

# Investment Insight

**June 2022** 

The role of a professional adviser is not to tell people what to think, but rather, what to think about. As 2022 unfolds it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to tell our clients to START THINKING ABOUT CHANGE. In 2021 we referenced the Strauss/Howe work "The Fourth Turning" outlining the cyclical nature and impact of inter-generational change. However, reading about change and living it are entirely different matters. Significant events are the catalysts of significant change. The digital revolution, 9/11, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the rise of China, climate change awareness and COVID-19 each fall into that class. They progressively brought us to where we are today having re-shaped information flows, the world order, work and lifestyles, the role of government, debt, interest rates, energy costs and asset values. Collectively, they created the most widespread and elevated rise in living standards ever enjoyed by humankind and "the everything bubble". The events of 2022 are changing all that. War, energy disruption, sovereign security and trade concerns, China's ongoing lockdowns, supply chain blockages, re-shoring, rising fuel and food costs, labour

shortages, excess demand and excess liquidity have released the INFLATION genie from its bottle. To put it back, INTEREST RATES MUST RISE. A LOT. In an ageing world where governments, companies and people are deeply in debt and we are all to some extent, intoxicated by over priced assets, this party seems likely to end badly for all of us. Raising interest rates too far will create a recession and hardship. Not enough will keep inflation high and persistent. A choice must be made. Meanwhile, the simple pain relieving remedies of printing more money or lowering interest rates are not current options. Winter is coming.



# **Boomers, Borrowers, Prices and Pain**

## Are Bankers Fighting The Wrong War?

In the early stages of WW2, Winston Churchill was credited with saying "Generals are always prepared to fight the last war". He believed a new conflict could only be won by adopting new tactics. In 2022, in the space of less than 3 months, central banks across the globe suddenly declared war on "unexpected" inflation. Their approach, like that employed in the 1970s, is to raise interest rates to obliterate it. That was a tactic for a different time when the world was young, debt levels low and no one had the internet to remind them of how much their investments had dropped, hour by hour. It is not for today's older, more indebted and fragile world.

The 2022 inflationary outbreak is the product of prior COVID **fiscal and** monetary stimulus injected directly into the economy at precisely a time

when the global supply of goods and services were disrupted. It was deliberately induced demand. Have we already forgotten how most people loved free money?

This is not like free spending, unionised 1960s/70s with boomers coming of age, but more post-WW2 1940's.

we US 8.6%
ney? Euro Area 8.6%
UK 9.1%
S with
O's. Canada 7.7%

Years of WW2 **rationing** generated pent up demand, household **savings** were high mostly forced by governments needing capital (War Bonds). **Commodities** were scarce, **product supply chains** and shipping lanes were all but non existent (for obvious reasons) and there was a severe mis-match between post-war **labour needs** and available **labour skills**. Young people were fighting to save our way of life, not doing apprenticeships or professional training. In so many ways, the 2020s economic challenges really do resemble those of the 1940s.



In the 1940's inflation was allowed to run up to 15% in most countries and interest rates were capped below 3% since governments carried the debt. This was termed financial repression and bankers did not panic. Over time, supply systems were rebuilt and caught up with demand and prices abated. Rejuvenated industries of all types trained people (who gladly accepted any work) in both skilled and unskilled jobs. Compared to wartime, late 1940s people were living life again and patient for its spoils. It took 2-3 years for the mess to clear and it did.

Today's economic malaise stems directly from government printed money handed directly to consumers, just as interest rates were set to zero and debt levels allowed to explode . This set elevated asset prices and inflation on a collision course. We are concerned central bankers are misreading 1970s history, too eager to move too fast. Let it pass. The chances of orchestrating a soft landing are slim and the cost of a hard landing is high. Borrowers will get seriously hurt if this goes wrong and so will the rest of us, should asset prices enter a period of protracted declines.

Aggressive interest rate rises will not make oil flow, produce computer chips or food grow faster to ease prices. These are supply side issues and need only time to correct. Unwinding asset price needs more care.

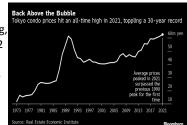
# Age Makes A Difference

Recognising change early is no simple matter and when allocating capital, can be critical to investment success. Understanding demographics helps.

Economically, children cost money but produce little until reaching working age. They are the future. People between the ages of 25 and 45 consume resources heavily, borrowing to buy homes, big ticket manufactured goods and to raise families. They are the engine of an economy. Those between 46 and 65 are at the peak of their productive and earning capacity. Often empty nesters, they begin to consider their retirement needs and increasingly save for that purpose, especially from age 50. They provide the savings and capital needed by economies to invest and grow. Retirees generally spend less on goods and more on services such as health care and experiences. With finite income and capital, retirees generally wind back their spending as they age, contracting economic demand and growth. The changing behaviours of these cohorts matters to us all. Like people, economies with older age profiles, slowly shrink and die.

#### Japan - A Glimpse Into The Future

After the wailing of incessant bombing, island Japan was humbled by its WW2 defeat. Unlike the West, it did not enjoy a post-war baby boom. Instead, it set itself to the task of rebuilding destroyed cities from their ashes and restoring its shattered national pride.



By the late 1980s Japan had become an economic powerhouse of industrial manufacturing, engineering, vehicles, electronics, finance and property investment. It was the world's largest creditor nation and 2nd largest economy. Alas, its glorious rise was both swift and short lived, destroyed by its hubris, debt levels, mal-investment in housing and father time. The world's oldest nation, is now our first view of an aged modern society.

A Japanese asset bubble 20 years in the making, was underpinned by ever rising productivity, GDP and income. Each considered bullet proof. In 1987 the Bank of Japan (BOJ) sought to increase interest rates to cool speculation, but took **no action** in the shadow of the global uncertainty after the 1987 stock market crash. With Japanese assets seen as a safe haven, a strong Yen (post Plaza Accord) and low interest rates, asset prices spiralled higher (sound familiar?). Prices spectacularly burst in 1990 leaving Japanese property and shares in tatters along with shūshin koyō, the post-war "job for life" promise. In its wake, Japan suffered a deep 10 year recession.

**Asset values in 2022 remain at or below their 1990 peak** despite decades of 0% interest rates since then. Imagine borrowing money today to buy an asset that did not rise for 30 years. Investors, please think about that.

Few confident and proud Japanese investors in 1990 saw what was to come. Conditions changed very quickly, as did outcomes. Wealth evaporated. The detail of what followed the bust is important and complex. It is also somewhat unique to Japan and its disciplined culture, to absorb financial hardship and happily live in houses shared by many generations.

# **Investment Insight - June 2022**

(Not sure how well that would work in the West). For Japanese businesses, workers and investors that is their lived reality. Yes, the splendour of life goes on and families and cities still thrive. Yet growing one's wealth is elusive and national humility has returned. Hard earned economic success, replaced by decades of tepid GDP growth and stagnant asset values as society gets much older and retirement capital is eroded.

Why? Demographics. In 1995 Japan, there were 125m people and 68m workers. Today there is 126m people and 68m workers, all much older.

## The European Project

Like Japan, the European Union has become old. As a political and monetary experiment formed by the joining of largely incompatible cultures, languages and needs, it seems destined to fail economically.

In the south, ancient buildings have limited appeal to



Asian tourists and sunny beaches mostly attract bums. Presently both Italian and Greek 10 year debt should be yielding above 10%p.a as both are in trouble. However, the ECB, the buyer of first resort has come to the rescue lending at sub 4% by selling high quality German debt. This makes no commercial sense other than to keep the Union alive.

**In the more productive north**, a decade of grossly mis-managed energy spending leaves it darker, colder and poorer with lower growth and higher CO2 emissions burning dirty coal and lignite to keep the lights on.

Socially divisive "open arms" EU immigration policies aimed to attract younger people have failed to spawn an economic dividend and instead created a toxic cultural nightmare. Mother Merkel forgot her chemistry lessons as to what happens when you forcibly mix oil and water.

What should be a pyramid shaped ageing profile, looks more like a lopsided ship with **over half the population at 2021 over 45.** It seems inevitable that over coming decades, the EU standard of living will decline.

#### China, Russia and India (The Elephant In The Room)

Our June, 2014 newsletter, identified China's working population would peak in 2015 and we suggested China "may get old before it gets rich".

In May, 2020 we declared 2020 "the year the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) lost control of the 21st century" as the CCP thwarted all attempts to identify the origins of SARS-CoV-2, betraying global trust and science.

In June, 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine shifting global trade alliances dividing the world between the totalitarian states and (roughly) the rest of the world, we now are now prepared to posit that **China is unlikely to see out this decade as a super-power.** Poor demographics, lower growth, mis-allocation of resources and China's intentions to become a territorial adversary of the West, support this thesis.

We are now in a war of ideology, with blood being overtly spilled in Ukraine (and covertly in the Uyghur camps in northwest China). Western countries have been jolted, united and swiftly drawn to action by the unexpectedly contemptuous aggression of both Putin and Xinping.

Russia appears to seek basic food/energy control and reintegration of its former states. China covets a position of global financial and technological domination. Each tyrant is racing against the same clock, a rapidly ageing workforce and declining population. **Time is of the essence**.

The Western response seems clear. COVID-19 alerted the US and everyone else of their vulnerability to Chinese controlled supply chains and the imperative of alternatives. This has initiated an almighty **investment** in US, European and Asian based raw materials, technology and productive capacity. The Ukraine war has raised the stakes further, exposing Europe's belly to Russian oil/gas supplies and the Asian/Middle Eastern dependence on Ukrainian fertilisers and basic foodstuffs.

In recent years major manufacturing corporations and brands including Adidas, Nike, Samsung, LG, Toshiba and Sony have **left China** setting up shop elsewhere. Now Schlumberger (oil services) BP, Microsoft, Intel and even McDonalds, Starbucks, IKEA and Prada have **left Russia**.

For both countries, these were reliable ever growing sources of income,

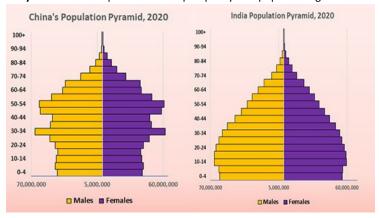
jobs, R&D, IP and innovation that paid for growing domestic and defence spending and US dollars to service debt. **They are now all lost.** 

Just as Japan saw its lunch eaten first by Sth Korea and then China, so too will China see its future revenue evaporate, along with the world's best minds in the sciences and technology who can no longer trust them. China and Russia believe they can be self reliant raising the bamboo and iron curtain. Looking back, this idea will likely fail politically and economically

China will still enjoy more years of being the world's workshop. It takes 5-10 years to re-tool, re-skill and relocate the complex network of components used in manufacture. China has a 20 year head start and continues to attract Foreign Direct Investment. Nonetheless, growing trade builds the future and the China growth story looks like it will be its history.

Now let's look at the demographics and what they tell us. The graphic below paints a tale of two nations. The difference is staggering.

To the left is China, with its bulging population of over 45s most within 10 years of retirement. Their productive years are limited and they will soon be living and drawing on their capital. The smaller cohort of under 30s will be unable to replace them in 5-10 years. Critical to China's future, many are angry with CCP policy and lockdowns, seeking to leave and not return. Notice the disproportionate number of young males to females? That is a product of the **enforced one child policy** (and infanticide). A current fertility rate of 1.15 suggests younger, educated **females now choose to have only one child**. This poisons future prosperity and population growth.



(Russia is like China in that when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and USSR was disbanded in 1992, **young people went west** where the future was and **older people stayed home**. Elevated death rates and a falling birth rate ever since the 1990s, puts Russia in the same ageing trap as China.)

Looking at India's demographic profile, it is almost a classic pyramid shape with lots of younger people at the base to support a small and ever diminishing dependant cohort approaching the peak. What you are seeing is a future workforce of over 580m people under 25 and a further 350m under 45. India has many social challenges, but its colonial history leaves a legacy of a rule of law, democratic political system and English language well suited to the world's service based future. As a perpetually poor country, India seeks higher living standards more than global power and like other smaller Asian nations, does not appear to threaten global peace. These represent endearing qualities for future global partnership.

Reliable data from both China and India is difficult to obtain. According to the UN, India's population will surpass China in 2025. Other sources suggest it already has. In any event, India will have the world's largest population and continue to grow while China's will inexorably shrink.

India is a growing pharmaceutical, chemicals and IT supplier with rising capabilities in finance. These provide a sound base for the future growth.

#### United States Of America - A Surprisingly Balanced Bunch

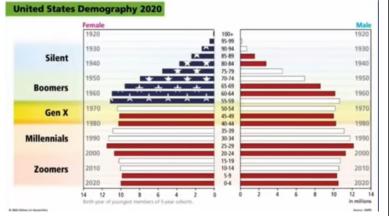
To appreciate the economics of current day USA, the largest economy on earth, is not easy. It demands an understanding of how it was possible at Bretton Woods in 1944 to demand the US dollar assigned as the **world's reserve currency**. For a single country to control the world's military, naval, industrial, technological and financial resources while **the rest of the world was in ruins**. To hold 80% of the world's gold and generate 50% of global GDP. US aggregate wealth, largely privately owned, has increased many-fold in the 78 years since. Growing decade after decade.

# **Zanacorp Financial Group Pty Ltd**

Contrast this with Japan's 40 year and China's 30 year economic miracles. Remembering only the recent past, should not ignore what came before.

US power has undeniably diminished since the GFC, the rise of China, unruly politics and fading appetite to work. Yet, it has not lost its capacity to attract entrepreneurs, innovate and invest globally to create wealth.

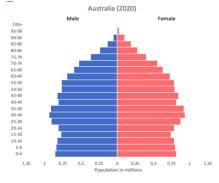
IMF data current at October, 2021 shows **US GDP at \$US\$22.9tr** or **US\$69,287** per capita. China's equivalents are **US\$16.8tr** and **US\$11,891**. China's outsized GDP is the result of having 1.4bn people, not lots of wealth. (GDPwise, Australia holds 13th position at **\$1.6tr** and **US\$ 62,619**).



Demographically, the US lies between China and India with a profile skewed towards retiring Boomers, but saved by an even larger cohort of their children, Millennials, approaching their working years. As a destination country for aspiring overseas students and families, strong US immigration supplements a low birth rate and is likely to grow from 330m to 440m by 2050. China's population will age and stagnate at 1.4bn, like Japan. These reliable forecasts have significant consequences for each.

## Australia — We'll Be OK

Let there be no doubt, we live in a most favoured country. Our climate, our natural resources, our skills and our capacity to absorb and integrate people from all parts of the planet, make us the envy of the world. Distance from others has kept us out of harm's way. We are indeed "The Lucky Country".



Australia's demographic profile is comparable to that of the US. (So too is our abundance in agriculture, energy and natural resources). By 2050 our population is estimated to grow from **25m to 33m** mainly from immigration, keeping us young and reinforcing our nation's capacity to meet and defeat future economic challenges. It also underpins long term property prices and potential profit growth for our best businesses. We are also well placed to develop greater two-way trade ties with Asia (ex China) and retain our trusted partner status in a peace seeking future world.

#### **Our Thematic Take Aways**

Remember that demographic changes take decades to evolve into economic changes though can be sped up by external events, like COVID. In the short term, the world is in a very precarious state, still sorting friends from enemies. As are **the risks of a 2023 economic recession and a serious asset price downturn,** we remain focussed on the here and now.

Over the horizon, we expect the next decade to see **Mexico and Asia** rise in China's place to produce goods. Commodity countries Australia, Canada, Brazil, Africa and NZ will prosper. Ageing **Europe, Sth Korea and Japan** are likely to fade from global prominence. It would appear unlikely that neither **China, Russia or Iran** will be trusted to supply critical global goods or services with these countries shut out of supply lines.

We favour green and old energy producers, commodities and precious metals and value stocks ahead of over priced growth (tech) in the years ahead. We also prefer consumer staples over financials, in a volatile period where income security is uncertain and credit becomes expensive.

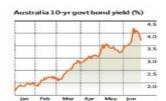
#### The Return of The King

Readers will be aware of our long held view that **interest rates were kept too low for too long.** Years too long. In June 2021 we discussed the inverse relationship between 10 year bonds and asset prices and evidence of the onset of demand driven inflation. Both the FED and RBA took no action. Their 2021 complacency has been replaced by sheer panic in 2022.

The arsonists have become the firefighters. Those who lit the match of cheap and plentiful money stoking the fire of rising asset prices and FOMO are now reducing liquidity and aggressively raising interest rates, to apparently save us from the inflationary shock of Putin's war. Oh please.

The sudden reversal of monetary policy has led many unsuspecting borrowers (and some greedy ones) into an asset debt trap. Regrettably, we too were unable to deter many clients from borrowing. Victims of FOMO and the lure of making easy money. With both shares and property prices around the world falling sharply in 2022, recent borrowers will simply become **collateral damage in a most cruel official error of policy.** Even those on fixed interest rates will eventually face the music, making the pathway out of debt tricky to navigate. Hold? Sell? It's a tough call.

TINA (There Is No Alternative) has left the building. For years, interest rates punished savers, forcing them into risk assets to generate a return. Today's falling prices and heightened fear coupled with 10 year bond yields rising from 1.7% last year to 3.75%, have changed everything. CASH IS



KING and our client portfolios have plenty, as we were prepared for this.

Being prepared has not made us immune from the savage decline in markets during 2022. Like most, we have been surprised by the swiftness of regulators to withdraw the punch bowl without notice. This has resulted in single digit portfolio declines at a time where most markets have declined by twice that much. It is difficult to be in a raging storm and not get wet.

Investment markets seem to have over reacted to the rhetoric of bankers to keep on raising interest rates assuming regulators will stay the course in their **inflation crushing crusade**. We do not believe they will, as **something will break** well before then. It could be the bond market, the share market, or property market. **When it does, rates will reverse**. Will the damage to asset prices and confidence be irreversible, as in Japan, post 1990?

Regulators acting in fear, invariably RAISE INTEREST RATES TOO LATE, TOO FAST AND TOO HIGH, too confident that strong employment levels can carry higher loan repayments. This time things really are different. As a result of many factors everyone is paying more for everything, from food and fuel, to electricity and gas, travel and insurance, even haircuts. In this environment, raising rates will destroy demand, but that demand is already under cost of living pressure and has arguably already turned down.

We believe today's post COVID inflationary circumstances are far more complex than bankers alone can manage, being the result of both fiscal and monetary stimulus measures. Government spending decisions are complicit culprits.



In November, 2021 RBA Governor Lowe, assured us that he was committed to his **Term Funding Facility** of **0.1% until 2024**. By June 2022, the RBA is on a mission to get the cash rate to 2.85% implying variable lending rates of 4.25%-5.25%. What a reversal! We're not concerned by that prospect as we expect to be in the **2023 recession long before they get there.** 

Raising interest rates will smash everything and no one wants that. With every market and government over sensitive and over leveraged, bankers will most likely stop using lagging economic data, like employment and inflation and make forecasts, just as they are paid to do. There'll be plenty of damage around to convince them their forecasts are right and they will proceed to lower interest rates again and governments will step in as well.

We think 2023 could be really bad for markets. Be aware of that. Dollar cost averaging will pay off, defensive assets will defend, stay the course. Be prepared for growth assets, shares and property to come under pressure for longer than you think and that even the best of portfolios will have them and suffer. The bull market is over and bear markets bring pain. Bad policy may have made this episode worse, but not permanent.

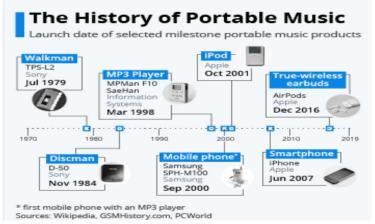
# **Investment Insight - June 2022**

#### Tax Increases from 1st July, 2022 ,10.5% SGC and FHSSS \$50,000

To extend consumer woes, we remind all clients that 2020 emergency tax cuts in the form of LMITO of \$1,080 p.a. later increased to \$1,500 p.a. have expired (just when you need them most). Employers will now also pay SGC at the rate of 10.5%, just when labour costs are rising. It never rains, it pours! On a brighter note, young first home buyers will be able to access \$50,000 under the First Home Savers Super Scheme, up from \$30,000. For those who are savers, house prices are finally coming your way. Don't rush (unless you find your dream home) as falling house prices will be with us for quite a while. Work hard in your job to keep it. Unlike today, 2023 will probably look a little different in work places.

#### Some Changes Happen So Slowly We Often Don't Notice

Think of a fond memory that still brings a smile to your face today. We may all have different ones, but they will each be pleasant and take you to a good time in your life. Most of us will have memories of the development of portable music devices from "trannies" all the way to 5G phones.



The graphic above takes us back to the beginning of user selected music. Devices may have been clunky but allowed us to get lost in our favourite music. The cassette based Sony Walkman, the Discman, solid state digital MP3s, the iPod, iPhone then hi-fi wireless earbuds that double as a phone mic. What a fantastic trip it has been, each innovation building on the last and most of us can't even imagine what may be next. This is change.

In financial circles, the post 1987 share market crash graduated into 17.5% interest rates, the "recession we had to have" and then the bond market crash of 1994. Share and property prices took 7 long years to recover in what today, is mostly a fuzzy blur. A nostalgic "badge of honour" retold by those old enough, to anyone who they may think cares.

The details of those years matter. Many people lost their jobs, savings, businesses and houses. That fuzzy blur was a period of profound change.

We mostly muddled our way through, not really focussed on money. We got one or two investment statements a year dedicating five minutes to each. We were busy living, working, raising families... making ends meet.

Fast forward 30 years and look at how much has changed. **Money means a lot more to people now**. Those who have the most are approaching or already retired. What they have, is all they will ever have and it needs to last. Many cannot resist looking at their portfolios daily or have data feeds on their phones. It is just what people do now, technology not only lets you talk to your family and friends, it delivers a real time Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss **toying with our emotions**, both highs and lows.

Now for the punch line. How would we go in 2022 if we had to live hour by hour and month by month with investment markets churning our stomachs going up and down, but more down than up, as they did in 1987-94? After a extended period of falling interest rates and rising markets, we need to think about the possibility of 1, 2, or 3 years of investment discomfort. Expect persistent inflation, higher interest rates and lower asset values. People will be thrown to the wolves by regulators who have run out of rabbits. Financial casualties may include loved ones. No one wants this change, but we need to be prepared for it, confident a sound and diversified investment portfolio will weather the storm. Things do change.

## Market Round Up

#### **Overseas Shares**

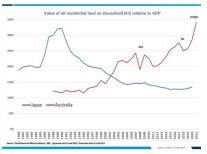
After glorious double digit returns in 2021, the Market Facts table below is a sea of red. The US fell **11%**, Japan **8%**, Germany **18%** and Hong Kong **25%**. Only the UK gained but it still sits **below its 2017 post Brexit level**. For those who like records, the first half of 2022 is worst for the Dow since 1962, the S&P500 since 1970 and the **worst EVER** for the Nasdaq. So far.

#### **Australian Shares**

The All Ords mirrored world markets falling 11%. Index heavyweights banks and retailers performed poorly, their losses outweighing strong gains amongst mining stocks. Strong 2021 earnings delivered the anticipated dividend bonanza. but rising labour, materials and energy costs are likely to severely crimp future earnings reducing the "E" in PE ratios, the most commonly used valuation metric. Share prices are no longer expensive, but they may get a lot cheaper next year. Prices are rarely fair, they are cheap or expensive, overshooting both ways. Goldilocks is a story.

## **Residential Property**

The chart to the right compares the value of residential land held by Japanese/Australian house-holders to GDP from 1980 to 2021. We have become the first country to have land values greater than 300% of GDP, higher than that of Japan at its peak. Should we be worried? Yes &No.



This is an example of how population profiles offer important guidance on investment decisions. A simple comparison between Japan's leveraged 1990 bubble and ours, may leave hearts skipping a beat. Sure, prices appear very stretched and they may correct by 10%- 20% over the next year or two. Beyond that they may stagnate for another year to two, as speculators exit the market. That would be an orderly correction not a collapse, albeit a painful one. Thereafter, a growing population should underpin returns of 3%-5% p.a. with lower debt, more typical of a healthy market.

## **Interest Rates & Cryptocurrencies**

We have spoken enough about interest rates but how could we possibly not mention the 2022 crypto collapse. Bitcoin the alleged new "digital gold" has fallen 55% this year. From the table below, "real gold" (you know, the shiny metal) stands out as one of the few assets not to lose money, as a "store of value" asset should. Last year we spoke of canaries in the coal mine. It turns out there was no chirping, they, like SPACS, Robinhood and dogecoin are dead. Too much liquidity in the system for too long and speculation, blurred the line between price and value. That line is getting back into focus. We genuinely believe there is a place future for digital assets, but no one knows which ones. Only time will tell.

MARKET FACTS	June 2022	June 2021	June 2020	5 Years Ago 2017	7 Years Ago 2015	10 Years Ago 2012	15 Years Ago 2007	20 Years Ago 2002
Australian All Ordinaries	6,746	7,585	6,001	5,764	5,451	4,135	6,310	3,163
Dow Jones (US)	30,775	34,502	25,812	21,349	17,619	12,880	13,409	9,243
FTSE 100 (UK)	7,168	7,037	6,169	7,313	6,521	5,571	6,608	4,656
Nikkei (Japan)	26,393	28,791	22,288	20,033	20,235	9,008	18,138	10,621
Hang Seng (Hong Kong)	21,793	28,905	24,427	25,765	26,250	19,441	21,772	10,598
Dax (Germany)	12,784	15,531	12,311	12,325	10,945	6,416	8,007	4,382
Gold - Spot US\$	\$ 1,804	\$ 1,762	\$ 1,776	\$ 1,242	\$ 1,171	\$ 1,598	\$ 651	\$ 314