

## Investment Update

As at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019



**Spheria Emerging Companies Limited**  
**ACN 621 402 588**

Pre-tax net tangible assets<sup>4</sup>  
**\$2.043**

Company<sup>7</sup> performance p.a.  
(since inception)  
**3.2%**

## Company Facts

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<b>Investment Manager</b>	Spheria Asset Management Pty Limited
<b>ASX Code</b>	SEC
<b>Share price</b>	\$1.76
<b>Inception date</b>	30 November 2017
<b>Listing date</b>	5 December 2017
<b>Benchmark</b>	S&P/ASX Small Ordinaries Accumulation Index
<b>Management Fee</b>	1.00% (plus GST) per annum <sup>1</sup>
<b>Performance Fee</b>	20% (plus GST) of the Portfolio's outperformance <sup>2</sup>
<b>Market Capitalisation</b>	\$117m

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<sup>1</sup> calculated daily and paid at the end of each month in arrears

<sup>2</sup> against the Benchmark over each 6-month period subject to a high-water mark mechanism

## Commentary

The Company's pre-tax NTA returned 0.1% for the 2019 financial year when adjusted for dividends paid. This represented an underperformance of 1.8% compared to the S&P/ASX Small Ordinaries Accumulation Index which returned 1.9%.

The market continues to be driven by macro-economic themes with little regard paid to traditional fundamental measures. Continued central bank monetary stimulus stoking tremendous asset bubbles in a variety of "fashionable" sectors including technology, property trusts and gold. Those looking at market averages to discern whether there is overvaluation are missing the point given the bifurcation of the market between the "haves" and "have nots". In many cases the "haves" are not making a profit or very little relative to prodigious market valuations. The "have nots" on the other hand are trading on extremely depressed valuations that are pricing in the bleakest of scenarios, which seem statistically improbable.

The portfolio was trampled like runners at Pamplona during June with the divergence between the two aforementioned camps noticeably widening, accentuated by heavy tax loss selling and large sell portfolio transitions due to several Australian small cap managers folding. The most significant downturn being at the small and microcap end of the market with less selling pressure when working up the market cap spectrum. We feel the smaller end of the market is now the most compelling from a valuation perspective since the GFC. Whilst we cannot forecast the catalyst that will drive a convergence in valuations between the camps, it feels like the winds of change are blowing particularly if the strategic interest in GBST (one of our key holdings) is any kind of gauge. Three months ago, you couldn't give the company away at \$1.20, now it is trading at close to \$3.60 with three parties registering interest in acquiring the company, the highest indicative offer at \$3.65.

The portfolio is currently littered with companies that possess "GBST like" characteristics, in that they are strategic in nature, inexpensive, produce sustainable cash flow, possess strong balance sheets and for whatever reason cannot curry any favour. These situations as illustrated by GBST can change quickly, with the speed and magnitude of the moves always astounding in hindsight. We will keep with our investment process and remain confident on the medium to long term outlook for the businesses comprising the portfolio, and the valuations are such that we expect the rewards to be handsome for the patient investor.

### Top 3 Contributors for FY19

Mount Gibson Iron (MGX, owned) – MGX rallied 141% in FY19. At the end of FY18 the MGX share price was 43c and trading around cash backing, the sea wall at Koolan Island was being rebuilt and the iron price was trading US\$65/tonne. In early calendar year 2019, the dewatering of Koolan Island was completed on schedule with the first shipment of iron ore occurring in April 2019. During this window, the iron ore price surged to over US\$120/tonne. This fuelled the MGX share price which peaked at \$1.30 in May and closed at just over \$1 by the end of the financial year. During the period we reduced our weighting in MGX given our concerns around the sustainability of the iron price due to the temporary nature of global supply constraints.

Technology One (TNE, owned) – TNE's share price staged a major rally in FY19 with a return including dividends of 88%. The selloff in early FY18 that saw the stock almost hit \$4, provided an opportunity to buy into one of the best, if

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not the best listed technology company in the Australian market at a very reasonable multiple (15x EBIT) when adjusting for its net cash balance sheet. We took some profit as the share price recovered strongly (it hit \$9 in May) but retain a core holding as we believe in the long term the business will continue to penetrate its core markets in Australia and the UK, and therefore increase its free cash flow generation.

Navitas (NVT, owned) – NVT returned 33% including dividends in FY19. We entered in the position in recent years at relatively low levels after several major contract losses that impacted group profitability. Again, we thought the market overreacted to these issues providing an opportunity to buy in at relatively attractive multiples. NVT was the subject of a takeover during the period which finalised prior to the end of the financial year. We were comfortable with the final price paid by the private equity consortium given a weakening demand outlook for Chinese students. This may be a structural issue given improving academic reputation of Chinese tertiary institutions and rising geopolitical risks. We commend the board and the senior management team which secured a solid outcome in difficult circumstances.

### **Bottom 3 Contributors for FY19**

Bega (BGA, owned) – BGA's share price fell 34% in FY19 including dividends. The drought and ensuing competition for milk supply drove up the price of BGA's largest input cost in its milk processing division. The inability to pass on the full cost particularly in globally traded commodity products (e.g. skim milk powder) essentially crushed profitability and returns. Toward the latter part of the year, end markets began to improve with rising global milk prices. At some point the drought will break and alleviate cost pressures. Furthermore, BGA had a major legal win versus Kraft for the livery usage for its peanut butter product, which should benefit margins and sales in future periods. A modest price increase for Vegemite will also benefit its consumer brand division. We believe further price increases are very likely given the strength of the Vegemite brand and the absence of price increases under foreign ownership. In our opinion, whilst the outlook is improving for BGA and the valuation more attractive on a through the cycle basis, the balance sheet needs further deleveraging which will weigh on dividends and sentiment towards the company.

Class (CL1, owned) – CL1's share price fell 36% over FY19 including dividends. The business de-rated significantly as net account additions slowed due to a more effective incumbent response to CL1's share grab and investor concerns around the SMSF industry mounted given proposed changes to franking credits by the Labor party. The latter proved to be a false alarm given the Liberal government win, however, it did slow industry growth as SMSF fund closures accelerated. This was possibly also driven by the inability to fund gearing of property in SMSF's due to tighter bank controls and the perception that SMSF's with low balances cannot be run economically due to high administration costs. We believe some of these issues are overplayed and that the closure rate will reduce moving forward as the cost of managing an SMSF continues to fall due to the uptake of automated software. The more effective incumbent is real but it is now acting more rationally with a price increase of \$10pa on 1st July 2019. This should allow CL1 to increase price which will significantly benefit the bottom line. We continue to believe the competitor is not making much money due to its greater headcount and lower pricing, and as such pricing in the industry may continue to rise benefiting all participants. The family trust and related adjacencies (that CL1 service using Class Portfolio) represent significant growth for CL1, which is the first mover in this space. There are estimates that the total addressable market for Class Portfolio is greater than the SMSF market. At <4x revenue we continue to see CL1 as offering exceptional upside for a SaaS business.

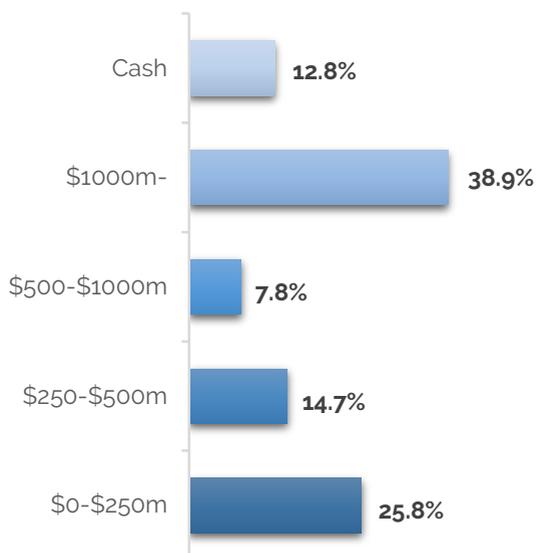
Fletcher Building (FBU, owned) – FBU's share price fell 26% in FY19 including dividends. The main culprits being losses in its vertical construction business in New Zealand (now cauterised in our view) and continuing issues with the Australian operations, in particular the Tradelink plumbing business. Despite being the second largest plumbing supplier in Australia, Tradelink has always disappointed on the margin front with the downturn in the housing market not helping in recent periods. We believe the positive spin for Tradelink is that on paper it looks "turnaroundable", and if FBU can't do it there would be a line of strategic buyers willing to pay for the potential, with the most obvious acquirer being Bunnings (Wesfarmers). To give some indication of the possible upside FBU earns a 3% return on the \$1.8bn of funds employed in Australia versus a 22% return in its \$1.7bn NZ building products division. FBU does also face competitive pressures in New Zealand across its building product, concrete and steel divisions. However, its balance sheet is now repaired with the sale of its Formica business and the question now is whether the management team can make a difference, with execution poor under previous senior management teams. Management clearly back themselves though with the recent announcement of a NZ\$300m buyback.

## Top 5 Holdings

Company Name	% Portfolio
Platinum Asset	4.8
Ht&E Limited	4.5
Bega Cheese Ltd	4.5
Healius	4.4
Fletcher Building	4.3
<b>Top 5</b>	<b>22.4</b>

Source: Spheria Asset Management

## Market Cap Bands



Source: Spheria Asset Management

## Net Tangible Assets (NTA)<sup>3</sup>

Pre-tax NTA <sup>4</sup>	\$2.043
Post-tax NTA <sup>5</sup>	\$2.096

<sup>3</sup> NTA calculations exclude Deferred Tax Assets relating to capitalised issue cost related balances and income tax losses

<sup>4</sup> Pre-tax NTA includes tax on realised gains/losses and other earnings, but excludes any provisions for tax on unrealised gains/losses

<sup>5</sup> Post-tax NTA includes tax on realised and unrealised gains/losses and other earnings

## Performance as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019

	1m	3m	6m	1 yr	Inception p.a. <sup>6</sup>
Company <sup>7</sup>	-2.3%	0.8%	12.1%	0.1%	3.2%
Benchmark <sup>8</sup>	0.9%	3.7%	16.8%	1.9%	6.1%

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

<sup>6</sup> Inception date is 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017

<sup>7</sup> Calculated as movement in Company's pre-tax NTA (which includes tax on realised gains/losses and other earnings, but excludes any provision for tax on unrealised gains/losses), assuming the re-investment of any dividends paid by the company

<sup>8</sup> Benchmark is the S&P/ASX Small Ordinaries Accumulation Index

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