# Current Market View

**Investment Markets**

**Global Markets**

Finally, some sanity over May 2025 for global markets as the President Trump **fixed trade tariffs for 90 days**. Investors are reading the tariff situation better with signs that suggest that they may have seen the worst of the volatility associated with the introduction of the US trade tariffs. The market appreciated the break in constant tariff related announcements and resumed the **cautious optimism** that we anticipate will supported by the economic data to follow in the upcoming months. Remember, unilateral tariff rates are expected to resume on the **9th of July 2025**.

The Global Markets finished the month strongly believing the worst was behind us however, a new threat to northern hemisphere **political uncertainty** has evolved with the latest flare up in the Middle East. Isreal has made pre-emptive strikes against Iran believing that the threat of nuclear weapons was eminent. This is just not what the world needs currently. Let’s hope common sense prevails and a ceasefire can be quickly negotiated.

US President Donald Trump has been distracted with the domestic situation with illegal immigrants. While the people support the idea of a clean-up, the manner of executing the policy has created internal conflict with the military now involved. Again, let’s hope this does not escalate as we do not need any more violence in our society.

**Share Markets**

The US share markets led the rebound in shares as short positions were covered and cash re-invested opportunistically. The response was sharp and again the technology sector was the stand-out performer.

The 9th of April 2025 announcement of a 90 day pause in US tariffs with **a flat rate instead of 10%** (except China) who have recently negotiated terms of 30% for most goods has provided some certainty to the market and a chance to regroup.

For stock prices, the first-quarter S&P 500 earnings were up 13.4% compared to market expectations of 7.2%, according to FactSet. They also stated that of the 90% of S&P 500 companies that have reported, **78% have beaten consensus earnings expectations**, above the 77% one-year and five-year averages of 77%. The Australian company reporting season was subdued with markets impacted by the volatility.

While geopolitical tensions simmered and the US tariff policy offered a temporary reprieve, economic observers kept a close eye on the performance of other global markets. Europe faced its own set of challenges, with industrial output showing signs of slowing and concerns over energy dependency arising due to fluctuations in supply from key providers. Meanwhile, Asian markets exhibited resilience, continuing to capitalise on regional trade agreements that mitigate some of the uncertainty surrounding US tariffs.

In the commodities sector, oil prices surged in response to instability in the Middle East, amplifying inflationary fears across the globe. Gold, as expected, became a haven for investors looking to hedge against volatility, with prices climbing marginally higher during the month. Agricultural commodities also saw moderate movement, influenced by seasonal factors and trade dynamics with China.

Currency markets remained unpredictable. The US dollar gained ground against several major currencies, supported by the Federal Reserve’s current monetary policy stance. However, emerging market currencies showed vulnerability as rising bond yields and geopolitical risks weighed heavily on investor sentiment.

**Bond Markets**

Bond markets are still not convinced by the tariff reprieve believing that the outcome will eventually lead to further inflation. The long end of the interest rate curve is sensitive and has retreated again (yields up) reflecting the nervous state of US interest rate expectations.

Interest rate markets in the US have again had a torrid month over May 2025 with the 10year Government bonds falling to 4.167% late April and then rebounding to hit 4.60% mid-May 2025. US10year ended May at **4.397%**.

The **decoupled relationship** with shares and bonds has continued. Usually when bonds sell-off (yields rise) then shares fall as valuations factor in the lower intrinsic value for the company based on the changed discount rate. Recently the **bonds have jumped sharply lower in price (higher in yield) yet shares also rallied.** This is caused by the overshoot in prices during the tariff driven market volatility. We expect both markets to drift slowly back to basics soon.

Most investors are still of the opinion that interest rates and inflation are heading lower over the medium to long term, however these short-term adjustments driven by market data as the US Federal Reserve (the Fed) ponders the next move after inflation printed at 2.4% for May 2025.

The Fed left the target cash rate at **4.25%-4.50%** at its meeting held on the 6th/7th May 2025. The next meeting held on the **17th/18th** **June 2025**. The **US Fed is expected to leave the** **target cash range unchanged**. Regarding treasury securities and agency debt holdings:

*“In assessing the appropriate stance of monetary policy, the Committee will continue to monitor the implications of incoming information for the economic outlook. The Committee would be prepared to adjust the stance of monetary policy as appropriate if risks emerge that could impede the attainment of the Committee’s goals. The Committee’s assessments will take (more) -2- into account a wide range of information, including readings on labor market conditions, inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and financial and international developments.”. Source: The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Chair, Jerome Powell, 7th May 2025.*

Inflation prints have revealed the **US Inflation YOY rose to 2.4%** in May 2025 from 2.3% in April 2025. US Retail Sales MOM increased by (+0.1**%)** in April 2025 up from upwardly revised (+1.7%) in March 2025.

**Domestic Markets**

For Australia, the latest inflation prints for (year-on-year) first quarter of 2025 **was 2.4%** which was unchanged from the fourth quarter of 2024. The market awaits the next RBA board meeting, which is due on the **7th/8th July 2025**. Pressure will be on for another interest rate move; however, the next round of economic data will determine what direction the RBA may take.

Despite more supply coming onto the housing market over April and May 2025, the domestic house prices held their ground however, the investment market volatility has led to recession talk and potentially an interest rate cut has buoyed house prices.

The first half of 2025 has proven to be challenging; however, **the broader economy is weathering the storm well** given the mixed support from moderating immigration levels and the stable level of employment with unemployment unchanged at 4.1% in April 2025.

The RBA decided to leave the **target cash rate unchanged at 3.85%** following the 20th of May 2025 board meeting noting that the outlook remains uncertain.

*“The Board judged that the risks to inflation had become more balanced but was mindful of the* ***considerable uncertainty*** *about the outlook. International developments are expected to weigh on the economy and, with inflation expected to remain around target, the Board judged that it was appropriate to ease monetary policy at this meeting. The Board nevertheless remains* ***cautious about the outlook****. The Board considered the severe downside scenario presented in this Statement and noted that monetary policy is well placed to respond decisively to international developments if they were to have material implications for activity and inflation in Australia. The Board will be* ***attentive to the data*** *and the evolving assessment of risks and is focused on its mandate to deliver price stability and full employment “. Michelle Bullock, Governor, RBA Monetary Policy Board meeting, 20th May 2025.*

The next RBA Monetary Policy announcement is expected on the 7th/8th July 2025.

From a risk return perspective, markets are mixed:



 Source data: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

From the chart above, you can gain an understanding of why investors over the past year have tilted their exposures towards shares over property given the higher risk score resulting in higher returns in most cases.

*The risk measure is simply the one-year annualised standard deviation of the monthly total return time series for each category. The total return is the share or bond price movement monthly including any cash dividends and coupons payable.*

The issues at the forefront of investors thoughts included:

* **Global Conflict** – The latest flare up in the Middle East with Israel and Iran.
* **Trade Tariffs** - US President Trump changes to **trade tariffs expiry 9th July 2025.**
* **Central banks** – the pace of follow-on **interest rate easing** given the tariff issue. **Hold** looks like being with us until the data says otherwise.
* **Inflation** – still stabilising but dependant on the tariff situation in the coming months.
* **Growth** – China and US tariffs. The POC has responded to the announcement on US tariffs (+30%) by placing reciprocal tariffs of 10% on US imports. We will wait and see how the negotiations pan out in the coming months.
* **Company Profits** – forward guidance for earnings is likely to be impacted by US tariffs however, **for Australia, this is much better than other countries.**
* **Commodities** – softening of demand for energy and EV related materials (lithium) as global demand slows. The trade conflict and continued problems in the Middle East is likely to stem consumer activity short term.
* **Downside Risks** - With economic indicators flagging downside risks; however, **investors are encouraged to maintain their cautious optimism**, navigate this period of uncertainty, and expect better conditions to prevail in the rest of 2025.

In the face of the recent volatility, short-term investors had taken risk off the table in the mostly growth companies however, after the **US** **fixed tariffs for 90 days**, the share markets have responded with **sharp rallies higher** which has eased market nervousness. Medium and longer term they have maintained their risk appetite at **“cautiously optimistic”** as they await the next round of inflation data and Central Bank activity. Opportunistic buying is recommended despite the possibility of an economic slowdown in the future, with the impact expected to be limited. We are looking for a **soft landing** for Australia.

Ukraine, Russia, Gaza, Iran and Israel conflict is still a major concern for investors however, we are a long way from the conflict zone and the global economic data is improving slowly but the main influence on our domestic market remains from offshore, especially China.

China continues to make fiscal and monetary policy announcements to support economic growth, **targeting 5% over the next year.** In response to a decrease in US tariffs to 30%, China has introduced a 10% tariff on US imported goods.

**The following total returns across the asset classes are as of 31st May 2025:**



Source data: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

The developed markets asset classes had a strong month in terms of performance. The AUD/USD finished higher at **0.6436 (+0.31%)** for the month which cost returns for unhedged holdings.

**Asset Class Performance**



Data Source: Lonsec as of 31st May2025 & Fox Asset Management

**Investment Climate**

The underlying uncertainty of investment markets in the short term has given way to opportunistic buying reflecting the easing of volatility post the US tariffs announcements. **Risk-off trades** initially dominated activity, however, post the tariff freeze, **risk-on trades** have dominated. This downside risk remains a real threat given that all countries that trade (exporters) with the US are impacted by the tariffs. For Australia, the **impact is contained** to the **steel and aluminium (+25%) and everything else 10%** of exports to the US. At this stage, Australia has not retaliated with any US tariffs however, the AUKUS submarine agreement is now under review which may impact our defence needs.

Medium-term investors are encouraged by the anticipated gradual easing of interest rates; however, the unsettled nature of the share and bond markets clouds the short-term direction. The soft-landing expectations and **economic recovery are still supported by the economic data**, despite the recent volatility.

The risk is that the conflict in the middle east may escalate and involve neighbours which could then inflame the situation. While this situation continues and further sanctions are introduced, investors will be cautious around exposure to energy (oil, and gas), however any fall in interest rates will spur buying in asset classes that have been oversold in recent months (property) however, the volatility of prices remain.

US consumption is holding up well with **retail sales YOY rising by (+5.2%)** in April 2025 which will impact company profit expectations in the short-term and worry the Fed from an inflation perspective.

The **medium-term view remains positive** for returns despite the US Fed Chair, Jerome Powels downplaying further easing of interest rates in the US for the rest of 2025.

**Longer term investors are optimistic** for a recovery period ahead. Global Central Banks continue to indicate a resolve to get inflation under control however, the economic data is showing signs of a stabilising despite inflation being elevated and every indication is for future easing in monetary policy to be possible over 2025. Remember **markets are forward looking** so the support now is reflecting the expectations for conditions in February 2026.

**The following commentary is based on month-end closing prices as of 31st May 2025:**

Global share markets over May were strong with returns recovering despite the ongoing tariff situation and changing bouts of volatility after every announcement. The AUD/USD strengthened from 0.6416 to 0.6436 (+0.31%). The AUD/USD has since surged higher in recent trading at 0.6528 (+1.43%) as of 17th June 2025.

The US Fed is expected to leave the monetary policy unchanged with the target range for federal funds at **4.25%-4.50%** when it met on the 17/18th June 2025. Investors are gaining more confidence that the economy is headed for a soft landing despite the intermittent bouts of volatility.

The underlying short-term theme is **cautiously optimistic** for shares. The sharp retracement moves in the markets in May 2025 continues to support share prices.

**Summary of global share returns in AUD terms:**

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Data Source: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

The situation in Russia/Ukraine conflict remains unchanged however the latest conflict between Israel, Gaza (Hamas) and now Lebanon and Iran is showing no signs of abating despite attempted peace talks.

Unfortunately, a resolution to the regional conflict may be a way off however, the underlying economies elsewhere are emerging with a growth orientated momentum after such an extended period of uncertainty.

**Investor Focus**

**For Australia**, investors focussed on the following issues:

* **Cost of living expenses** and the impact on **consumer spending**.
* **Commodity prices** (post China policy changes) **and the impact on company profits.**
* The level of **interest rates** and the delicate position of the RBA given the global volatility in markets.
* **US tariffs** and the impact on Australia’s exports.
* **Inflation** (Y-O-Y) was steady at **2.4%** unchanged in the first quarter of 2025.
* **Government spending** and the rising debt level.
* **China growth prospects** – The Peoples Bank of China cut the seven-day reverse repurchase rates by 10 basis points to 1.4% from 1.5%, the People’s Bank of China Governor Pan Gongsheng said at a press briefing on the 6th of May 2025.

The central bank will also lower the reserve requirement ratio, which determines the amount of cash banks must hold in reserves, by 50 basis points, unleashing additional liquidity of 1 trillion yuan (US$138.5 billion) to the market, effective 15th May 2025.

## Asset Class Returns

Returns across the various asset classes ended mixed over the month: 

Source data: Lonsec as 31st May 2025

## Global Share Returns

For share markets, the focus remains on **US tariffs**, **inflation, employment,** and **interest rates.** Unhedged global shares had returns were affected by a strengthening AUD/USD (0.6436 from 0.6416) which had a **negative impact of (-0.31%) in AUD returns** over the month for unhedged investors.

Most investors are content to **stay invested and opportunistically add to their positions** which has proven the correct strategy over the recent medium-term trend.



Source data: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

In AUD terms, the global share markets posted one month return of (+5.41%). The US posted returns of (+5.68%), Asia ex Japan (+4.52%), Japan (+3.46%), the UK (+3.83%), Europe (+4.17%) and the Emerging Markets (+3.71%).

**Australian Shares**

Australian shares posted strong returns reflecting the global markets trend post the tariff impact. Shares finished (+4.20%) for the month and (+4.31%) over the last three months.

Commodity markets ended mixed with Iron Ore closing at US$99.12 per tonne at the end of May 2025 with a monthly loss of (-0.64%) and falls of (-7.28%) for the previous three months. Oil (WTI) closed higher at US$60.79 a barrel at the end of May 2025 resulting in gains of (+4.43%) for the month and down (-12.86%) over the last three months. China remains our main export market followed by Japan.

**Australian Industry Returns**

Industry sectors posted positive results for May 2025. The industry sector performance results for the last month were:



Source data: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

Information Technology was the best performing sector posting gains of (+19.83%).

Utilities were the worst performing sector finishing (+0.31%) for the month.

**Australian Shares - Sector Returns**



Source data: Lonsec as of 31st Mayl 2025

## Debt Market Returns

Australian Bonds and Fixed Interest markets finished higher as global bond prices pushed lower (up in yield) after a volatile month which saw highs of . Australian bonds remain nervous after the initial US tariff sell-off with the short-dated 2-year Government bonds trading at **3.31%** on the 17th of June 2025 and longer dated 10-year bonds trading at **4.25%.**

Global Bonds returns ended lower (-0.60%) and Australian Bonds ended up (+0.16%) for the month of May 2025 and up (+0.01%) and (+2.59%) respectively for the previous three months.

The RBA maintained the target cash rate at 3.85% following the 20th of May 2025 board meeting.

The US 10-year Government bonds closed at (**4.397%**) for the month up in yield (+0.23%) from the previous month close of (4.167%).



The Australian Government 10-year bonds finished higher in yield in May 2025 at (**4.294%**) up in yield (-0.182%) from (4.112%) in April 2025.



Source data: Lonsec as of 31st May 2025

## Currency

The $A closed stronger AUD/USD 0.6436 at the end of May 2025 which was negative on returns for investors who held offshore assets unhedged (-0.31%) over the month and (-3.57%) over the last three months.

 

Currency forecasters see the AUD/USD range between:

**0.5750 and 0.6750** cents in the medium term and most likely to trade within the:

**0.5500 to 0.7500** range in the longer term.

## Australian Economy

Australia’s latest GDP data for the fourth quarter of 2024 revealed an **annual growth rate of 1.3%** which was up from 0.80% in the third quarter of 2024. Unemployment was unchanged at 4.1% in April 2025. The Y-O-Y **inflation rate held steady at 2.4%** in the first quarter of 2025 unchanged from the fourth quarter of 2024, which is within the Reserve Bank’s targeted 2% to 3% target range.

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## Current Market View

### Domestic View

The overall investment view for shares “**cautiously optimistic”** **over the short, medium and long run** as interest rates are expected to **continue to trend down** post the **tariff implementation** and futureanticipated easing of Monetary Policy by the RBA.

The market is expecting a **0.25% cut to interest rates** at the coming RBA monetary policy meeting on the **7th/8th July 2025**. This will help borrowers in the short-term and support share market valuations.

### Global View

Global share market remains **uncertain** given the Middle East conflict which we expect will result in Central Banks looking to ease interest rates to prevent further fallout from the events where they can however, the countries impacted by trade tariffs directly are likely to **hold rates** while they assess what will be the inflationary impacts of the new tariffs.

Global markets have dealt with tariffs in the past and they will settle given the charges have only just begun. The implementation of the tariffs will take time to work through and in the interim, markets will remain on alert. **We remain optimistic about the future** despite the tariffs and the **interruption to global trade.**

Despite the uncertain geopolitical situation with the Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Hamas, Israel and Iran, Hezbollah and Houthi conflict, and economic slowdown concerns, we expect the **medium-term outlook to reflect reasonable opportunities for investors**.

**Where to From Here?**

**For Australia**, a **soft landing is still on the cards**. Markets take the lead from what is happening in the global markets as this directly impacts our markets given there is alignment in trade terms but the fallout remains mitigated given our immigration, agricultural and resource assets.

Tariffs have had a **muted impact** on our resource sector to date although the market did overreact on the downside initially most of which has been unwound of late.

Company reporting season has been subdued however, there are early signs that guidance is being met or exceeded in key industries which will support the positive momentum of the share market.

**The Middle East political unrest** is a background factor that is not easily solved.Let us hope the situation will be contained and a solution that ceases further aggression and violence is forthcoming.

**Global markets** have already weathered tough conditions over 2023/24 and now there is economic evidence pointing to a **soft landing** rather than a mild recession in the US and pockets of growth emerging for Europe.

The latest sell-off and associated rebound is **healthy for markets** as it lets investors **recalibrate** their portfolios and pick up bargains along the way. Disruption can be rewarding but care needs to be taken in the bouts of volatility not to overreact.

**Markets are forward looking**, so it is likely they have not yet **found a solid bottom and now seeking evidence of what lies ahead.** We suspect we have just seen the start of that recovery process and **the recent volatility is simply the ebb and flow of markets**.

Fingers crossed monetary policy direction remains accommodative and trending towards further easing in the months ahead which hopefully, will lead to a moderation in prices and the start of a more stable global growth platform.

**Footnote**

This market update written by Graham Fox for and on behalf of HNW Planning on 17/06/2025. Graham Fox is an external asset consultant and consults to the HNW Investment Committee. Graham has enjoyed a career in financial services covering several private, corporate and investment banking institutions including, Genesys Wealth Advisers (research), Standard & Poor’s Australia (fund ratings), Westpac Private Bank (research, strategy and product), Gold Link Capital (sales and marketing), Challenger Financial Services Group (COO asset management), Deutsche Funds Management (head of treasury), Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (regional head of FX), Banque Nationale de Paris, (F/X) and Commercial Bank of Australia (International and Treasury). Graham references material made available from HNW Planning’s' contracted research houses including Lonsec and Morningstar.