

## Economic and Market Commentary March 2013

Improving investor sentiment has underpinned the strong start to global equities markets in 2013, however uncertainty within the Eurozone remains and is creating a volatile market environment. The concerns of a major correction caused by the US deficit and fiscal issues have been diminished and deferred with market concerns dissipating. The US is undergoing a broadening economic recovery although from a low base fuelled by cheap funds (cash rates close to 0% and 10 year bonds 2%), improving consumer sentiment, improving housing and construction market and access to affordable energy all providing a lift in confidence. The US fiscal issues remain a hurdle to be overcome with politicians being required to still address the significant debt issues within coming months. The quantitative easing programmes being undertaken by US, Europe and Japan has fuelled the recent "risk on" approach by investors and is likely to underpin a positive growth environment for the year.

Deleveraging over the past five years and an aggressive US Fed Reserve has contributed significantly to the change in sentiment. The US unemployment rate is a major focus for the Fed and has remained stubbornly high, although recently easing below the 8% level to 7.7%. With the US housing sector recovering this should provide a further boost to employment. The Fed is targeting a 6.5% unemployment rate before reducing its stimulatory stance.

The European Central Bank continues to be proactive in providing a support mechanism to the region in the form of a bond purchase program, Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT) that allows member countries to offload distressed bonds to the ECB. While this action has improved investor sentiment and confidence the Eurozone is still suffering from excesses of debt with Cyprus being the latest member country to require assistance. These issues can have significant flow on effects for the country and its people as it leads to social unrest and dislocation of the economy and recovery process.

Spain, Portugal, Italy and UK continue to deal with weakening economies, high debt burdens and high unemployment levels. These uncertain conditions are all leading to a long period of recession and low growth for the region and dominates decision making. A further decline in economic activity across the Eurozone during the fourth quarter of 2012 is delaying the path to recovery. The recent Italian elections has resulted in a hung parliament and seen a move away from the stricter austerity measures implemented by Mario Monti, leaving the country with no decisive leadership. France's unemployment rate has crept up to 10.6% placing further pressure on the government's finances.

Despite the US fiscal issues the US economy continues to produce positive growth although at low levels (in the region of 2%) and a more upbeat corporate and banking sector. The housing market is recovering, although patchy is starting to underpin consumer confidence. A further positive for the US is the strong state of the energy market which is anticipated to provide a strong boost to the economy over the coming years as they rely less on imported oil and gas, with an expectation of being an exporter of gas by 2015.

The emerging world is in better shape and is likely to account for much of the global growth in the year ahead. China remains key to world growth. The Chinese leadership change and transition appears to be proceeding better than expected with the corruption issues now being dealt with. Xi Jinping, recently elected as President, is already implementing structural change, prioritising the urbanisation process and seeking to balance an infrastructure investment spending focus with consumption spending led transition. Growth has now stabilised around 7.5 - 8% and there is greater confidence in the reacceleration of the economy. The Chinese economy is likely to become more volatile as the large urbanisation programme with now over 50% of population living in urban regions has to deal with the many imbalances that this is likely to create along with potential social unrest. The leadership is attempting to manage the reflation of the property market which is again showing signs of overheating.

The Japanese equities market has rebounded by 15% over the past three months as the new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe embarks on a strong growth strategy. He has formally adopted a 2% inflation target in conjunction with the Bank of Japan and is implementing a monetary easing stimulus of ¥10.3 trillion Yen (US\$116 billion) aimed at driving up economic growth. Forecast growth for 2013 has been increased to 2.3%. The aim is to drive down the currency and boost export earnings which should also be supportive for the equities market.

The Australian share market has rebounded strongly over the past three months (up 13%) and the recent companies reporting period resulted in generally better earnings and positive guidance for the coming period. This should provide support for the market over the year ahead as funds move out of cash and term deposits

into growth investments. Resource companies are having to deal with more volatile commodity prices and a general outlook for lower prices over the year ahead. With the recent rapid increase in the Australian equities market stock selection is likely to become more important as earnings need to increase. The announcement of the election date for 14th September should focus the politicians on better articulating their policies which should provide for better decision making by the business sector.

A major headwind for the Australian market continues to be the strong A\$ making it difficult for manufacturers, exporters, retailers and tourism. The A\$ has been supported by strong Australian bond purchasers by foreign investors seeking AAA government credit ratings. With close to zero interest rates in the US, Europe and Japan large capital flows have entered Australia chasing higher yields. The devaluation of the Yen is also another factor in keeping the A\$ at these high levels. With the high A\$ and resulting lower cost of overseas travel Australian tourism industry is now suffering a net outflow in tourism dollars.

The RBA is under pressure to cut interest rates further over the year ahead in order to provide a boost to the economy, which should flow through to the equities market. The lower interest rates (cash rate 3%) is reducing the attractiveness of term deposits and is starting to stimulate flows into higher yielding equities with sustainable or growing dividends. Bank shares are currently offering in the region of 5% yields before franking. The high returns last year from fixed interest is becoming harder to achieve as cash rates are generally at well below long term levels and opportunities are now difficult to find. Return expectations for fixed interest should be reduced to the 5-6% region for the year ahead.

Commercial and retail property valuations are now offering better value and long term investors are re-entering the market. More interest is emerging in the listed REIT space as investors seek higher yielding investments although the outlook for the housing market remains uncertain.

- **International shares: [Overweight]** Sentiment in global equities markets is improving which provides opportunities for international shares to outperform over the coming year. An overweight position is appropriate for the sector with the US, Asia and emerging markets being the preferred regions.
- **Australian shares: [Overweight] Australian Small Caps: [Neutral]** Opportunities are likely to arise from a stronger investment climate in Asia and the US. Investors who have been holding cash are likely to consider equities during the year as the return profile has become more attractive. **Australian Listed Property: [Neutral] Global Listed Property: [Neutral]** Quality listed property securities delivering solid yields are likely to benefit from the focus on yield and suggest a neutral weighting to this sector. Quality direct property is also showing signs of recovery although investors need to be selective in this sector.
- **Fixed Interest: [Underweight]** With interest rates at historically low levels both globally and in Australia, opportunities for fixed interest are likely to be limited over the coming year. An underweight for the sector is appropriate. A cautious approach to global sovereign debt is required with opportunities for corporate bonds preferred.
- **Cash: [Underweight]** The risk return profile of Cash and Term Deposits is becoming less attractive.

## Risks

- The risk of sovereign debt defaults continues to remain high with the large deficits being run by many countries. They now need to manage carefully the wind back. Investors need to be selective.
- The European Union continues to face major challenges in managing member countries, especially Greece in near collapse, also Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Portugal and UK with large debt issues and the lack of discipline to control the predicament.
- A potential risk ahead for the global economy is the mismanagement of the unwinding of the QE stimulus programs currently in place and its repercussions on bond markets.
- Social unrest in Europe, Africa and the Middle East is becoming an increasing concern for governments.
- With large US debt levels (US\$16 trillion), strong political will is required to enact the necessary measures to reduce the debt levels. This is likely to be difficult as the US politicians continue to defer making tough decisions.
- Increased social unrest within China maybe an issue with the increasing urbanisation of the country.
- Poor policy decisions by the Australian Federal government in the lead up to the election may result in lower growth for the Australian economy.

### Global Opportunities

- The Asian region continues to generate satisfactory GDP growth and should continue to be a major driver of world growth. Asia should continue to create opportunities for Australian investors although with periods of volatility like we have been experiencing.
- A key factor for continued Asian growth is the increasing demand by China's consumers as they develop greater wealth and require ever increasing volumes of commodities and agricultural products, which should underpin the Australian resources and agricultural sectors over the longer term.
- The rise of the US energy industry to a point of becoming an exporter of energy (gas) within 3-4 years and oil by 2030 provides a platform for optimism.

### Australia

- Opportunities should continue as China and India evolve into stronger economies over the coming decade and demand for resources should be under pinned over the longer term.

### Fixed Interest and Property

- Opportunities for higher returns from traditional fixed interest have largely disappeared with interest rates at low levels. The market has already factored in the lower rates and the risk now is for capital loss if rates rise. Increased opportunities may arise in the lower grade credit markets although caution in this sector is required.
- The listed property trust sector is in better shape to participate in an improving property cycle.

### Monthly Share Market Performance over the last Thirteen Months

Market Indices	Feb-12	Mar-12	Apr-12	May-12	Jun-12	Jul-12	Aug-12	Sep-12	Oct-12	Nov-12	Dec-12	Jan-13	Feb-13
Intl-MSCI ex A A\$	3.24	5.80	-1.73	-1.76	-0.62	-1.56	4.50	2.11	-0.52	0.67	2.34	4.59	1.90
Aust - All Ords	2.41	1.15	1.10	-6.90	0.25	3.74	2.12	2.13	2.97	0.27	3.43	5.08	5.18
Aust - Small Coy	6.51	0.19	-0.92	-10.22	-4.78	-0.19	2.95	4.37	1.31	-2.43	3.23	4.20	0.87
Aust Property ASX	2.25	-0.59	5.42	-1.24	4.34	5.55	-0.13	1.20	5.32	-1.28	2.86	4.41	3.53
Global Property	1.11	4.63	2.45	-4.22	5.15	3.08	0.60	-0.21	1.11	1.03	3.09	3.58	1.72

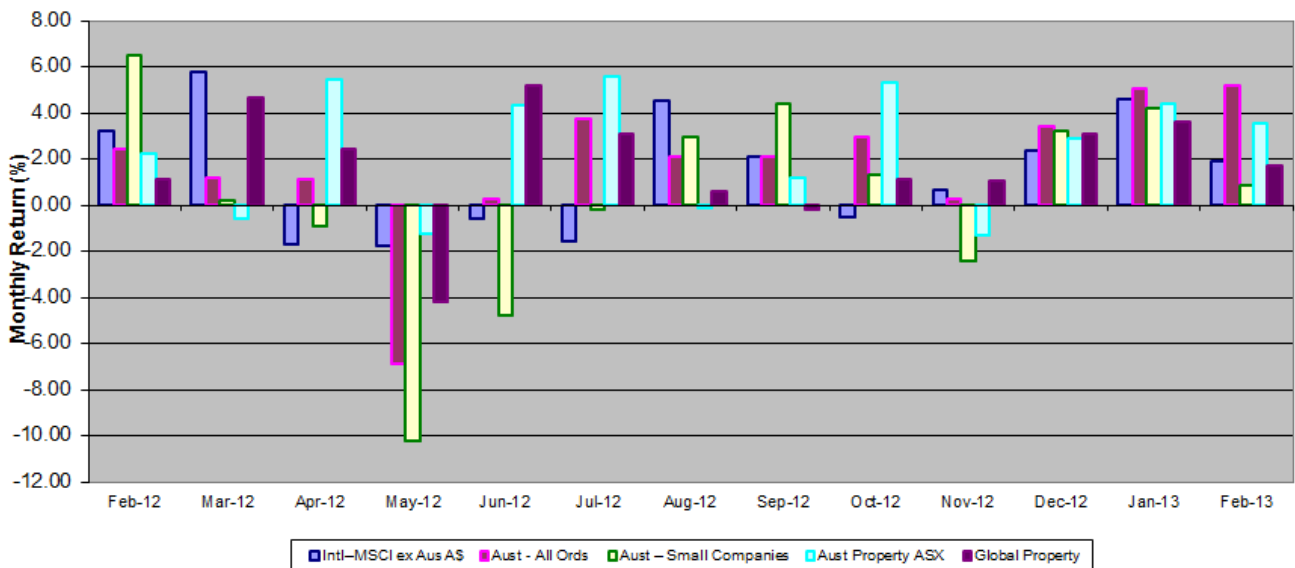
### Annual Share Market Performance

Markets Index	1 Year to 31 Dec 10 %	1 Year to 31 Mar 11 %	1 Year to 30 Jun 11 %	1 Year to 30 Sep 11 %	1 Year to 31 Dec 11 %	1 Year to 31 Mar 12 %	1 Year to 30 Jun 12 %	1 Year to 30 Sep 12 %	1 Year to 31 Dec 12 %	1 Year to 28 Feb 13 %
Intl-MSCI ex A A\$	-2.40	0.64	2.66	-4.52	-5.34	0.69	-0.50	13.59	14.14	16.47
Aust - All Ords	3.31	4.80	12.17	-8.43	-11.43	-6.27	-7.04	13.36	18.84	21.88
Aust - Small Coy	13.05	13.49	16.41	-12.11	-21.43	-8.57	-14.61	3.83	6.58	-2.40
Aust Prop - ASX	-0.68	4.74	5.87	-6.29	-1.56	1.67	10.98	28.90	32.79	33.18
Global Property	26.15	24.78	36.60	1.06	1.94	8.40	6.93	30.54	26.29	23.95

## Best Performing Asset Sectors for twelve months ended 28 February 2013

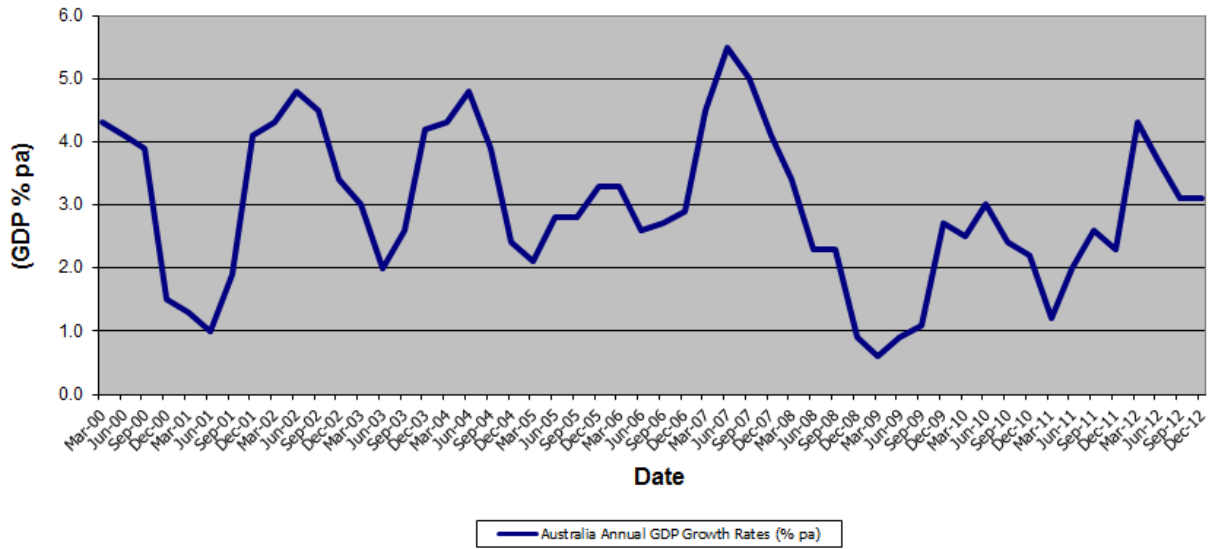
Sector	Market Index	Return
Aust Listed Property	S&P/ASX Property Trusts Accum Index	33.18
Global Listed Property	UBS Global Real Estate Inv Ex Aust Idx Hedge \$A	23.95
Australian Shares	S&P/ASX All Ords Accum Index	21.88
International Equities Unhedged	MSCI World Ex Aust Accum Index A\$	16.47
International Equities Hedged	MSCI World Accum Index Hedged A\$	13.59
Australian Fixed Interest	UBS Warburg Composite 0 + Years	8.18
International Fixed Interest Hedged	JP Morgan Gov Bond Accum Index Hedged \$A	7.01
Cash	Australian 90 Day Bank Accepted Bill	3.73
Australian Smaller Companies	S&P/ASX Small Ordinaries Accum Index	-2.40

### Market Indices - Monthly Returns (%)

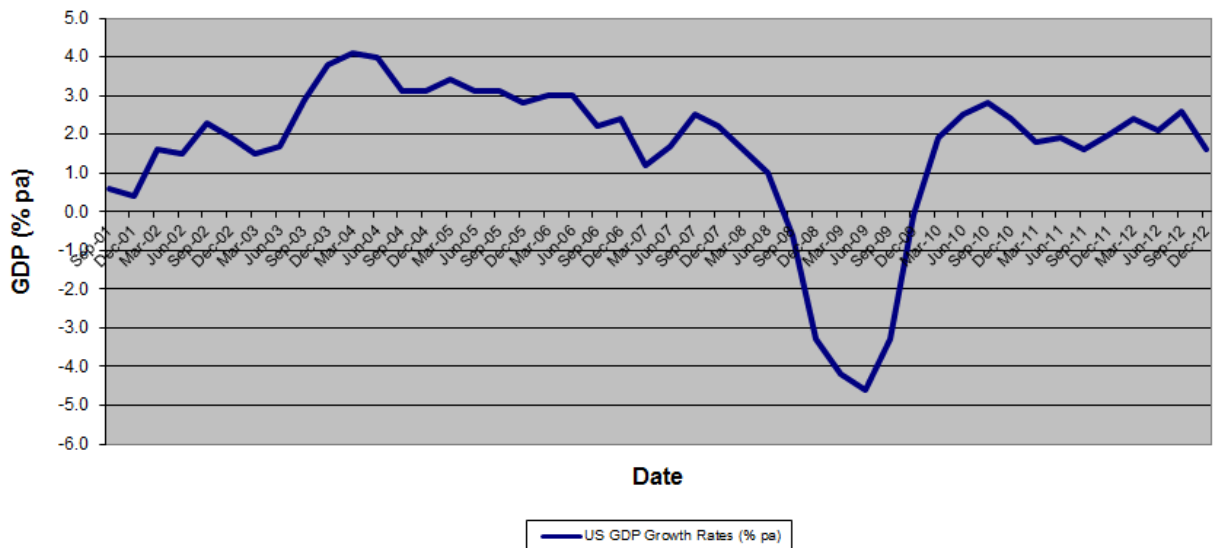


## Major Economic Indicators

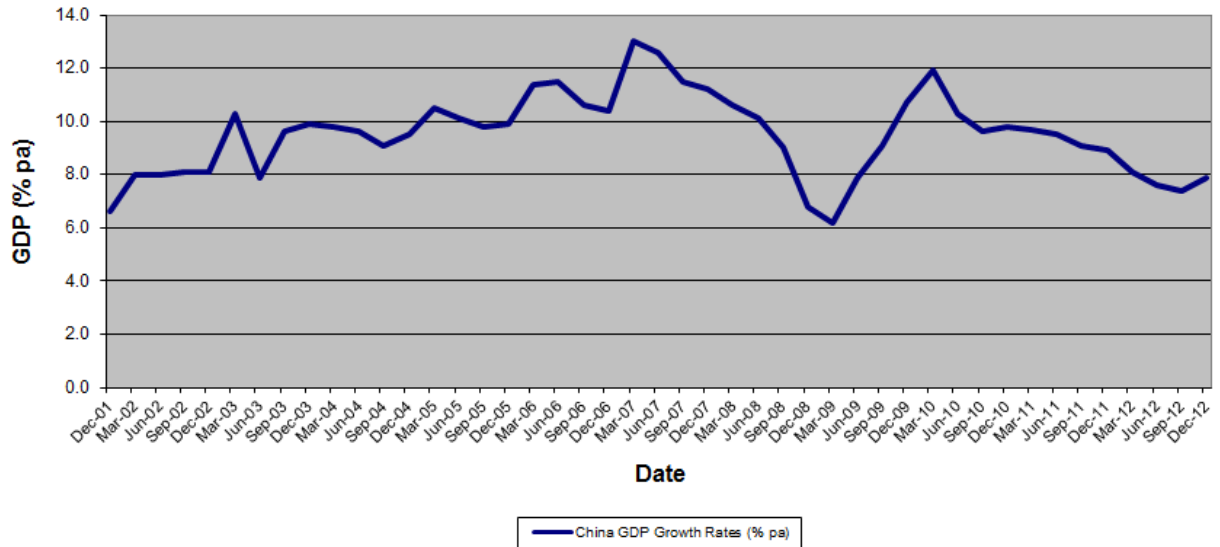
### Australia GDP Growth Rates (%pa)



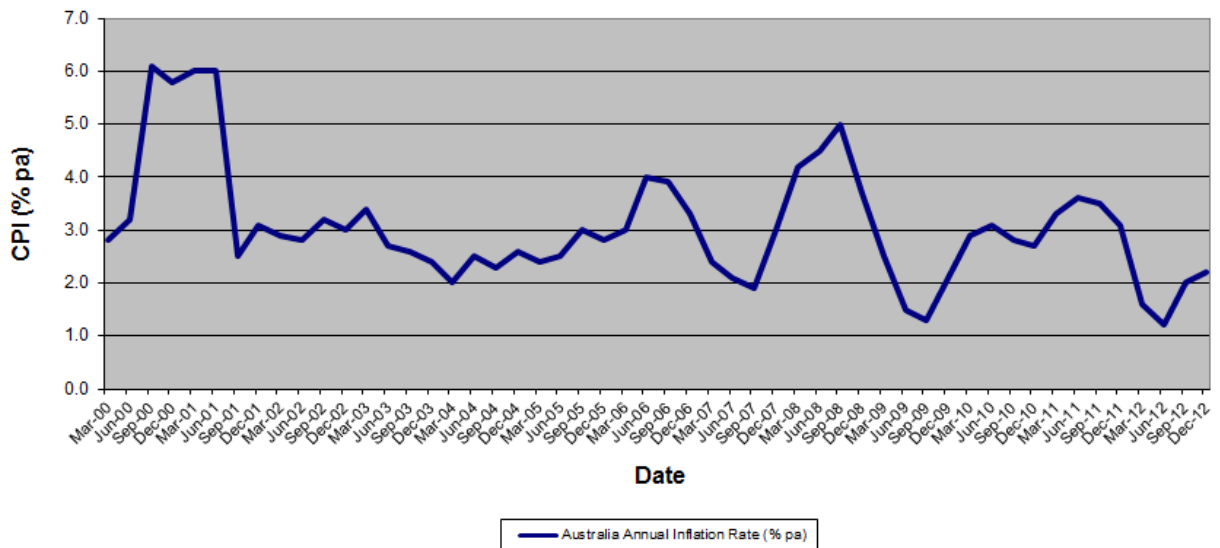
### US GDP Growth Rates (%pa)



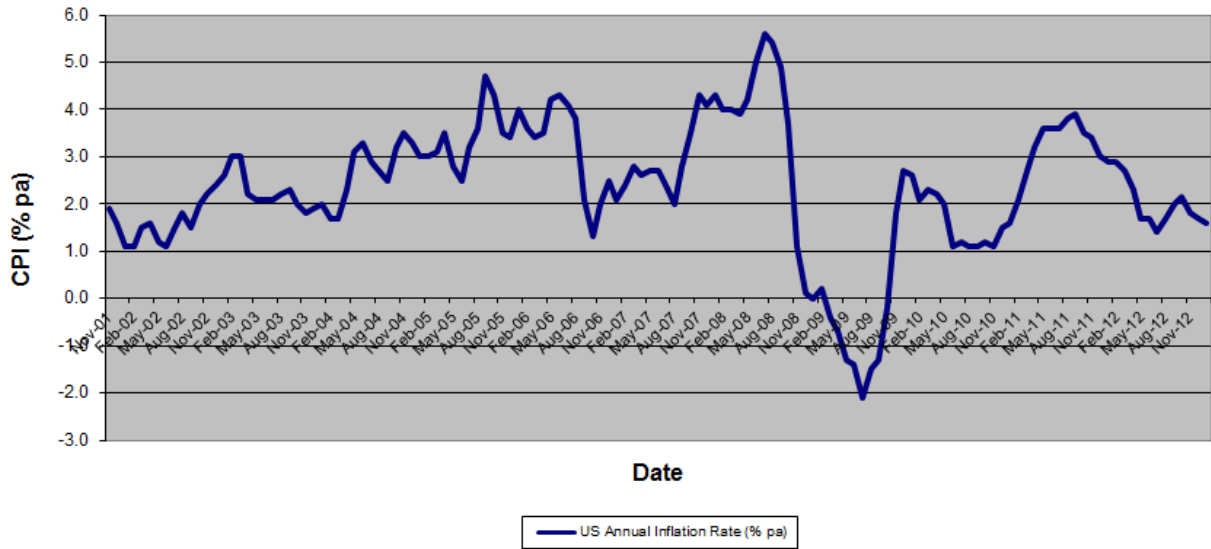
China GDP Growth Rates (%pa)



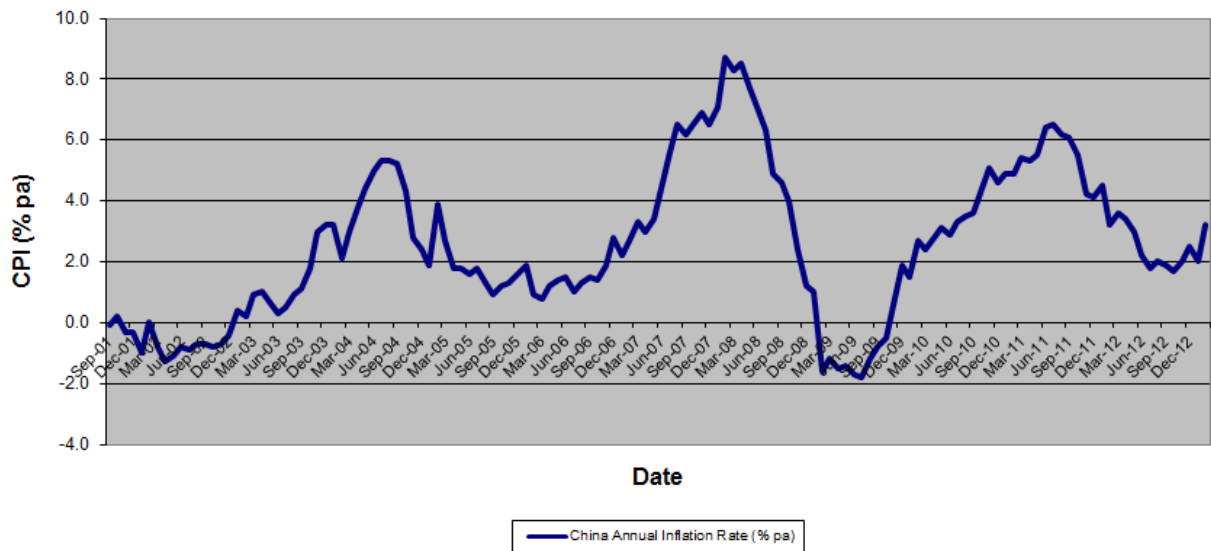
Australia Inflation Rates (%pa)



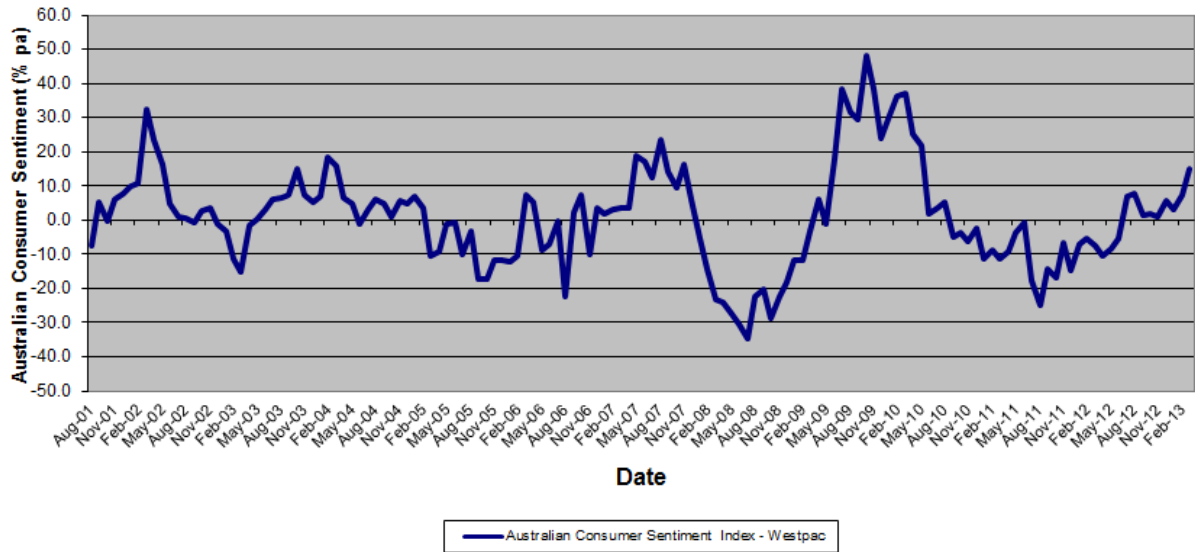
US Inflation Rates (%pa)



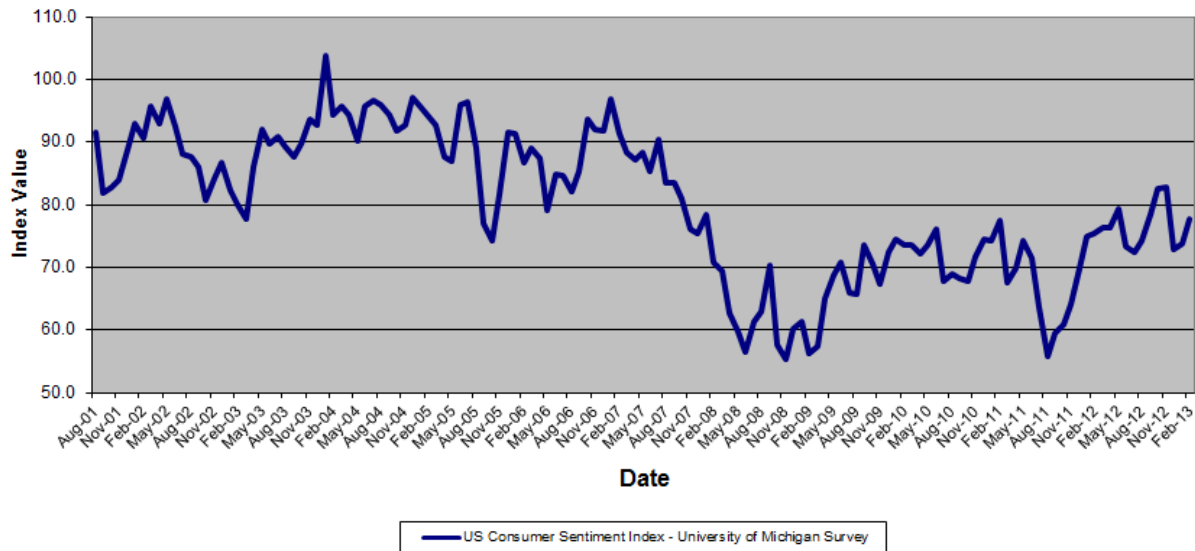
China Inflation Rates (%pa)



Australian Consumer Sentiment Index - Westpac

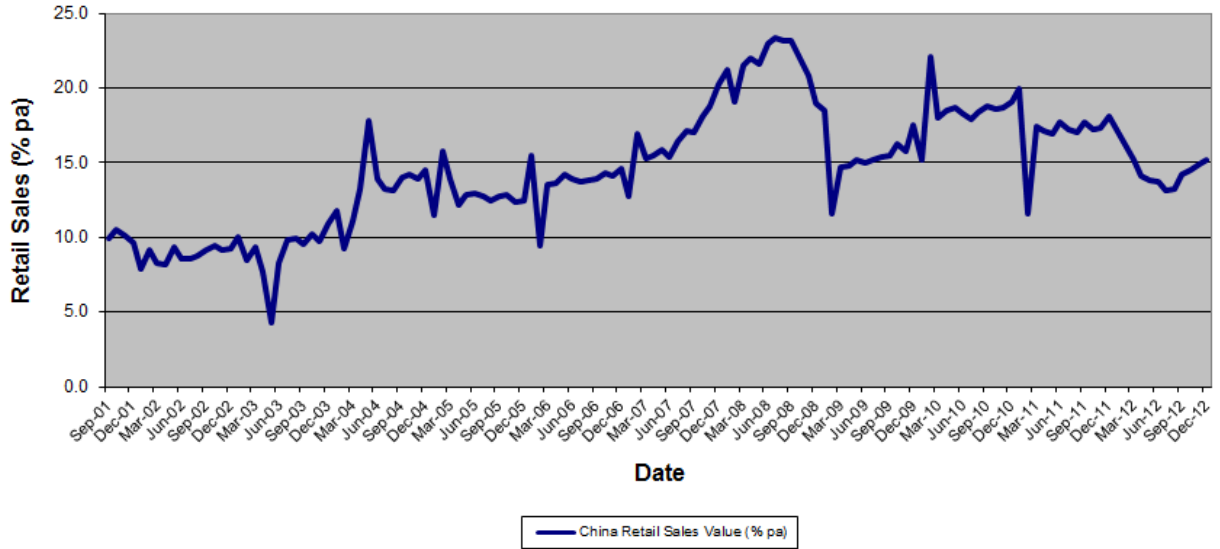


US Consumer Sentiment Index - University of Michigan Survey

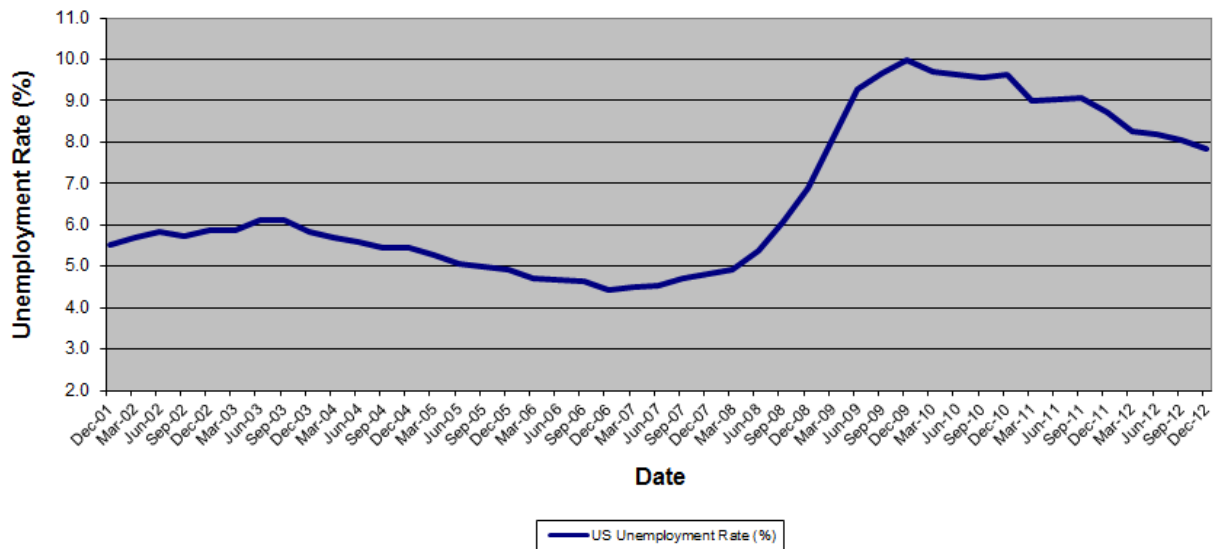


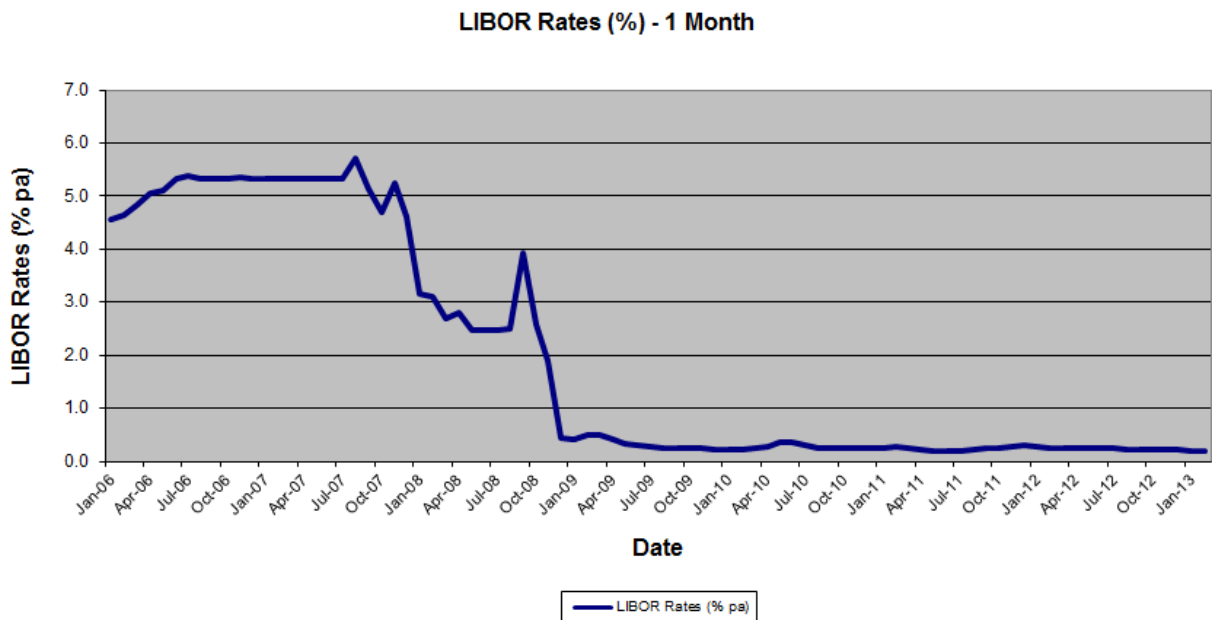
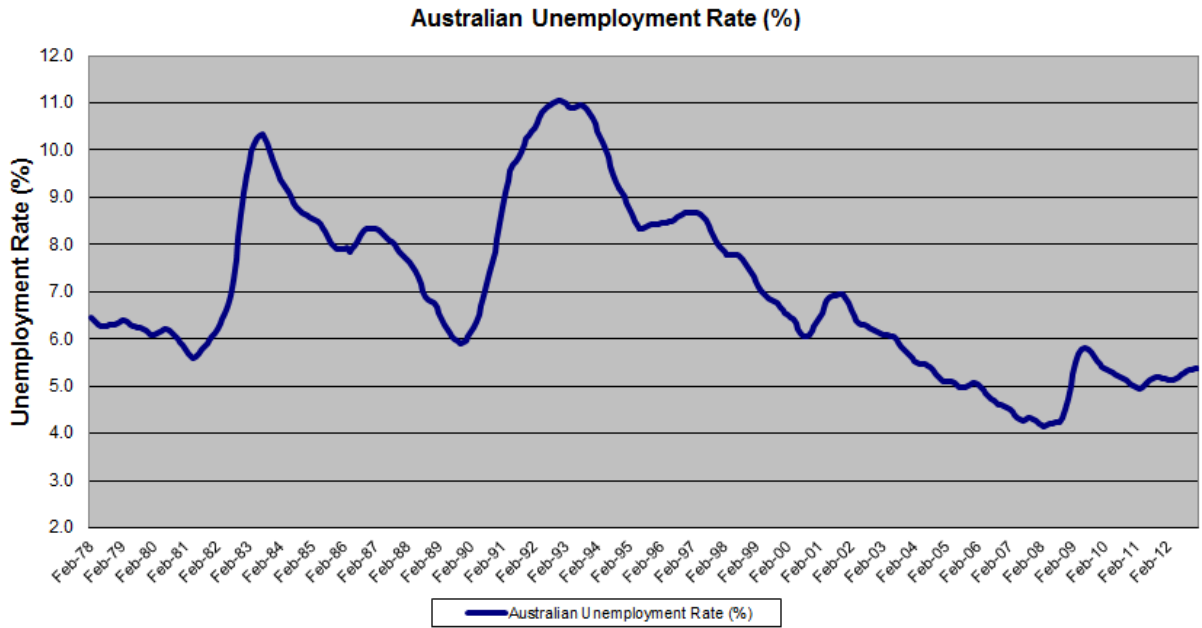


China Retail Sales Value (%pa)

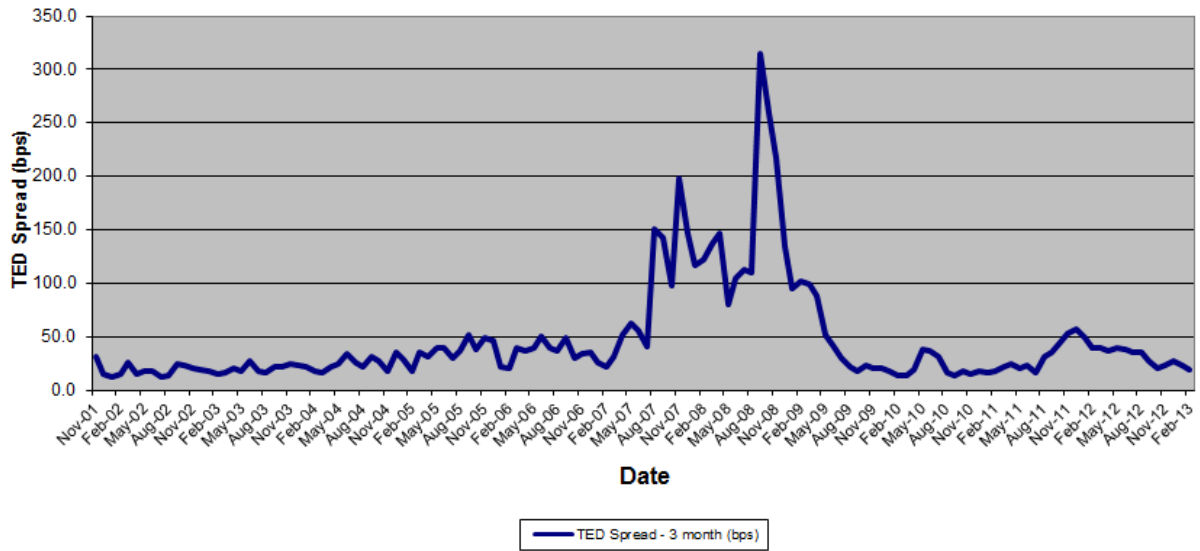


US Unemployment Rate (%)

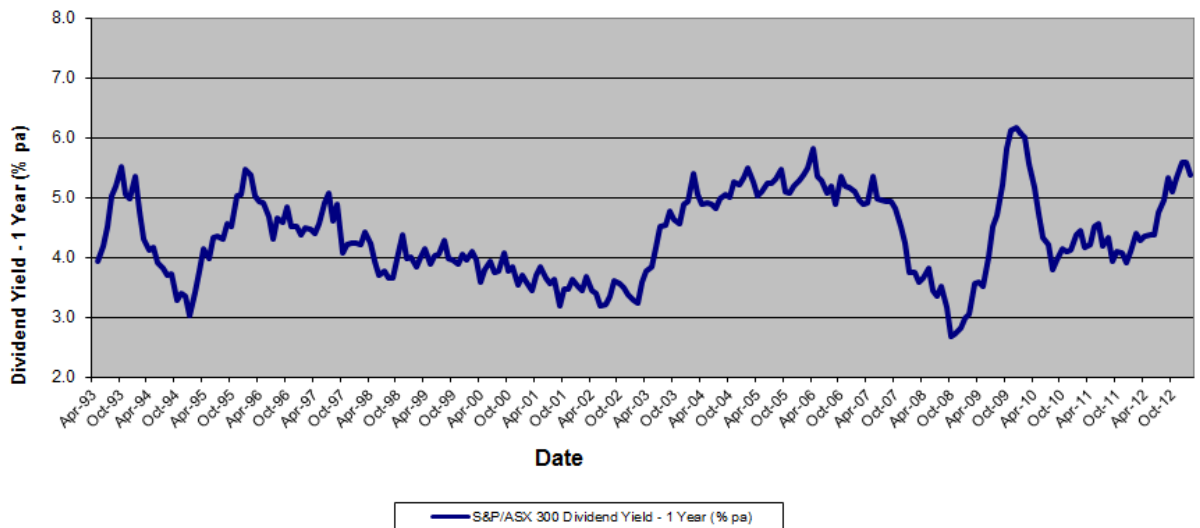




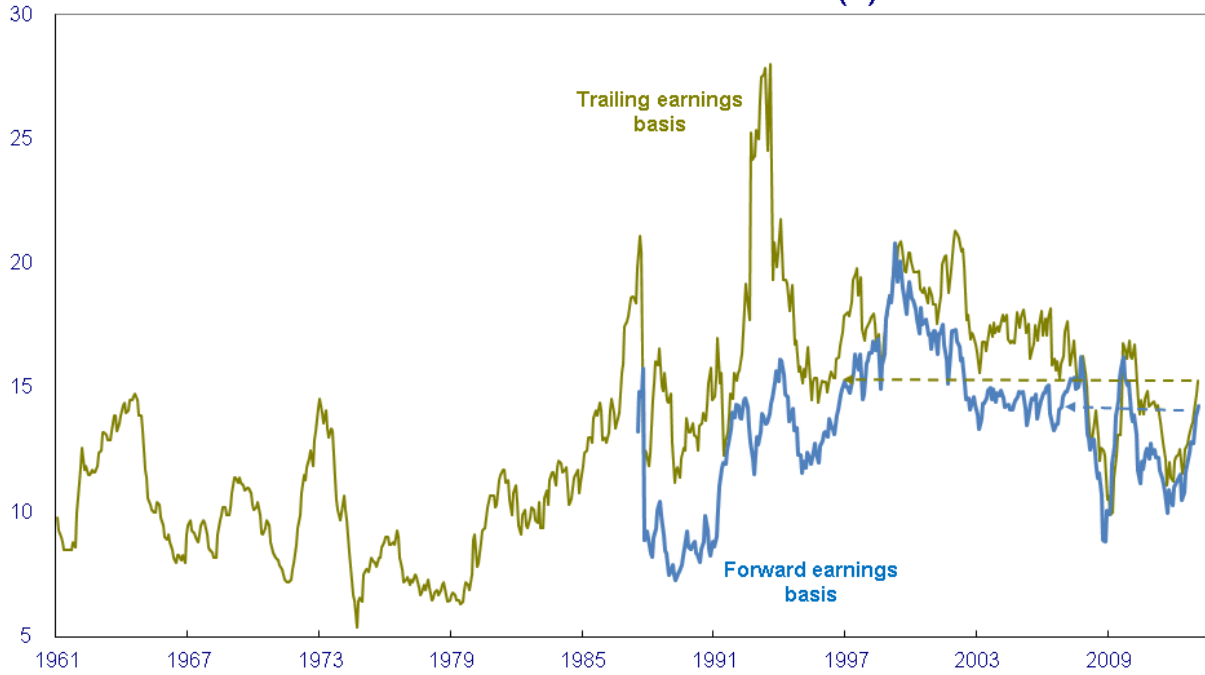
**TED Spread - 3 Month**



**S&P/ASX 300 Dividend Yield - 1 Year (% pa)**

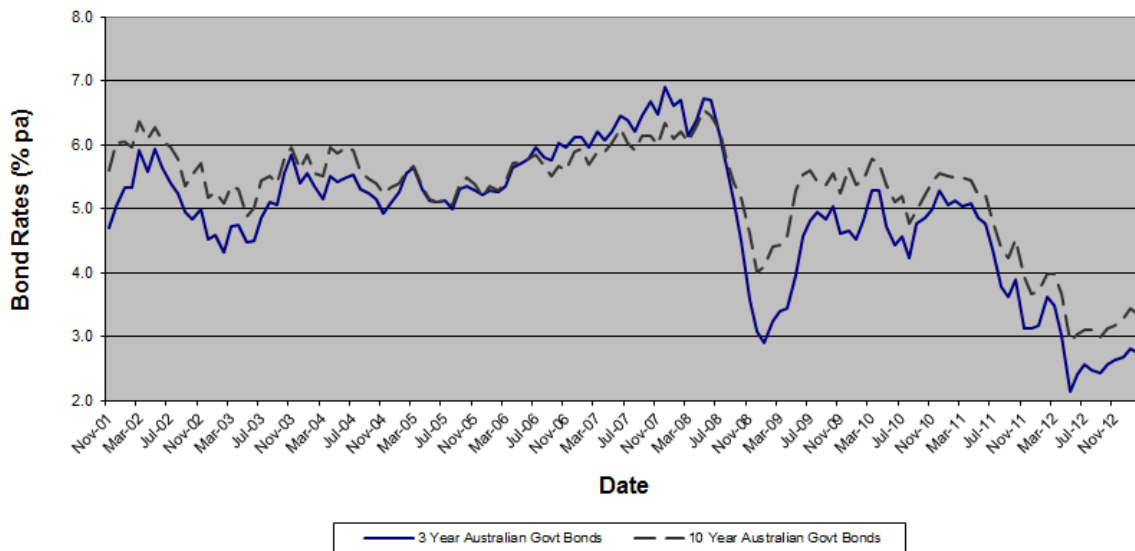


### Australian Sharemarket Valuations (X)

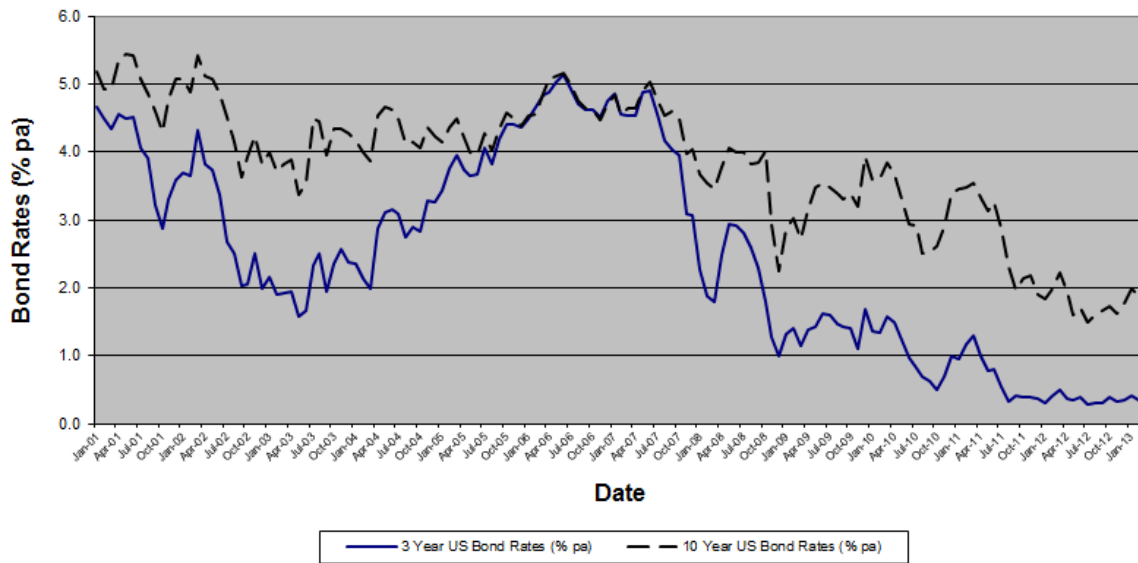


Source: UBS Australia and Reserve Bank of Australia as at 14 February 2013.

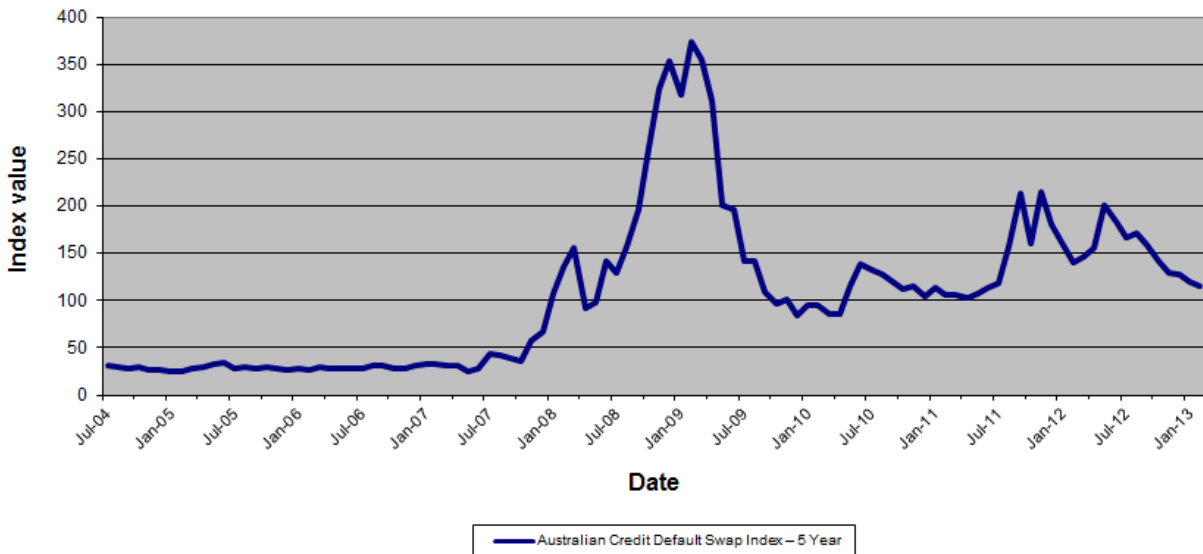
### 3y and 10y Australian Bond Rates (%)



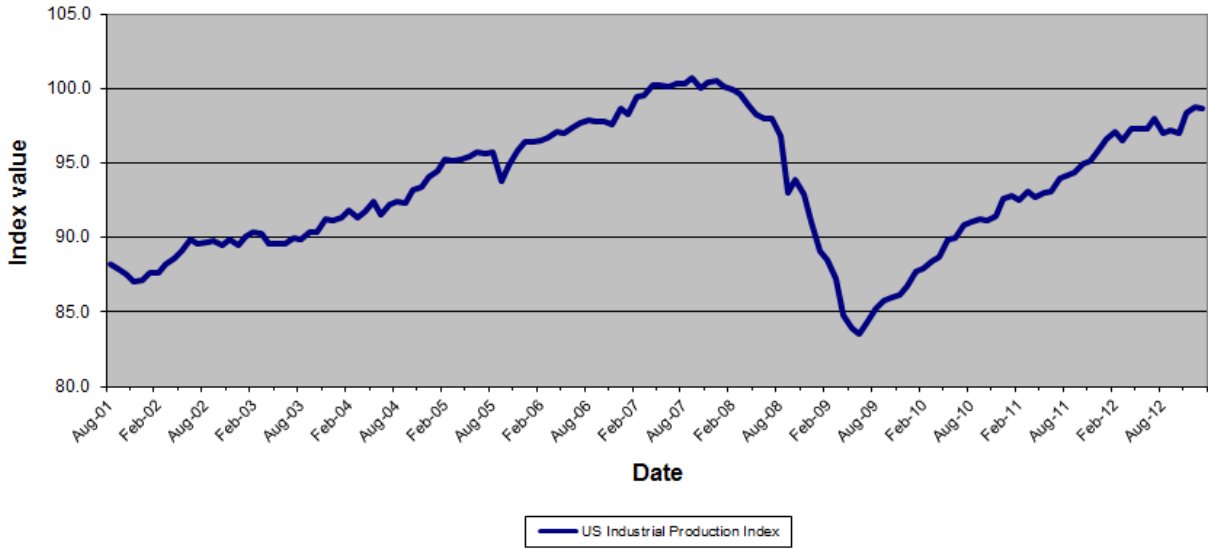
### 3y and 10y US Bond Rates (%)



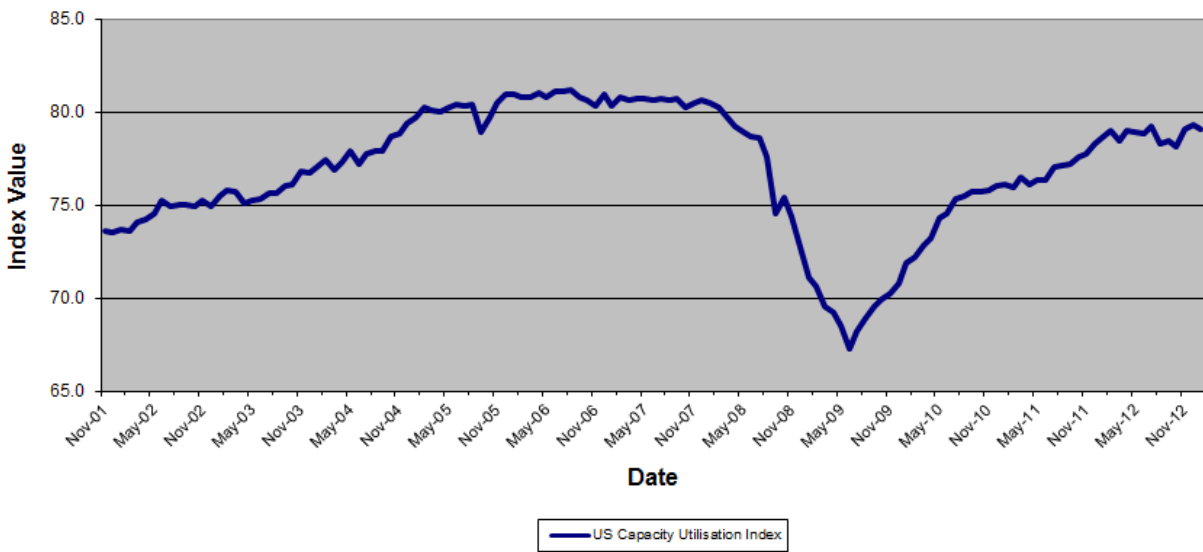
### Australian Credit Default Swap Index – 5 Year



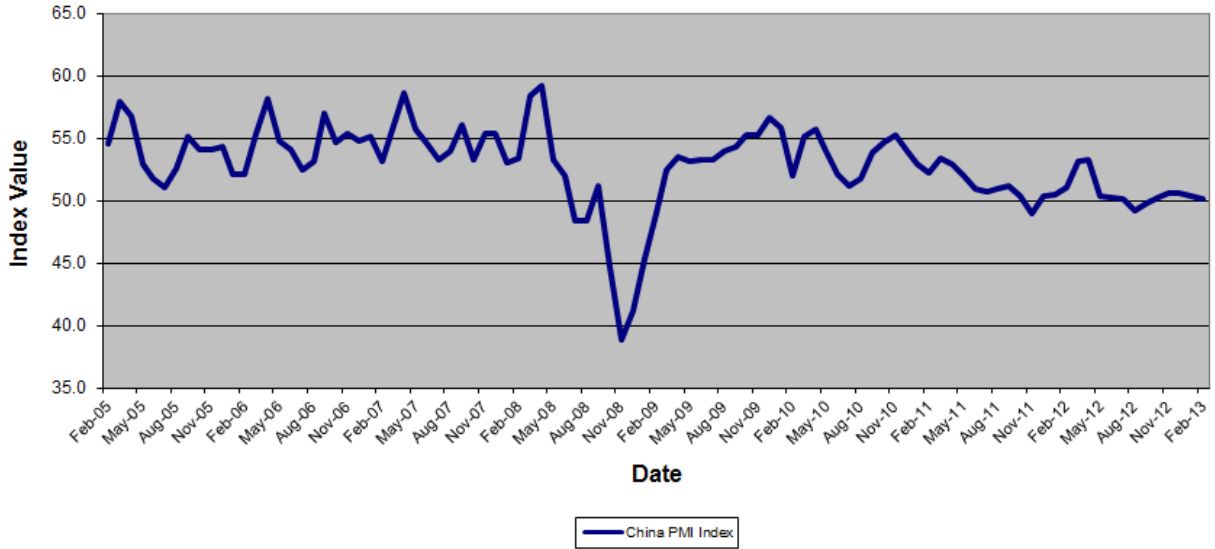
US Industrial Production Index



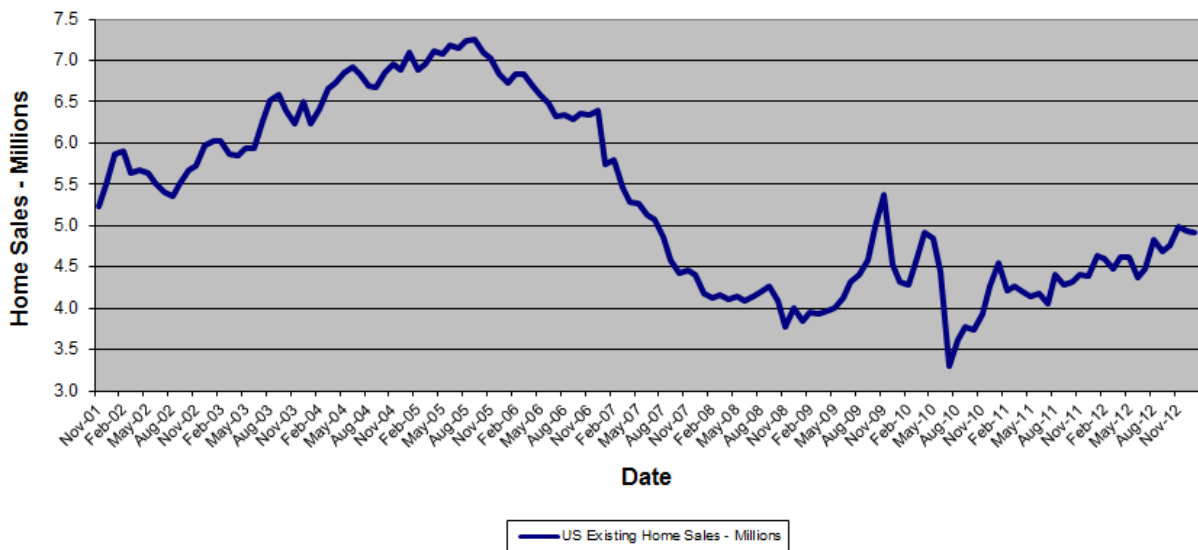
US Capacity Utilisation Index



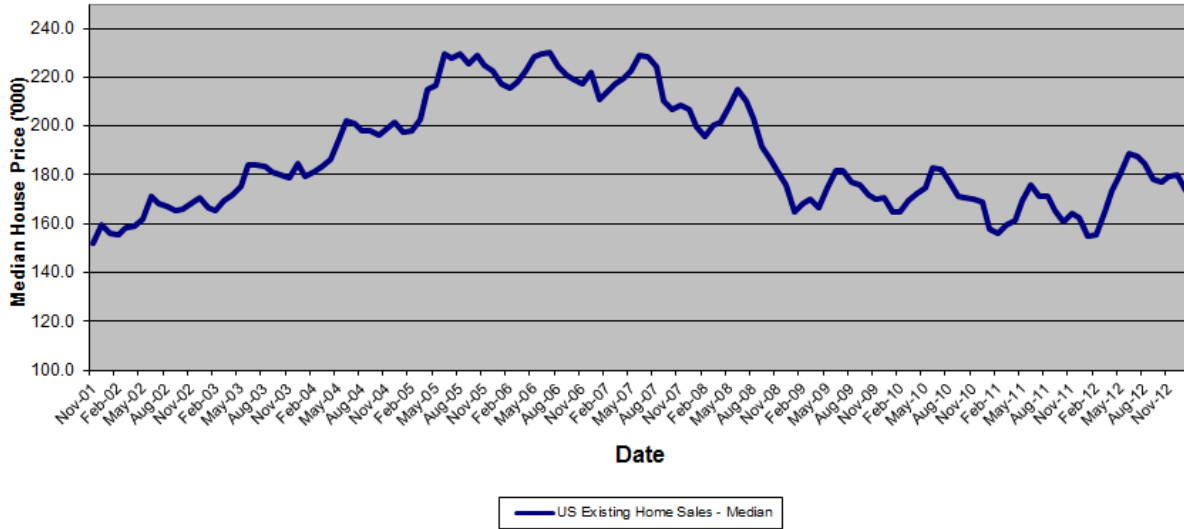
China Purchasing Managers Index (PMI)



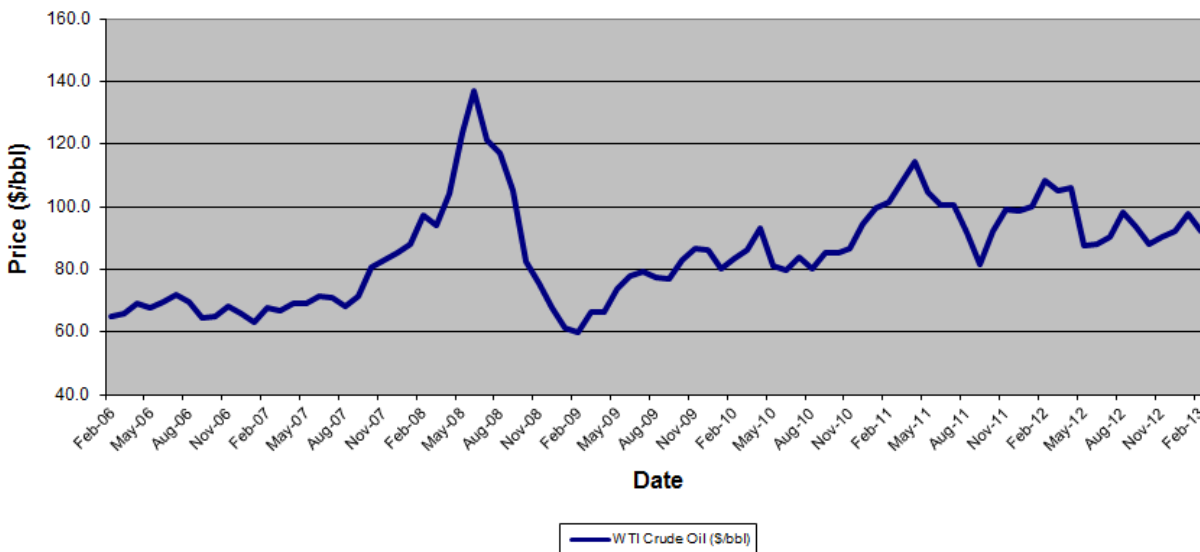
US Existing Home Sales - Millions



US Existing Home Sales - Median

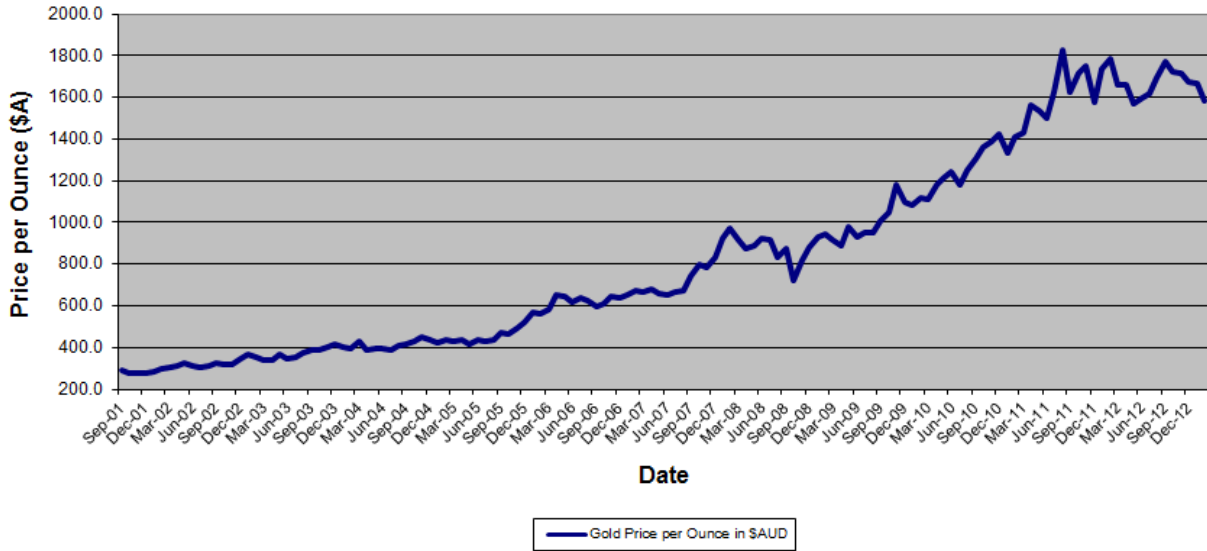


WTI Crude Oil (\$/bbl)

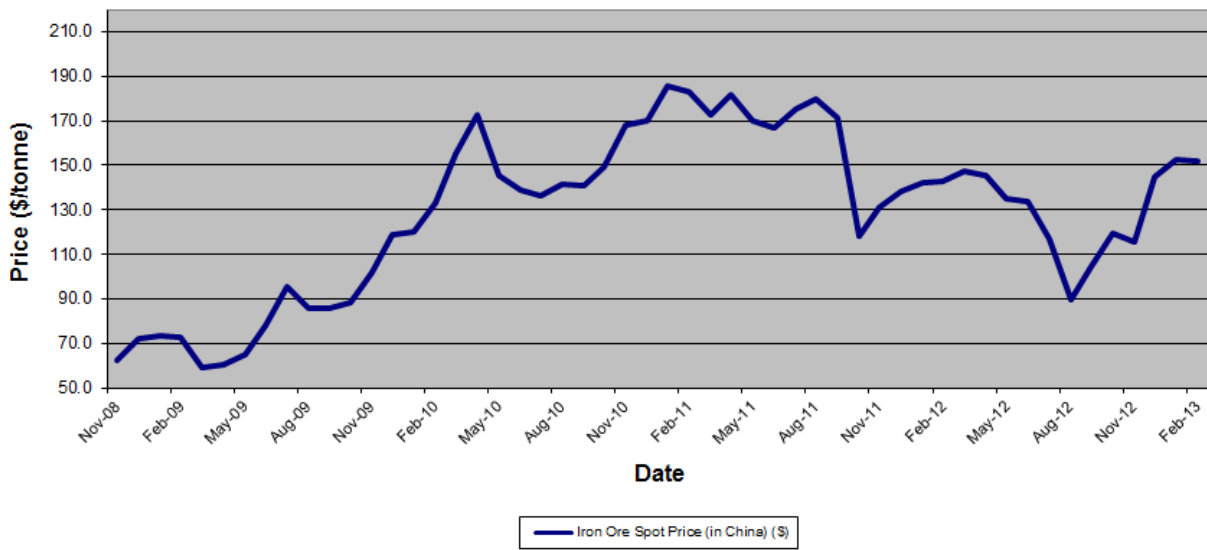




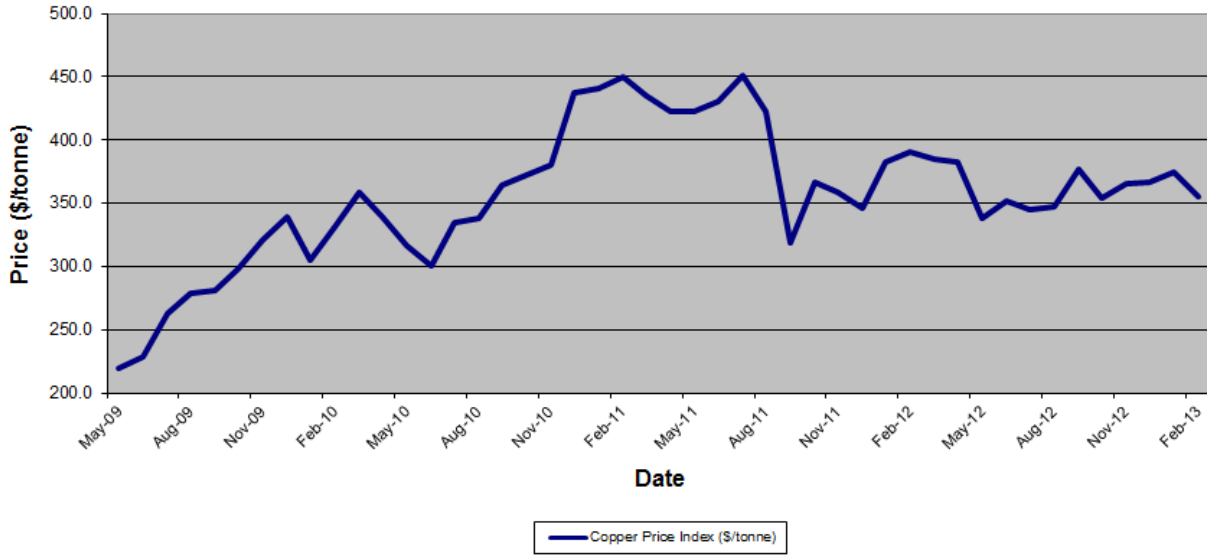
**Gold Price per Ounce in \$AUD**



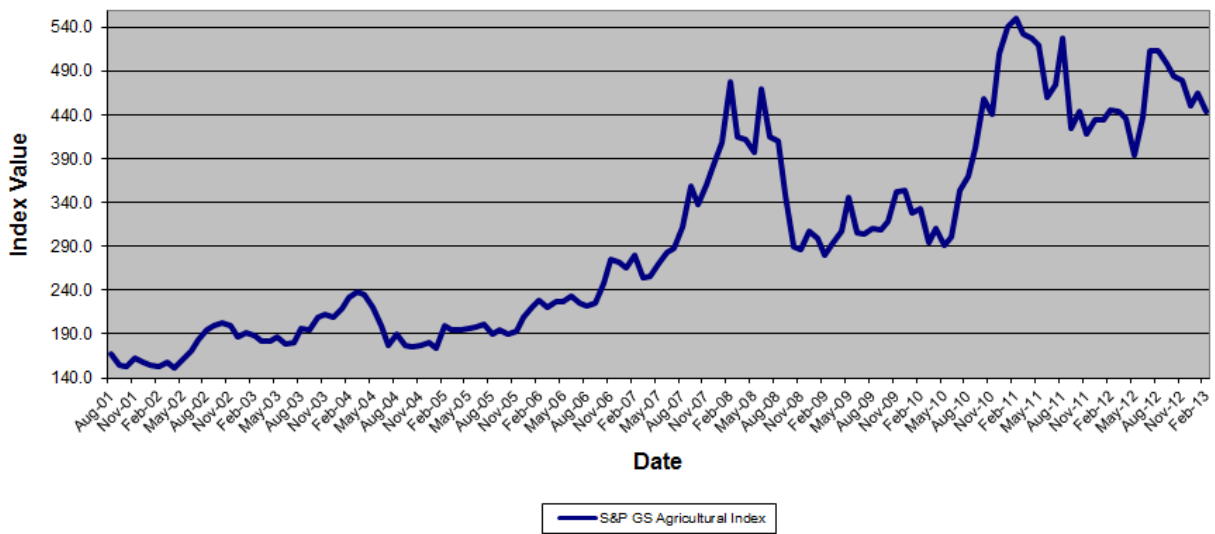
**Iron Ore Spot Price (in China) (\$/tonne)**

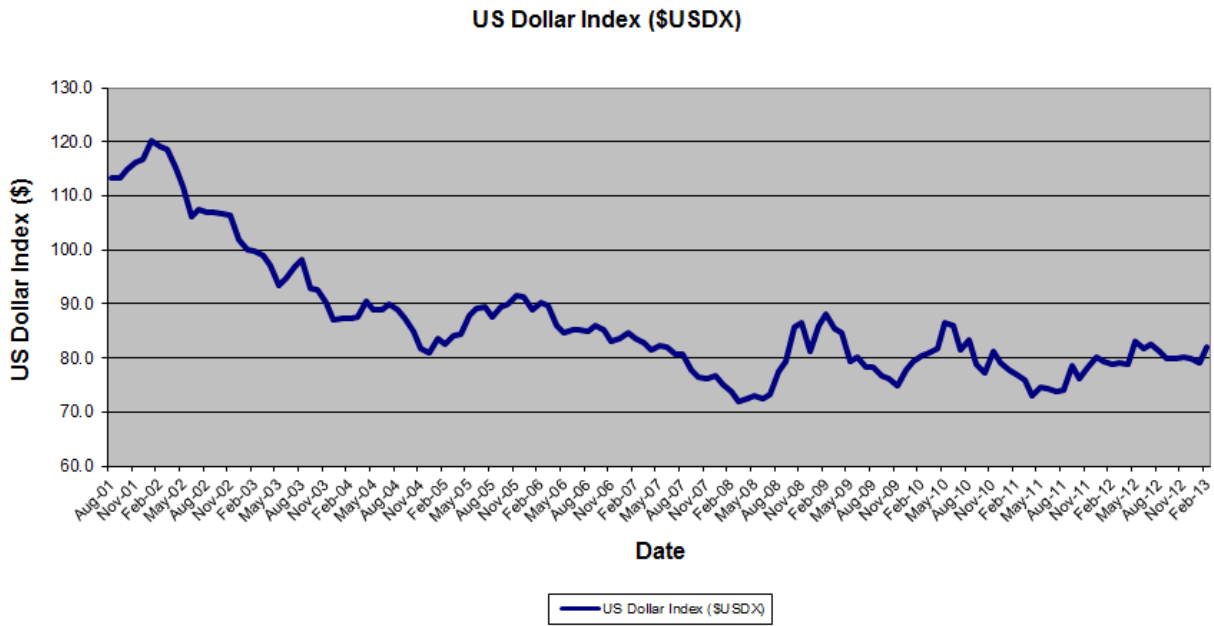


**Copper Price Index (\$/tonne)**



**S&P Goldman Sachs Agricultural Index**





The DXY is a weighted index of some of the major trading partners of the United States. The components of the DXY Index are (by weighting): Euro (57.6%), Japanese Yen (13.6%), Great Britain- Pounds Sterling (11.9%), Canadian Dollar (9.1%), Swedish Krona (4.2%), and Swiss Franc (3.6%).