the Euro and some Asian currencies. When setting our position we focus as much on the cross rates as the bilateral rate USD/AUD and regard, for example, the Canadian dollar and the Norwegian krone as interesting alternative commodity currencies to the AUD. As we have mentioned before, we see the AUD as a proxy on world growth and have been reluctant to heavily hedge back into the AUD preferring to favour other currencies like the Canadian dollar, Norwegian krone and selected Asian currencies as more diverse growth proxies.

We must, however, acknowledge that the AUD has been a lot stronger than we had anticipated. Though it may be volatile, we suspect the pre-emptive interest action by the Reserve Bank and the fact that the savings rate has been increasing, will give support to the currency for some while yet in a world of poor choices.

At present we have 24% exposure to Asian currencies (ex the Hong Kong dollar, which we see for the moment as a US dollar proxy), 24% in European currencies (ex the Norwegian krone), 19% in the US dollar, 15% in the Australian dollar, 12% combined in the Norwegian krone and Canadian dollar, and 5% in the Hong Kong dollar. We hold virtually no Yen which we believe is now entering a weakening phase on account of the crises and Bank of Japan (BOJ) stimulation, among other things.

## Shorting

We continued to shift our exposures away from the pro-cyclical shorts taking advantage of the market retracement in March and have cut the shorts in India, Hong Kong and Korea. The current short position is 13%.

## Changes to the Portfolio

To complement our existing oil exposure we added the Canadian-based oil producer, **Nexen**. This company, formerly Occidental Canada, has built a business via several extremely bold bets that have elevated it into being a mid-tier player but also more recently, earned the ire of investors when another huge leap into a Canadian tar sands development fell well short of expectations. Its market capitalisation is around \$13 billion with net debt being offset by investment in saleable investment like Syncrude. For this we get the product of capital expenditure and development spending of some \$16 billion over the last five years that gives us a resource base of perhaps 12 billion barrels.

The main producing asset is the Buzzard oil field in the North Sea that provides about half of production and much of the cashflow. Other assets include expiring oil production in Yemen (with some prospects of licence renewal); the Long Lake project in Alberta which together with its 72,000 barrels per day upgrader is running at half design capacity; valuable tight gas acreage in the Horn River basin in British Columbia; the Usan development in Nigeria with Total; and a 20% interest in Shell's top priority prospect in the Gulf of Mexico. This relative minnow in a global sense is participating with the majors and has built a wide technology and resource platform for the next decade to exploit.

We do not dispute the company's predilection for the 'big hit' but we are attracted to the magnitude and location of its reserves and the prospect of production growing from about 220,000 barrels of oil equivalent (boe) per day at present, to about 290,000 boe per day by 2013. Nominally it is on a standard type of industry rating but at a point of its development spending cycle that should see considerable cash generation and hopefully falling operational risks. New management since 2009 are very focused on bringing the large leaps of the last decade to economic harvest.

We have long held positions in gold shares in the belief that governments find it almost irresistible to dishonour their obligation to preserve the purchasing power of money. The

bigger miners have faced the twin challenges of fast rising production costs and the need to replace their gold reserves. With this in mind we have been switching Newmont into **Newcrest**. The latter's attraction is the extraordinary find in Papua New Guinea which looks like turning into a major copper-gold mine able to produce as much as one million ounces of gold a year and over 400 thousand tonnes of copper pa. The latest exploration hole of 628 metres at 3.06 g/t gold and 2.82% copper should provide high grade initial feed to the mill and allows one to dream of what might be found in the next drill hole! Importantly this 50/50 joint venture project is unlikely to be producing before 2016 but for a gold miner with an existing profile of rising production it adds both huge additional reserves and arguably reduced risk on account of the rich bimetallic nature of the ore bodies.

Among the financials, we have sold our holding of Prudential, which proved a good investment having been bought when it was under a cloud during its saga to acquire the Asian interests of AIG, to enter **Deutsche Börse (DB)**. The exchanges are in the midst of globalising and DB is attempting to merge with the New York Stock Exchange. However, the Nasdaq and IntercontinentalExchange (ICE) have come out with a higher bid. Though it is not certain that the merger will be voted down, even if it does fail, the inherent business of DB with its stranglehold on derivative trading in key products and integrated clearing leaves us with a sound business (see extensive coverage of this idea in the European Fund Quarterly Report on page 16).

Historically growth was augmented by the introduction of electronic exchanges and then by the introduction of highly successful products like the "Euro Stoxx 50 Equity Index" and the winning over of the German bund contracts from London. Apart from volatility returning to the markets as interest rates normalise and subsequently drive volumes, there are additional prospects of growth from the regulator's desire to shift over-the-counter (OTC) derivatives onto exchanges from which we will gain clearing fees. It is possible that DB may eventually have to pay up to ensure the merger goes ahead but the probable cost relative to a longer term unassailable position looks satisfactory at current prices.

## Commentary

As noted in the introduction, the markets are defying pretty much all bad news. Government stimulus spending that augments the increased savings in the private sector in the developed markets (DMs) is working for now and confidence is returning patchily.

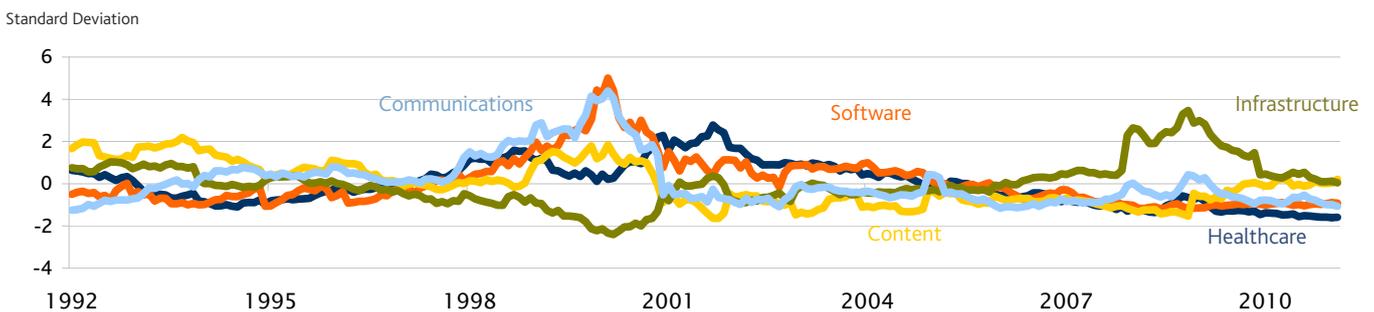
Earnings visibility has been the hallmark of the winning sectors. They have benefited from unusual earnings leverage associated with the recovery, strong investment demand in the emerging markets (EMs) and the sustained benefit from off-shore sourcing. Growth in the EMs barely missed a beat, and if one chooses to ignore the financial devastation in the West, the principal result of the Lehman shock was to suspend many important projects that were either under consideration or development. There has been a consequent surge of activity, particularly in the EMs, in an attempt to catch-up with burgeoning demand for raw materials. As we have noted often, current exchange rates do not properly reflect the physical significance of these economies and can cause one to underestimate their contribution to world growth. In the last 10 years for example, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have grown in aggregate by over 10% pa, other developing and emerging markets at 8.5% pa and the G7 by 3.6% pa. According to International Monetary Fund estimates, world GDP in *purchasing parity terms* amounts to about \$74 trillion of which the BRICs account for \$18 trillion, other emerging economies \$17 trillion and the G7 only \$29 trillion (39%).

Scale is best understood in physical output where for example China today is producing some 1.7 billion tonnes of cement, 660 million tonnes of steel and about 3.6 billion tonnes of coal. For context, this represents nearly half of total *world production!* Further, China is using more cement per head of population than the former world champ, Korea, at 1.3 tonnes per head per year. By way of context, for all its tectonic challenges, Japan only ever managed to consume 600kg of cement per capita pa and the US typically uses about 80 million tonnes pa.

These gigantic numbers do of course raise issues of how China is to eventually wean itself off an economy so skewed to investment (45% of resource flows). In the near term this may not be a problem given the government's desire to build some 30 million units of low-cost housing over the next three years which will certainly compensate for the clamp-down on the luxury-end of the property market. It does, however, point to longer term issues. Right now, strong investment in the EMs is the inherent propellant of the recovery in the DMs together, of course, with government transfer payments and suppressed interest rates.

It is this cognitive dissonance that has imprisoned our thinking in dealing with the *world as it appears*, and that which *is*. For some, it is not whether these conflicting forces can co-exist, but when they break. A concoction of recent years is the so-called targeting of inflation rates by the Central Banks. Even with these seemingly iron clad obligations it is interesting that the Bank of England have chosen for the third consecutive

## Defensive Sectors - Relative Global Enterprise Value/Operating Capital Employed



Source: Factset

## Global Cyclical versus Defensive Sectors\*



Source: Factset

\* The chart represents a ratio of the cost of operating capital of global cyclicals to the cost of operating capital of global defensives i.e. the price we pay for the productive assets of cyclicals relative to the price we pay for the productive assets of defensives. The chart is at a 20 year high suggesting that we are paying more for the assets of cyclicals (relative to defensives) than we have in the past. In short, cyclicals are relatively expensive.

year to delay tightening on argument that under-utilised resources should ensure that inflation does not become endemic. Importantly, pricing, structural biases, the arbitrary increase of money way in excess of the physical economy and rational expectations are seemingly deemed unworthy of mention when forming these policies – inflation in the UK is running at about 4.5% pa!

Work by numerous economists point to the instability inherent in huge government borrowing requirements when they exceed a tipping point (expressed as a theoretical percentage of debt to revenues or GDP) and **the implicit dead end that comes from prolonged tampering with the yield curve**. Without this context, we may seem somewhat club-footed in managing your money. On the one hand we are trying to participate in the lively party but do not wish to be intoxicated by the hilarity.

When examining the relative merits of industries and stocks, our proprietary research shows that sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare and software are trading by as much as 1.5 standard deviations below their historic averages (see chart on page 7 and glossary on page 34). By the same measure, industrials, process industries, autos and materials are between 2.2 and 1.3 standard deviations above their respective historic means. This obviously doesn't give timing indications but when one sees that these sectors have moved from very depressed levels to relatively elevated levels over a 10 year span, one is reassured of the benefits of avoiding the crowd.

The Fund is predominantly in these more defensive sectors that have the added virtue of being more inflation protected. We also have areas of strong growth such as social networking sites and gaming as well as some exposure to cyclicals where we believe there is a longer term structural imbalance.

## Conclusion

The stock markets are now entering their third year of recovery. Earnings momentum for sectors such as the industrials, materials and energy will see progressively slower advances. The hitherto neglected sectors of healthcare, technology and utilities may by comparison appear less stodgy. Starting with low valuations and typically better placed in a more inflationary environment, specific companies in these areas can be expected to gain favour. In reality, the portfolio is built-up one stock at a time and this is an on-going process that we believe will reveal itself in coming months.

## Notes

1. The investment returns are calculated using the Fund's unit price and represent the combined income and capital return for the specific period. They are net of fees and costs (excluding the buy-sell spread and any investment performance fee payable), are pre-tax, and assume the reinvestment of distributions. The investment returns shown are historical and no warranty can be given for future performance. You should be aware that historical performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Due to the volatility of underlying assets of the Funds and other risk factors associated with investing, investment returns can be negative (particularly in the short-term).

The inception dates for each Fund are as follows:

Platinum International Fund: 30 April 1995

Platinum Unhedged Fund: 31 January 2005

Platinum Asia Fund: 4 March 2003

Platinum European Fund: 30 June 1998

Platinum Japan Fund: 30 June 1998

Platinum International Brands Fund: 18 May 2000

Platinum International Health Care Fund: 10 November 2003

Platinum International Technology Fund: 18 May 2000

2. The investment returns depicted in this graph are cumulative on A\$20,000 invested in the relevant Fund over five years from 31 March 2006 to 31 March 2011 relative to their Index (in A\$) as per below:

Platinum International Fund - MSCI All Country World Net Index

Platinum Unhedged Fund - MSCI All Country World Net Index

Platinum Asia Fund - MSCI All Country Asia ex Japan Net Index

Platinum European Fund - MSCI All Country Europe Net Index

Platinum Japan Fund - MSCI Japan Net Index

Platinum International Brands Fund - MSCI All Country World Net Index

Platinum International Health Care Fund - MSCI All Country World Health Care Net Index

Platinum International Technology Fund - MSCI All Country World Information Technology Net Index

(nb. the gross MSCI Index was used prior to 31 December 1998 as the net MSCI Index did not exist).

The investment returns are calculated using the Fund's unit price. They are net of fees and costs (excluding the buy-sell spread and any investment performance fee payable), pre-tax and assume the reinvestment of distributions. It should be noted that Platinum does not invest by reference to the weightings of the Index. Underlying assets are chosen through Platinum's individual stock selection process and as a result holdings will vary considerably to the make-up of the Index. The Index is provided as a reference only.

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