

Explanatory Memorandum - Hybrid Unit Trusts.

Hybrid Unit Trusts are unit trusts with the added feature of allowing for the issue of special units. The rights and restrictions of special units are contained within the application and unit certificate.

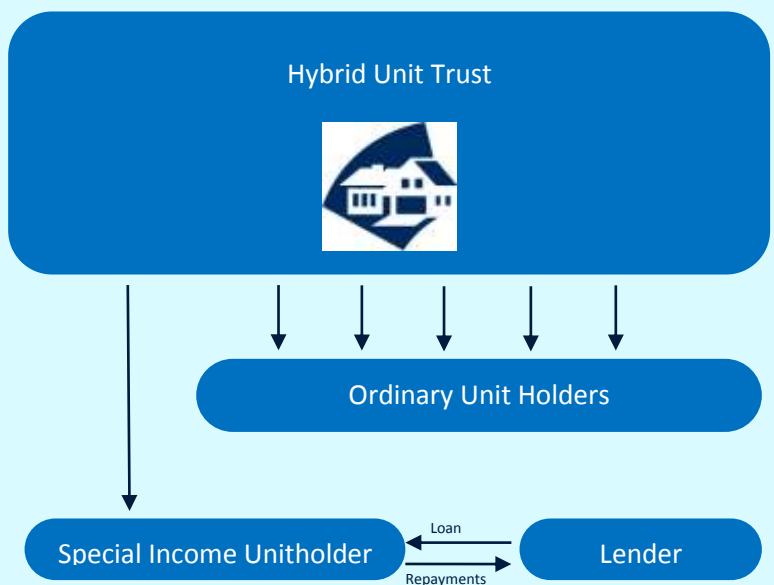
Explanatory Memorandums - Hybrid Unit Trust

The following memorandum is provided as a guide to provide a general overview of the operation of a hybrid unit trust sourced from Macquarie Group Services. It is not intended to be an exhaustive nor complete statement, but should merely be viewed as an introduction to hybrid unit trusts in general (and ours in particular) and further reading is encouraged. Many accounting and legal matters have not been addressed, and the *Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986* (Cth) and various other enactments, including the State and Territory stamp duty and land tax statutes, have implications which have not been exhaustively discussed here. Both Trustees and Beneficiaries should have an understanding of hybrid unit trusts, to enable them to exercise their rights, powers and duties in accordance with the Deed of Trust. The Deed of Trust should be read immediately by those parties, and any queries or concerns raised with their professional advisers.

Important Issues

In order to be entitled to deductions for interest expenses they incur, geared income unitholders must:

- be in the same position they'd be in if they held the underlying asset directly;
- be entitled to both the ordinary income of the trust and its capital gains; and
- have their units redeemed at amounts reflecting the market value of the underlying asset.



Macquarie Group Services

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Deed of Trust

A unit trust is usually established with the payment of an amount, called the Initial Amount, by the Initial Unit Holders to the Trustee to acquire the Initial Units to be held in accordance with the Deed of Trust for the benefit of the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders. The Trustee is to hold all trust property (known as the Trust Fund) and invest such assets for the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders. The Beneficiaries/Unit Holders may remove/replace the Trustee in accordance with the Deed of Trust.

The Deed of Trust provides for a Vesting Day on which the Trust is to terminate. On the Vesting Day, the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders are entitled to the whole of the Trust Fund. Until that day, however, distributions of income or capital of the Trust are made in proportion to the number of units held by the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, with reference to their respective unit certificates and the Deed of Trust.

Initial Unit Holder

A trust *inter vivos* (which means its formed during the life of its creator, as opposed to being formed under the Will of the creator) may be constituted either by a declaration of trust in respect of specified property, or by the settlement of money (the Initial Amount) or other property by a person (the Initial Unit Holder) upon the Trustee upon trust, to deal with it as provided in the Deed of Trust.

A liability to stamp duty usually arises in most jurisdictions when a trust is constituted and, therefore, consideration should be given to the amount of the Initial Amount and any gifts or transfers of property to the Trust – the stamp duty liability will often be a function of the value of the gift or property transferred to the Trust.

Beneficiary/Unit Holder

A person becomes a Beneficiary/Unit Holder of the Trust by virtue of their specific identification as such and their execution of all of the relevant documentation, eg. Application for Units.

Although its not a requirement, a Beneficiary/Unit Holder may also be the “test individual” for the purposes of Family Trust Elections.

A Beneficiary/Unit Holder does not have any proprietary interest in the Trust Fund (*Gartside v IRC* (1968) AC 553) and has no interest in the Trust Fund pending the completion of administration. Instead, the Beneficiary/Unit Holder's interest is a *chose in action* which entitles them to a right of due administration, ie. to call upon the Trustee to deal appropriately with the income and or capital of the Trust. In other words, the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders have the right to secure proper administration of the Trust, including the proper management and exercise of the Trustee's power and discretions.

Beneficiaries/Unit Holders are vested with the power to give the Trustee consent to act in various ways, eg. to redeem units, to create new or additional units, to determine an earlier Vesting Date and to vary the Deed of Trust. The occupancy of this role is not optional and can never be vacant (otherwise the Trust cannot exist), with the result that the Trustee cannot act without constriction in the areas mentioned. The Family Court is likely to find that a Beneficiary/Unit Holder has control of the Trust for property settlement purposes.

The Beneficiary/Unit Holder also has the power, exercisable by written or oral resolution, at any time and from time to time to remove any Trustee, and may also appoint any new or additional Trustee.

Trustee

A trustee of an *inter vivos* express trust (which usually means that evidence for the creation of the trust exists in written or oral form) may be appointed:

- (1) by the settlor;
- (2) pursuant to an express power contained in the trust deed;
- (3) by the courts in certain instances; and
- (4) under the provisions of the various

Trustee Acts of the States and Territories.

The Trustee of an MGS Hybrid Unit Trust holds the legal title to the Trust Fund, and gains its powers from the Deed of Trust, legislation and from the common law.

The Trustee may be one or more individuals or a company (typically a \$2.00 corporate Trustee wherein the spouses or one of the spouses of a particular family unit are directors and shareholders).

Trustees owe a fiduciary duty to the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders of the Trust, and also have various other duties, including the duty to: preserve the Trust Fund; keep and to render to the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders full and candid accounts; act personally; acquaint and be familiar with the Deed of Trust; exercise reasonable care; act impartially between the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, subject to the terms of the Deed of Trust and their Certificates of Units; act gratuitously and not to profit from the Trust; and the duty not to deal with the Trust Fund for their own benefit or otherwise to profit by the Trust.

While remedies are available for breach of duty, Beneficiaries/Unit Holders generally do not have the power to compel the Trustee to exercise a discretion. The duties of a Trustee are many, and they may be held personally liable for debts incurred in their capacity as a Trustee. Nevertheless, the Trustee has the right of indemnity out of Trust assets for such liability, although it should be understood that it may sometimes occur that Trust assets are less than those liabilities.

A person or company may disclaim the Trust, if they do not wish to act as Trustee. However, to be effective, they must disclaim it in writing to the Initial Unit Holder as soon as possible. A trusteeship may only be disclaimed before acceptance, and a Trustee may only retire after acceptance if:

- (1) they're authorised by the trust deed to do so;
- (2) a new Trustee is appointed in their stead;
- (3) if the conditions prescribed by a provision in a *Trustee Act* of a State or Territory are satisfied; or
- (4) if its permitted by a court.

If the Trust is a trading trust, then its advisable that the Trustee be a company rather than individuals. In all cases, however, resolutions should be signed and maintained when the Trustee makes a decision or takes an action.

The Trustee is to maintain proper accounting records (including books of accounts), which show all receipts, payments and distributions of income. A Profit and Loss Statement and a Balance Sheet should be prepared, and all relevant returns and statements lodged with the various revenue authorities where any relevant income is derived, assets held or activities are engaged in by the Trust.

Distributions of Income

Distributions from a Trust may take many forms, and have different implications for a Trustee and a Beneficiary/Unit Holder. Generally, the entirety of the net Trust income earned in each financial year is distributed amongst the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders in proportion to the number of units held by each of them and the Trustee has no power to accumulate, ie. withhold from distribution, any of the net Trust income.

If the whole of the net Trust income is distributed to adult Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, the amount received by each of them is taxable in their hands as an addition to their total assessable income.

Tax on income held on trust for, or applied for the

benefit of, Beneficiaries/Unit Holders under the age of 18 (or any other Beneficiary/Unit Holder under a legal disability) is effectively paid by the Trustee on behalf of the Beneficiary/Unit Holder. Special provisions apply where such a Beneficiary/Unit Holder has income from other sources, and higher rates of tax apply to income held, applied or distributed to minors - in general, \$416 in total may be safely distributed to a child Beneficiary/Unit Holder without attracting the higher rates of tax.

When distributing income to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, it is possible to separately characterise the amounts concerned. For example, where the Trust income includes, say, the receipt of franked dividends, interest income and taxable capital gains, then the distribution received by the Beneficiary/Unit Holder can be divided into these three portions. This will be particularly important where, for example, franking credits are to be passed onto Beneficiaries/Unit Holders.

Distribution of Capital Gains

As a result of the existence of taxation on capital gains, careful consideration will need to be given to the consequences for the Trust of various types of transactions which may give rise to a taxable capital gain.

In particular, if the Trustee sells a trust asset to an arm's-length person and realises a gain on the disposal, the gain will be included in the assessable income of the Trust to be distributed in the same way as any other income. Capital losses may be subtracted from the gain (but not from any other type of income) before a net amount is included as assessable income of the Trust.

It is sometimes the case that the "accounting" income of a Trust is not equal to its net income according to tax law – this often arises due to the difference in the treatment of consideration received on the disposal of CGT assets. The now judicially accepted "proportionate theory" (acknowledged by the Commissioner of Taxation in Practice Statement PS LA

2005/1 (GA)) essentially provides that where there are differences between accounting and tax law income for a Trust arising from the disposal of its CGT assets, the distribution (and assessability) of its realised capital gains to the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders will be in the same proportion as the distribution of its ordinary income.

Other situations may give rise to deemed capital gains and, therefore, require careful consideration. For example, if Trust assets are appointed or distributed to any particular Beneficiary/Unit Holder, the Trustee is regarded as having sold the asset to that Beneficiary/Unit Holder at its then market value and a capital gain may arise (depending on the cost-base of the asset).

For CGT purposes, the units in a Hybrid Unit Trust will be treated as an "asset". Accordingly, the disposal of units by a Beneficiary/Unit Holder could give rise to a capital gains tax liability in the hands of the Beneficiary/Unit Holder. Further, the capital gains tax legislation provides for the deemed disposal of units, where distributions of tax-free amounts are made on units, eg. CGT discounts, and those tax-free amounts that exceed the cost-base of the units.

For this reason, it is very important that advice is sought prior to entering into major investment transactions using a Hybrid Unit Trust. As a general guide, any borrowings that need to be undertaken should be entered into by the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, who would then invest those funds (together with their own capital) on unit capital subscriptions. This could shelter the Beneficiary/Unit Holder from unnecessary tax exposure in future years.

Other distribution matters & distributions to minors

Very importantly, a decision in relation to the income of the Trust should be made before 30 June in each and every year by the Trustee, and such decision recorded in a written resolution of the Trustee on or before that date (see Income Tax Ruling IT 347). The resolution may be prepared and signed after 30 June, provided that it records what actually took place on or before 30 June. Although the long-standing practice of the Commissioner of Taxation is to allow two months for such a decision to be made (ie. up until 31 August in each year), that stance

is not law and may be ignored by the Australian Taxation Office (or any other revenue authority) without it having to provide any justification.

A problem obviously arises, then, in that until accounts for the Trust for a financial year have been prepared, it may well be impossible to estimate with accuracy the amount of the net income of the Trust. This difficulty can be overcome by the Trustee resolving on or before 30 June to distribute the income in accordance with the proportional rights of the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders - for example:

Beneficiary/ Unit Holder	Proportion %
X	50
Y	30
Z	<u>20</u>
	<u>100</u>

After the exact amount of the net Trust income is known, and the proportion to which each Beneficiary/Unit Holder is entitled has been calculated, those specific amounts should be recorded in further Trustee resolutions.

Notably, a distribution to a Beneficiary/Unit Holder need not entail a physical payment to them. If the Trustee wishes to retain the money which it has distributed to a particular adult Beneficiary/Unit Holder, then it may, with the consent of the relevant Beneficiary/Unit Holder, establish a loan account in the books of the Trust in their name, and then credit the amount of the distribution to that loan account. The Trustee can then deal with the amount of the loan in accordance with the powers given to it by the Deed of Trust, but the Beneficiary/Unit Holder can call for payment of the amount credited to their account at any time in the absence of any arrangement to the contrary. It should be remembered, however, that the amount credited to the Beneficiary/Unit Holder's loan account is assessable income to them and will also constitute "property" for the purposes of the *Bankruptcy Act 1966* (Cth).

The situation could arise where an child Beneficiary approaching the age of majority is entitled to receive a substantial amount from the Trustee, the payment of which would be a matter of some difficulty. If this situation arises, its possible to avert the necessity for the Trustee to actually make a payment of the amount due, and discussions with professional advisers at the appropriate time are recommended.

Distribution of Corpus

On the winding-up of the Trust on the Vesting Day, or at any time before, the Trustee may exercise its discretion as to the manner in which the corpus (sometimes referred to as the "capital") of the Trust Fund will be distributed to the various Beneficiaries in accordance with the Deed of Trust and the specific rights of Beneficiaries/Unit Holders as enumerated in their Certificates of Units. Corpus usually includes amounts settled on the Trust, or amounts that do not form part of its net income, eg. depreciation.

From the Vesting Day, any assets belonging to the Trust or constituting the Trust Fund are held by the Trustee until payment or transfer specifically for the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders in their proportional entitlements.

The Trustee need not realise the assets of the Trust on the Vesting Day and distribute monies to the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders – indeed, the Trustee may transfer those assets to the Beneficiaries/Unit Holders *in specie*, ie. in kind.

Entering into Contracts

It is the Trustee who enters into contracts on behalf of the Trust and, although the Trustee is not required to state its capacity, its advisable to do so and avoid confusion as to the beneficial ownership of assets and rights. If asked whether a person or entity is acting in the capacity of Trustee, it would be advised that responses be both factual and in good faith.

Resolutions

When undertaking any transactions, including the

acquisition of assets or making distributions from the Trust, the Trustee should evince its intention to do so by way of resolution. Resolutions should be filed in the Trust binder, and maintained as a record of the decisions and agreements affecting the Trust Fund and/or its net income. As noted above, a resolution by the Trustee to distribute the net Trust income should be made on or before 30 June each year.

Income Streaming

Trust income retains its character when it is distributed to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders. Therefore, if a Trust derives interest income, trading income and capital gains, each Beneficiary/Unit Holder who receives a distribution of net Trust income will receive a proportion of each of those types of income, and the tax paid by them must be calculated accordingly.

Trust distributions can be made more tax-effective by employing the process known as streaming. Streaming is the distribution of different types of income and capital gains to particular Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, in order that the overall tax payable by all Beneficiaries/Unit Holders and the Trustee is minimised.

Income streaming equally applies to Hybrid Discretionary, Discretionary, Hybrid Unit and Unit Trusts, and all types of trust income can be streamed. It's simply a matter of analysing the Beneficiaries'/Unit Holders' tax positions, and then streaming the various types of income to different Beneficiaries/Unit Holders, in accordance with their proportional entitlements as enumerated in their Certificates of Units, to minimise the overall tax payable.

Income Streaming Possibilities

Capital gains to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders who can apply capital losses against them.

Capital gains to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders on low marginal tax rates. Capital gains from collectibles to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders who can apply capital losses from collectibles against them.

Interest income, royalties and unfranked dividends

to non-resident Beneficiaries/Unit Holders to make use of the lower withholding tax rates.

Trading income, dividends, etc. to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders on low marginal rates of tax or who have carry-forward income losses.

Foreign source income to non-resident Beneficiaries/Unit Holders so that no tax is payable.

Refinancing

As with all other types of Trusts, the "refinancing principle" from *FC of T v. Roberts & Smith* 92 ATC 4380, would allow the Trustee of a Hybrid Unit Trust a deduction for interest expenses incurred on funds borrowed and used to reduce or extinguish a Beneficiary/Unit Holder's interest in the corpus, or which is used to discharge a liability to pay a Beneficiary/Unit Holder a share of the income of the Trust.

Family Law Act and Trusts

It is not proposed to discuss in any detail the impact which certain provisions of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) may have on trusts. The following is intended only as an alert to the possibility of interference by the Family Court in plans or arrangements which may be contemplated by a person whose marital situation is not secure. In any such case, it would be prudent to seek legal advice from someone well-versed in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) before executing any trust, particularly one which is intended to preclude or limit claims which may be made by a (former) spouse or partner. Nevertheless, brief mention should be made of several of the powers which the Family Court has and which, in certain circumstances, may affect provisions contained in a trust, and the exercise of any powers conferred by the Deed of Trust upon the Trustee.

Problems would usually only arise where there is a marital or relationship break-up. When this occurs, the Family Court has wide powers in relation to the property of the parties to the marriage or relationship.

The pitfall, into which the unwary may fall, is to believe that if income-producing assets are transferred to a Hybrid Unit Trust, the exercise of the Trustee's powers is immune from interference by the Family Court.

For example, where there is a Trust the ultimate Beneficiaries/Unit Holders of which are the children of the Initial Unit Holder, the Court's considerable powers in regard to the maintenance of those children will generally include the ability to appoint or remove Trustees (paragraph 80(1)(e) of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth)). Thus, for example, the Court could remove the existing Trustee and appoint the divorced spouse or former partner to that role. Again, if a person who fears that their marriage or relationship is about to break-up transfers assets to a Hybrid Unit Trust, in the hope that it will prevent their spouse or partner from making claims against them, this may prove to be false hope. Under subsections 90AF(1) and 90AF(2) of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), the Family Court has power to make any order or to grant any injunction that directs a third-party to do a thing in relation to the property of a party to a marriage, or which alters the rights, liabilities or property interests of a third-party in relation to a marriage.

As a result, even if a person causes assets and/or income to be held by a Hybrid Unit Trust simply for tax-planning reasons, and with no thought of avoiding any claim by their spouse or partner, the provisions of the Trust may not be inviolate. This may be so, even if the assets were never the property of that person or the subject of any disposition made by that person. In other words, where the Trust Fund can be applied for the benefit of a couple and their children, it appears that the Family Court would be able to treat it as family property and would have wide powers in relation thereto.

Nevertheless, the Court will not find that a party has control of a Trust merely by virtue of being a Beneficiary/Unit Holder *per se*. Although a Beneficiary/Unit Holder has a right to call upon the Trustee to deal with the Trust Fund in a manner appropriate to the due administration of the Trust and for payment to them of their proportional entitlements to the net income of the Trust, which is an equitable *chose in action* which is itself "property" in the strict sense, the Beneficiary/Unit Holder has no interest,

vested or contingent, in the Trust Fund itself, nor in any particular asset of the Trust. Thus, unless the Trust was the Beneficiary's alter ego or "puppet" the only property of the Beneficiary is their equitable *chose in action* (*Shaw and Shaw* (1989) FLC ¶192-030 at p 77,416).

Further, as stated above, as the Beneficiary/Unit Holder has effective control over the Trust, the Trust Fund is accountable in *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) property settlement matters.

Minors

Careful consideration must be given when distributing either income or capital to minors (who, for the purposes of the Income Tax laws are natural persons under 18 years of age). This is because of the penal rates of tax that apply to such distributions, which are as follows.

Where the eligible taxable income of a resident minor is less than a threshold (\$417 for the 2009/2010 financial year) the special (higher) rates do not apply; instead the general rates applicable to resident adults apply to the whole of the taxable income. Resident minors may also be eligible for the rebate for low income-earners, which effectively increases this threshold, if the minor has no other income.

Where the eligible taxable income of a resident minor is within a certain band (ie. in excess of \$416 and less than \$1308 for the 2009/2010 financial year), then the tax on the eligible taxable income is the greater of:

(1) 66% of the excess over the lower threshold; and

(2) the difference between tax on the whole of the taxable income and the tax on the taxable income other than the eligible taxable income.

Where the eligible taxable income exceeds the upper threshold (\$1307 for the 2009/2010 financial year), tax is payable on the whole of the eligible taxable income at the

highest marginal rate.

However, this is not the case where the Trust is a Capital Vested (or Child Maintenance) Trust, in which case income distributed to minors is taxed at non-penal adult rates. Capital Vested Trusts are created at the death of a person or upon a marriage or relationship break-up, whereby the assets of the Trust must vest in the Capital Vested Beneficiaries. Before any distributions are made to any minors, the Trustee should consult their accountant or financial adviser.

Stamp Duty and Land tax

The issue of units in a Hybrid Unit Trust will not normally constitute a dutiable transaction for the purposes of any of the relevant State/Territory statutes dealing with stamp duty. On the other hand, a redemption or transfer of such units may attract duty, sometimes depending upon the value of the transaction and the nature of the underlying assets of the trust.

Most State/Territory statutes dealing with the imposition of land tax provide for special non-concessional rates of such an impost for land held in trusts that are not “fixed.” Although the definitions of what constitutes a “fixed” trust for these purposes varies between the jurisdictions, it usually requires that all of the interests to the income and capital of the relevant trust are vested and indefeasible, which can be said of a Hybrid Unit Trust.

Special features of Hybrid Unit Trusts

As they have no statutory or judicial definition, it can be said that Hybrid Unit Trusts have always been in existence, in one form or another – only the precise details of their drafting will vary between the multitude of providers. An MGS Hybrid Unit Trust has all the features of a Unit Trust, as described above, but additionally vests the Trustee with the power to issue units of various descriptions carrying various entitlements.

The units may be known as Special Units, Special Income Units, Special Capital Units or such other distinctive name as the Trustee determines. The rights as to income and/or capital of the Trust Fund attaching to these units is determined by the Trustee in its absolute discretion, and are described in the Certificate of Units. For example, a Special Unit may entitle the unitholder to a present and absolute entitlement to the Special Income of the Trust Fund, in the proportion of the number of Special Units they hold to the total number of such units on issue at that time. For these purposes, the Special Income of the Trust Fund may mean that portion of the income of the Trust Fund as the Trustee determines is reasonably attributable to the investment by the Trustee of the moneys received by it from the issue of Special Units, eg. in a Trust which has assets of \$500 000 and 250 000 Special Units on issue which had been issued at \$1 each, those units would be entitled to 50% of the income of the Trust Fund.

There do not have to be any units of any description on issue at the time of the creation of a Hybrid Unit Trust (just the Initial Units). Where they are issued, the issue value of units may be any denomination, but \$1.00 each is recommended for the purposes of simplicity. Importantly, however, the total number of units issued multiplied by the value of each such unit should reflect the market value of the new Beneficiary/Unit Holder’s proportional interest in the underlying assets of the Trust (which includes the monies that will be added to the Trust Fund pursuant to the issue of the units themselves) – to do otherwise risks the Commissioner substituting such a market value for the acquisition of those units.

Further, Special Units that have been redeemed by the Trustee may entitle their former holders to receive from the Trustee an amount calculated in various possible ways, including the market value of the units, the market value of the units plus an increment (eg. CPI or some other percentage), or to the amount paid to acquire the units. Although all of these redemption formulae are possible from a trust

law perspective, adopting anything other than the market value of the units as the redemption amount will seriously jeopardise the deductibility of interest expenses incurred on any funds that may have been borrowed by the Beneficiary/Unit Holder to acquire such units. It is notable that the deductibility of the interest expense will still be available to the former Beneficiary/Unit Holder, irrespective of the application of the monies received upon the redemption of their units. Apart from their entitlement under a redemption, and depending upon the rights as described in their Certificate of Units, the holders of Special Units may not necessarily have an entitlement to any part of the corpus (or capital) of the Trust Fund.

In essence, this means that an MGS Hybrid Unit Trust can operate as “routine” Unit Trust, vesting Beneficiaries/Unit Holders with fixed entitlements to only the income, only the capital or to both the income and capital of the Trust. As a consequence, Hybrid Unit Trusts with these or other similar features are moderately flexible and useful vehicles that are capable of serving multiple purposes, which include estate-planning, asset-protection and tax-efficiency.

The Commissioner’s Views

As the number of providers of Hybrid Unit Trusts in Australia grows, they’re all seeking to differentiate themselves by making increasingly contentious claims, eg. no stamp duty or CGT liabilities on the transfer or redemption of units, the availability of land tax concessions, and that Deeds of Trust will never be effected by the introduction of any adverse legislation! Certain providers are also clearly asserting that capital gains realised on the disposal of CGT assets by the trustee can be streamed away from Beneficiaries/Unit Holders – again, although that outcome is, indeed, possible from a trust law perspective, it seriously jeopardises the deductibility of interest expenses incurred on any funds that may have been borrowed by the Beneficiary/Unit Holder to acquire such units.

Not surprisingly, the Commissioner noticed the

growing proliferation of Hybrid Unit Trusts and embarked upon an intelligence-gathering exercise, which culminated in the release of Taxpayer Alert TA 2008/3 in 2008, to voice a number of concerns he has in relation to certain features of particular arrangements. The particular features of some Hybrid Unit Trusts which the Commissioner appears to have the most difficulty with include:

- an ability to defeat a Beneficiary/Unit Holder’s entitlement to receive distributions of fixed proportions of trust income and capital gains;
- a Beneficiary/Unit Holder not being entitled to receive distributions of trust capital gains at all;
- interests or entitlements being conferred upon associates of a Beneficiary/Unit Holder for less-than-market-value consideration;
- a Beneficiary/Unit Holder’s entitlement to receive distributions of the trust’s ordinary income being less than what it should be, meaning that they’ve borrowed to fund income to which other beneficiaries are entitled;
- a Beneficiary/Unit Holder only being entitled to receive distributions of the trust capital gains;
- a Beneficiary Unit Holder’s interest in the trust ending before the cost of their investment has been recouped;
- a Beneficiary/Unit Holder redeeming their units at their purchase price or less than market-value; and

- units being purchased at an amount less than their market-value.

Interestingly, the Commissioner does not mention the “proportionate theory” (as discussed above) in his Alert. This is considered an important omission, as the theory would apply to ensure that distributions to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders entitled to any of the income of a Hybrid Unit Trust will also receive a distribution of an appropriate proportion of the Trust’s realised capital gains.

Nevertheless, the Commissioner’s views in Taxpayer Alert 2008/3 are particularly relevant to Beneficiaries/Unit Holders who have undertaken a borrowing to acquire their units, and who are seeking an income tax deduction for the interest expenses incurred on that borrowing. Notably, the Commissioner’s received numerous applications for Private Binding Rulings on the issue of the deductibility of interest on funds borrowed to acquire units, and has subsequently issued Interpretative Decisions, which are overwhelmingly adverse to the Beneficiary/Unit Holder. In fairness to the Commissioner, it’s difficult to criticise those adverse decisions, because they all seem to be with respect to poorly-drafted and even abusive Deeds of Trust. Importantly, therefore, in order to be entitled to deductions for interest expenses they incur, geared Beneficiaries/Unit Holders must:

- essentially be in the same position they’d be in if they held the underlying asset of the Trust directly;
- be entitled to both the ordinary income of the Trust and its realised capital gains; and
- have their units redeemed at amounts reflecting the market value of the underlying asset of the Trust.

The provisions of MGS Hybrid Unit Trusts do not contain any of the features that the Commissioner has described as offensive.

In particular (and as noted above), a holder of Special Units is typically entitled to that proportion of the net income of the Trust (ordinary and statutory income, including realised capital gains) which is reasonably attributable to their investment. This right cannot be defeated, including by way of accumulation. Importantly, units should always be acquired and redeemed at amounts that reflect the market value of the underlying asset of the Trust - if they aren’t, the CGT “market-value substitution rules” will apply in calculating any tax liability.

The Commissioner has also raised a concern regarding distributions from Hybrid Unit Trusts to complying superannuation funds, in Taxpayer Alert TA 2008/4, which is in similar form to Taxpayer Alert 2008/3.

If any queries exist or a further explanation is required following reading the above together with the Deed of Trust, please contact your professional adviser.

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