Fund Update
2025

Powered by Australian Ethical

AE Altius Credit Income Fund (Retail Units)

The Fund invests in a combination of short-term money market instruments and medium-term floating securities that are investment-grade rated. The investment process is designed to maximise returns while balancing the risk and liquidity of the portfolio.

Performance as of October 2025

	1 mth %	3 mths %	1 yr %	3 yrs % p.a.	Since inception %
Gross total return	0.42	1.43	5.71	5.80	4.02
Net total return	0.40	1.36	5.39	5.49	3.71
Benchmark	0.30	0.91	4.11	4.07	2.97
Excess to benchmark	0.10	0.45	1.28	1.41	0.73

Net total returns are calculated after fees and expenses and assume the reinvestment of distributions. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance
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Excess to benchmark is calculated on Net total return.
The benchmark is the Bloomberg AusBond BankBill Index.
Inception date for performance calculations is 28 June 2021

Portfolio Performance and Activity

On the credit front, spreads were largely unchanged at slightly softer over October, after hitting post COVID lows in many markets through September. Credit sentiment was generally positive, reflecting an upbeat equity environment despite growing concerns about private credit lending, tariff threats, political risk in France, and the ongoing US Government shutdown. Major bank spreads for three years were unchanged at 59bps, while five years drifted 3bps wider to 71bps. Single A and BBB indices were also unchanged at 84bps and 110bps, respectively.
Issuance was light in the first half of October, ahead of Bank and Corporate earnings in the US markets. Post earnings blackout, the US primary market accelerated with $131bn of issuance, a record for October. Locally, there was a flurry of corporate issuance in October with $4.8bn. Financial issuance was light ahead of major bank reporting in early November. NAB was the only major bank to issue what would be considered a benchmark deal with a multi-tranche three (fixed/floating) and ten-year fixed deal. A total of $2bn was issued for three years at a margin of 65bps and $1bn for ten years at 103bps. Both deals were well oversubscribed and performed well following pricing. Mid sizes mutual banks were active in both senior and Tier 2 space in October. AMP Bank and Australian Military Bank issued Tier 2 transactions while three-year senior primary coming from Credit Union Australia and Police Bank at margins of 93bps and 105bps, respectively and Peoples First Bank issued $300m for four years at 105bps. Twelve corporate transactions were completed in October with three debut issuers. Inaugural issuance from Patrick Terminals with a seven- and ten-year deal at 125 and 145bps, E.ON (Europe's largest energy company) issuing a green bond for ten years at 138bps, and Weir Group (Scottish engineering company) with a 5.25-year at 165bps. Multiple property trust issuers returned to the market with deals for Stockland, Region, BWP trust. Lend Lease and Ampol issued hybrid debt with Lend Lease issuing non-equity based debt under perpetual non-call 3-year deal, and Ampol issued a 30nc8.25-year equity-credit hybrid at 200bps. Finally, VPN issued a 6.5yr $750m a green bond. The bond was the first to align with the new ASFI taxonomy. The bond proceeds are intended to be allocated to equipment and infrastructure that will support Victoria's RET targets by integrating renewable energy, energy storage and EV's into the grid.

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Socially Responsible Investments in Focus

In a major setback for sustainable finance, the Net Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) has announced its immediate closure after members voted to transition from a member-based alliance to a guidance-only framework. While individual banks can still reference NZBA's climate guidance to shape their own net-zero transition plans, the dissolution marks the loss of a central coordinating body for sector-wide commitments. Without unified pressure, the pace of capital reallocation toward low-carbon projects is expected to slow.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has warned that the collapse of the NZBA could undermine financing for renewable energy deployment and poses a systemic risk to achieving global climate goals and accelerating the energy transition. This concern comes as the IEA revised its global renewable growth forecast downward, citing policy shifts in the US and China. In the US, projections have been cut by nearly 50% due to the phase-out of tax credits and new restrictions on renewable development on federal land.

Meanwhile, the Net Zero Asset Managers (NZAM) initiative announced it will relaunch in January 2026 after a temporary suspension, but with substantially scaled-back commitments. The revised framework removes the 2050 net-zero target, eliminates mandatory interim targets, and drops requirements for asset managers to engage collectively with companies on climate transition plans. These changes mark a shift from a prescriptive, target-driven approach to a more flexible, principles-based model, acknowledging signatories operate across different jurisdictions and regulatory contexts.

In Australia, the Labour government is proposing the first major reform in more than 25 years to the nation's key federal environmental law, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). A key feature of the reforms is the creation of an independent National Environmental Protection Agency, which would be responsible for overseeing compliance, issuing permits and licenses, and auditing environmental performance. Another key feature is the streamlining of project approvals between the Commonwealth and the states for housing, renewable energy, critical minerals, aiming to reduce delays from years to months.

The government also plans to introduce National Environmental Standards to ensure consistent minimum requirements for environmental outcomes and to block projects from causing irreversible harm to critical habitats. These would include new legal tests such as "unacceptable impact" and "net gain" to strengthen biodiversity protection. A controversial "National Interest" provision is also proposed, which allows the Environment Minister to override environmental standards for projects deemed critical (e.g. defense, major infrastructure).

During the month, Queensland also unveiled a new Energy Roadmap, marking a major policy shift in its approach to the energy transition. The roadmap outlines a five-year plan prioritising affordability, reliability and sustainability, with an emphasis on integrating cost-effective technologies to avoid unnecessary price hikes, attracting private sector investment and adopting a more pragmatic sequencing of transition steps.

Queensland repealed its near-term renewable energy targets of 50% by 2030 and 80% by 2035 but retained its legislated 2050 net-zero emissions target. At the same time however, the state is extending the life of its coal-fired power stations, allowing them to operate until the end of their technical lives and possibly beyond if system reliability or economic factors require it. This move effectively positions coal as a continuing part of Queensland's energy mix into the 2040s.

The state has not provided a detailed interim pathway to net-zero by 2050, instead relying on the gradual build-out of renewable energy projects through private capital, increased gas-fired generation capacity as a lower-emissions alternative to coal, carbon offsets and/or Carbon Capture and Storage technologies to close the gap. The new policy shifts the bulk of emissions cuts to later decades, increasing pressure on other sectors and future governments to accelerate the transition and meet the country's 2035 climate target of reducing GHG emissions by 62-70% below 2005 levels.

A recalibration of climate policy was also seen in New Zealand where the nation's 2050 biogenic methane reduction target was lowered from the previous 24-47% cut below 2017 levels to a new range of 14-24%, while keeping the 2030 target at 10%. The revised target is said to reflect the findings of the independent Methane Science Review 2024 and applies specifically to methane emissions from agriculture - primarily livestock. Biogenic methane accounts for nearly half of New Zealand's total gross annual greenhouse gas emissions, with about 91% coming from the agriculture industry. The new targets are based on the principle of "no additional warming", rather than deep emissions cuts, and is perceived to be a weakening of the country's climate commitments.

While the lower target is more achievable, farmers note that reaching the upper-end of 24% will still require accelerated investment in methane-reducing technologies such as feed additives and genetics. To support this, the government has ruled out a methane tax and will instead commit over $400m to develop and deploy methane-reducing technologies. A legislated review in 2040 will reassess the biogenic methane target to ensure alignment with science and progress among key trading partners.

At the same time, New Zealand will ease climate-related disclosure requirements, citing high compliance costs as the key reason. The reporting threshold for listed companies will be raised from NZ$60 million to NZ$1 billion in market capitalisation or quoted debt, thus exempting most small and mid-sized companies from the climate-related disclosure (CRD) regulation, and reducing the number of reporting entities from 164 to 76. Managed investment schemes have also been removed from the regime, and directors will no longer face personal liability for breaches.

For investors, these changes mean reduced ESG transparency for smaller companies, making it more difficult to assess climate-related risks and long-term sustainability strategies.

Outlook

Global Overview

Global inflation patterns remain uneven. China continues to experience disinflation and occasional deflation, while US services inflation has risen due to tariff passthrough effects. In the UK, regulated price adjustments are adding to inflation, and in Australia, higher energy costs, rents, and reduced subsidies are contributing to price pressures. As a result, central bank policy settings and sovereign bond markets are exhibiting increasingly divergent behaviour across economies.

Global economic activity strengthened in anticipation of tariff implementation, and resilience since has been surprisingly robust. This can be attributed partly to delays in tariff escalation and partly to cyclical momentum in Europe. The strong performance of the US technology sector—driven by AI-related capital expenditure—has supported exports from Taiwan and ASEAN economies.

Meanwhile, global term risk premiums remain elevated, reflecting uncertainty around US trade and foreign policy, the unwinding of quantitative easing, the end of Japan's yield curve control, falling foreign exchange reserves, and higher bond issuance requirements from expanding fiscal deficits in major economies. As markets adjust to shifting policy settings and headline volatility, we expect these premiums to moderate over time.

United States

The US economy faces mounting headwinds. Government shutdowns—though frequent historically—have become more prolonged, with the current episode expected to dampen consumer activity and shave up to 0.5% off GDP. Permanent job losses among furloughed workers could further hinder recovery.

Job growth has slowed sharply, falling from over 200,000 new positions per month in late 2024 to just 21,000 this quarter, even before data distortions caused by the shutdown. Employment outside the health and education sectors has contracted throughout most of 2025. Tighter immigration policies have reduced labour supply, masking what would otherwise be a higher unemployment rate. The simultaneous decline in both labour demand and supply signals a broader slowdown in economic momentum.

The US Federal Reserve remains attentive to labour market weakness, though its ability to respond is constrained by persistent uncertainty around inflation trends.

Australia

Australia continues to face a tension between stubborn inflation and a weakening labor market. While headline inflation remains elevated, much of it reflects one-off factors. Unemployment has risen only slightly, suggesting lingering capacity constraints and leaving policy makers uncertain about the true degree of economic slack.

The RBA describes its monetary policy stance as restrictive, though the exact degree of restriction remains debated. With third-quarter inflation exceeding expectations, rate cuts remain inconsistent with the mandate of price stability. Accordingly, we expect the RBA to maintain the cash rate at 3.60% for the foreseeable future.

For sovereign bonds, we anticipate long-term Australian government yields will fluctuate around a midpoint of 4.25% for 10-year maturities, and around 3.5% for shorter-dated bonds. Should global growth slow more sharply than expected and disinflation intensify, fixed-rate bond prices are likely to appreciate, with their defensive qualities supporting accrual and roll-down returns in such conditions.

Sector Profile as at July 2025

Asset Class	Portfolio %
Asset Backed	15.94
Cash at Bank	1.15
Financials	78.56
Industrials	4.35

Ratings Exposure

Rating	Portfolio %
A	32.01
AA	17.43
AAA	17.29
BBB	33.27

Interest Rate Profile

Term	Portfolio %
0 - 30 Days	51.37
1 - 3 Years	2.53
3+ Years	0.62
30 - 90 Days	42.18
90 Days - 1 Year	2.14
[Cash]	1.15

Top 10 Holdings

Issuer	Portfolio %
Commonwealth Bank of Australia	9.20
National Australia Bank Limited	8.00
Great Southern Bank (Australia)	6.58
Teachers Mutual Bank Limited	5.40
Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Limited	5.20
Westpac Banking Corporation	5.00
Bank Australia Limited	4.87
Bank of Queensland Limited	4.33
Norfina Limited	4.10

Portfolio Summary Statistics

	Portfolio
Yield to maturity (%)	4.62
Credit duration (years)	2.26
Modified duration (days)	53.58

Fund snapshot

APIR code	AUS0079AU
Inception date	13 Jun 2017
Distribution frequency	Monthly
Minimum initial investment	$100,000
Fund size (net asset value)	$886.3m
Management fee*	0.20% p.a.
Buy/Sell spread	
Advice fee	

*Refer to the Fund’s Product Disclosure Statement for more details on the Fund’s management costs which also include recoverable expenses and indirect costs. Total management costs may vary.

Zenith

RECOMMENDED

Important Information

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