

15 July 2024

Investment Grade Versus High Yield

By Frederick Stewart

As we enter a new financial year, it is important to take notice of where yield and credit spread markets are currently sitting so that we can discern where value lies as investors.

The question on everyone's lips is when do rates move and in what direction and inflation continues to be the key determinant for the RBA. As of today, the Australian economy continues to churn out data in support of the view of rates being higher for longer but let's examine this more closely.

It is now the expectation of markets that a further rate rise is likely for the Australian cash rate and that any potential cuts have been pushed into next year. This has been supported by strong wage growth and tight employment data for the Australian market combined with stronger than expected inflation, particularly amongst durable goods which appear to have been the key contributor to the higher than expected inflation print informing the RBA's stance.

Given the view that rates may rise by 25 basis points and then be followed by an easing cycle in mid next year, how should investors be optimising their portfolios to take advantage? As stated on several occasions, we are of the opinion that when yields sell off and we can add fixed coupon tier 2 and senior investment grade credit to portfolios above 6%, we should be adding with conviction.

When should we be adding this type of paper?

If we look at where 10-year Australian Government bond yields have traded since January, we have broadly ranged between lows of 3.955% and the highs of 4.52% and currently sit at 4.33%:



Source: Bloomberg

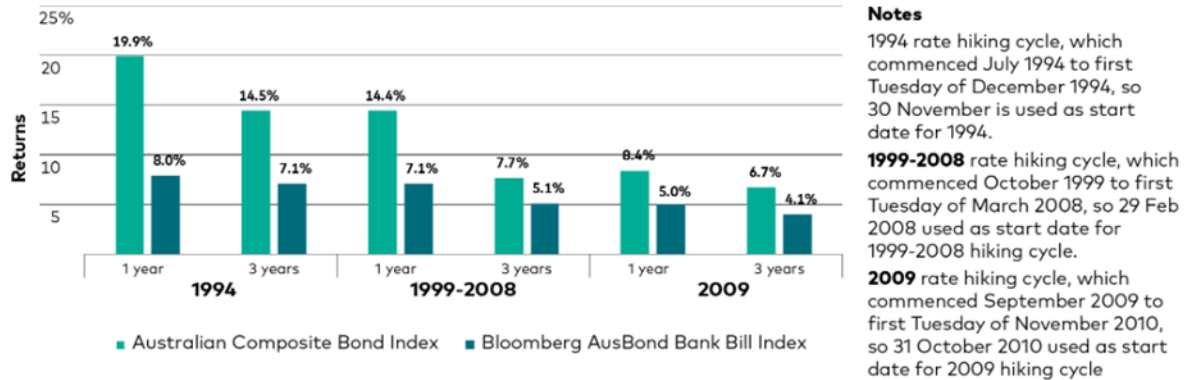
Under the efficient market hypothesis, it is assumed that all information available in the market is reflected in asset prices and with this in mind, the 10 year government bond has already priced in the expectation of a rate hike after the RBA minutes and hence why we are trading towards the top of the range. This occurred in mid-June on the chart above as the market digested the RBA minutes are yields sold off to reflect the growing possibility of the next move being higher. This begs the question, with us trading towards the top of the yearly range for the 10-year yield, is now the time to be adding duration to portfolios? To be clear, no one has a crystal ball and knows what will unfold over the coming months exactly, but the answer to that question in my opinion is yes, as long as we are garnering yields in excess of 6% or better which is achievable at current levels.

If we are able to add duration to the portfolio when yields are at or close to the top of the rate cycle, we can ride the easing cycle of rates downwards and amplify the return of these instruments in excess of their coupon payment rates through capital appreciation.

Additionally, while many investors like to hoard cash as rates begin to lower, data published by Vanguard and Bloomberg below clearly shows that Australian bonds typically outperform cash on a one- and three-year time period following the conclusion of hiking cycles in recent times.

Figure 1: What happens when rate hikes end?

Annualised performance following the rate hike cycle.



Sources: Vanguard and Bloomberg

Source: Vanguard and Bloomberg <https://www.vanguard.com.au/adviser/learn/insights/markets-and-economy/lock-in-higher-long-term-yields-now>

In summary, given where we currently sit in the rates cycle and where economic data and yields are signalling the trend in rates going forward, investors should be considering adding to their longer dated fixed allocation to drive outperformance.

We see these options as attractive in the current environment:

Issuer	Payment Rank	Coupon Type	Coupon Formula	Rating (S&P, FITCH, MOODY)	Call Date	Maturity Date	Face Value	Yield	Margin (TM/ASW)	Running Yield	Clean Price	Clean Consideration	Accrued Interest	Gross Consideration
BANCO SANTANDER SA	Subordinated	FIXED	6.444%	BBB+,N/A,Baa2	17-Jul-29	17-Jul-34	50,000	6.007%	1.852%	6.326%	101.864	50,932.00	0.00	50,932.00
WESTPAC BANKING CORP	Subordinated	FIXED	7.199%	A-,N/A,A3	15-Nov-33	15-Nov-38	50,000	6.043%	1.766%	6.657%	108.145	54,072.50	606.50	54,679.00
NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK	Subordinated	FIXED	6.342%	A-,A-,A3	06-Jun-34	06-Jun-39	50,000	5.983%	1.620%	6.178%	102.647	51,323.50	346.50	51,670.00

Research Report Disclosure

IAM Capital Markets Limited (AFSL 283119) ('IAM Capital Markets') is a financial service business and provides general financial product advice only. As a result, this document, the Content and the Reports are not intended to provide financial product advice and must not be relied upon or construed as such. IAM Capital Markets does not express any opinion on the future or expected value of any financial product and does not explicitly or implicitly recommend or suggest an investment strategy of any kind. The Content and the Reports provided in this document have been prepared based on available data to which IAM Capital Markets have access. Neither the accuracy of that data nor the research methodology used to produce the Content and Reports can be or is guaranteed or warranted. Some of the research used to create the Content and the Reports is based on past performance. Past performance is not an indicator of future performance. Any forecasts are predictive in character and based on specified assumptions generally available at the time and no reliance should be placed on the accuracy of any forecast information. The actual results may differ substantially from the forecasts and are subject to change without further notice. The data generated by the research in the Content or the Reports is based on research methodology that has limitations; and some of the information in the Content or the Reports is based on information from third parties. IAM Capital Markets does not guarantee the currency of the Content or the Reports. If you would like to assess the currency, you should compare the Content or the Reports with more recent characteristics and performance of the assets mentioned within it.

You acknowledge that investment can give rise to substantial risk and a product mentioned in the Content or the Reports may not be suitable to you. The Content and Reports have been provided or made available by IAM Capital Markets without taking account of your objectives, financial situation, and needs. IAM Capital Markets strongly recommends that you seek independent accounting, financial, taxation, and legal advice, tailored to your specific objectives, financial situation or needs, prior to making any investment decision. Neither IAM Capital Markets, nor any of its directors, authorised representatives, employees, or agents, makes any representation or warranty as to the reliability, accuracy, or completeness, of the Content and Reports. Nor does IAM Capital Markets accept any liability or responsibility arising in any way (including negligence) for errors in, or omissions from the Content and Reports. IAM Capital Markets, its staff and related parties earn fees and revenue from dealing in the securities as principal or otherwise and may have an interest in any securities mentioned in this document. Any reference to credit ratings of companies, entities or financial products must only be relied upon by a 'wholesale client' as that term is defined in section 761G of the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth). IAM Capital Markets does not provide tax advice and is not a registered tax agent or tax (financial) advisor, nor are any of IAM Capital Markets' staff or authorised representatives. IAM Capital Markets does not make a market in the securities or products that may be referred to in this document.

An investment in notes, corporate bonds, syndicated loans, or any debt instrument should not be compared to a bank deposit. Notes, corporate bonds, syndicated loans, or any debt instrument have a greater risk of loss of some or all an investor's capital when compared to bank deposits. IAM Capital Markets is not licensed to provide foreign exchange hedging or deal in foreign exchange contracts services. IAM Capital Markets may quote to you an estimated yield when you purchase a bond. This yield may be calculated by IAM Capital Markets on either A) a yield to maturity date basis; or B) a yield to early redemption date basis. Some bond issuances include multiple early redemption dates and prices, therefore the realised yield earned by you on the bond may differ from the yield estimated or quoted by IAM Capital Markets at the time of your purchase.

To the extent IAM Capital Markets has utilised research from BondAdvisor, the following Disclaimer applies. BondAdvisor has acted on information provided to it and our research is subject to change based on legal offering documents. This research is for informational purposes only. We note that this security offering is only being made to investors who are not retail clients under the Corporations Act nor located outside Australia. This information discusses general market activity, industry or sector trends, or other broad-based economic, market or political conditions and should not be construed as research or investment advice. The Content of this Report is not intended to provide financial product advice and must not be relied upon as such. The Content and the Reports are not and shall not be construed as financial product advice. The statements and/or recommendations on this web application, the Content and/or the Reports are our opinions only. We do not express any opinion on the future or expected value of any Security and do not explicitly or implicitly recommend or suggest an investment strategy of any kind. The Content and Reports provided have been prepared based on available data to which we have access. Neither the accuracy of that data nor the methodology used to produce the Report can be guaranteed or warranted. Some of the research used to create the Content is based on past performance. Past performance is not an indicator of future performance. We have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that any opinion or recommendation is based on reasonable grounds. The data generated by the research is based on methodology that has limitations; and some of the information in the Reports is based on information from third parties. We do not guarantee the currency of the Report. If you would like to assess the currency, you should compare the Reports with more recent characteristics and performance of the assets mentioned within it. You acknowledge that investment can give rise to substantial risk and a product mentioned in the Reports may not be suitable to you. You should obtain independent advice specific to your particular circumstances, make your own enquiries and satisfy yourself before you make any investment decisions or use the Report for any purpose. This Report provides general information only. There has been no regard whatsoever to your own personal or business needs, your individual circumstances, your own financial position or investment objectives in preparing the information. We do not accept responsibility for any loss or damage, however caused (including through negligence), which you may directly or indirectly suffer in connection with your use of this Report, nor do we accept any responsibility for any such loss arising out of your use of, or reliance on, information contained on or accessed through this Report.

© 2023 IAM Group | Income Asset Management Group Limited ABN 42 010 653 862 (ASX: IAM) and wholly owned subsidiaries, IAM Capital Markets Ltd ABN 86 111 273 048 AFSL 283119, IAM Cash Markets Pty Ltd ACN 164 806 357 as corporate authorised representative (no. 001295506) of AFSL 283119, Trustees Australia Limited ABN 63 010 579 058 AFSL 260038 and IAM Funds ABN 54 643 600 088, together the IAM Group.

The information in this website is for general information purposes only and does not purport to contain all matters relevant to any particular or financial instrument. It is not intended to be a recommendation, offer or invitation to purchase, sell or otherwise deal in securities or other investments. Before making any decision in respect to a financial product, you should read the relevant Financial Services Guide and Product Disclosure Statement available from IAM Group <https://www.incomeam.com> and seek independent and specific advice from an appropriately qualified professional. IAM Group shall not be liable for any errors, omissions, defects or misrepresentations in the information or for any loss or damage (whether direct or indirect) suffered by persons who use or rely on the information contained here.