



# Group of 100 Discount Rate

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Prepared by:

[Craig McCulloch](#), FIAA FFA  
[Jessica Lim](#), CFA, FRM

Level 5  
32 Walker Street  
North Sydney  
NSW 2060

Tel +61 (0)2 8090 9100

[au.milliman.com](http://au.milliman.com)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE .....	1
	RELIANCE AND LIMITATIONS .....	1
<b>2</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS</b> .....	<b>2</b>
	SUMMARY OF THE ASSET CALIBRATION SET .....	2
	INTERPOLATION METHODOLOGY .....	4
	EXTRAPOLATION METHODOLOGY .....	4
<b>3</b>	<b>FITTED YIELD CURVE</b> .....	<b>5</b>

# 1 Background

## OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The Group of 100 has commissioned Milliman to generate a standardised set of discount rates to be made publicly available for the purpose of discounting employee benefit liabilities under Australian Accounting Standard 119 (AASB 119). The scope of the work is limited to Australian employee benefit schemes, and excludes any schemes of foreign subsidiaries of domestic entities which are denominated in foreign currency.

This report provides the Australian corporate bond discount rate curve as at the end of February 2020 produced under the methodology and assumptions described in the 'Discount Rates for Australian Employee Benefit Liability Valuation' report.

## RELIANCE AND LIMITATIONS

In producing this report, we have relied upon the following information:

- Capital market data as sourced from Bloomberg. Should this data be incorrect, it could materially affect the analysis and conclusions drawn from it.

Users of this report should also be aware that it is subject to the following limitations:

- Current debt market conditions. Issuance of corporate bonds is subject to change over time, which may impact upon whether the accounting standard requirements of a deep market are met.
- Current capital market conditions, in particular the liquidity and credit ratings of corporate bond markets, which can change rapidly. The asset calibration set could change very rapidly under stressed market conditions.
- Reassessments of the suitability of the asset calibration set would be needed if the AAA and/or AA corporate bond market thins, which would require a prospective change to the assets selected for AASB 119 calibration purposes.

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## 2 Methodology and Assumptions

### SUMMARY OF THE ASSET CALIBRATION SET

The set of assets to be used to calibrate the discount rate curve is defined by those securities that meet the following conditions:

1. Individual bonds must have the following characteristics:
  - a. Physical bonds, with no embedded derivatives (e.g., callable, puttable, convertible, extendible, variable/floating coupon, index-linked)
  - b. High-quality corporate bonds issued by both domestic and foreign entities
  - c. Payments denominated in Australian dollars (AUD)
  - d. Pay fixed (or zero) coupons, non-inflation-linked
  - e. Maturity terms of greater than one month and less than 10 years
  - f. Minimum amount outstanding on an individual security of \$100 million
  - g. Securitised bonds are included
  
2. A deep market for these bonds must exist, as characterised by the ready availability of observable prices and current trades.

#### What is meant by high quality?

Figure 1 defines the credit ratings by each agency that map to each of these broad categories. This forms the basis for the asset calibration set used in this report.

**FIGURE 1: DEFINITION OF AAA AND AA CREDIT RATINGS BY AGENCY**

CATEGORY	AAA	AA
<b>S&amp;P</b>	AAA	AA+, AA, AA-
<b>FITCH</b>	AAA	AA+, AA, AA-
<b>MOODY'S</b>	AAA	AA1, AA2, AA3

Where there is disagreement between credit rating agencies on particular securities, we use the following conditions:

- If a security has at least two AAA ratings, then it is classified as a AAA security
- If a security has at least two AA ratings, then it is classified as a AA security
- If a security has only been rated by two agencies with different ratings, then the lower rating is used
- If a security has only been rated by one agency, then that rating becomes the sole reference

Hereafter, all references to credit ratings refer to those that meet the above conditions. For the purposes of this paper, we refer to this as the combined credit rating.

## Corporate bond universe

The table in Figure 2 shows the decomposition of the market by the combined credit rating satisfying all but the 'high quality' characteristic.

**FIGURE 2: AUSTRALIAN CORPORATE BOND MARKET OUTSTANDING DEBT BY COMBINED CREDIT RATING (\$ MILLIONS)**

Combined Rating	Number of Securities	Outstanding (\$ Millions)	% of Total
AAA	15	7,125	7.7%
AA	107	29,695	32.1%
A	120	31,625	34.2%
BBB	74	24,060	26.0%
BB	0	0	0.0%
Other	0	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>92,505</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Milliman analysis based upon Bloomberg data as at 28 February 2020.

The table in Figure 3 shows the universe of AAA and AA bonds used in the asset calibration set broken down into the composition of their respective S&P, Moody's and Fitch ratings.

**FIGURE 3: AUSTRALIAN AAA/AA CORPORATE BOND MARKET OUTSTANDING DEBT (\$ MILLIONS)**

Credit Rating Composition	Number of Securities	Outstanding (\$ Millions)	% of Total
<b>Combined Credit Rating of AAA</b>			
3 AAA ratings	0	0	0.0%
2 AAA ratings	14	6,850	96.1%
1 AAA rating	1	275	3.9%
<b>Total Combined AAA</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7,125</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Combined Credit Rating of AA</b>			
3 AA ratings	36	10,775	36.3%
2 AA ratings	60	16,620	56.0%
1 AA rating	11	2,300	7.7%
<b>Total Combined AA</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>29,695</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Milliman analysis based upon Bloomberg data as at 28 February 2020.

## INTERPOLATION METHODOLOGY

For fitting the discount curve to the asset calibration set, the Merrill Lynch Exponential Spline (MLES) method with nine exponential basis functions was used calibrated to yield data as at 28 February 2020, weighting each issue by the inverse duration of the issue. The results of the calibrated MLES parameters are shown in Figure 4.

**FIGURE 4: MLES-CALIBRATED PARAMETERS AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2020**

MLES Parameters		
Long-Run	<b>b0</b>	5.7%
Param1	<b>λ1</b>	180.3%
Param2	<b>λ2</b>	-2.7%
Param3	<b>λ3</b>	-134.2%
Param4	<b>λ4</b>	16.3%
Param5	<b>λ5</b>	50.3%
Param6	<b>λ6</b>	22.2%
Param7	<b>λ7</b>	-43.2%
Param8	<b>λ8</b>	2.4%
Param9	<b>λ9</b>	8.7%

For the calibration of the MLES basis functions, an adjusted R-squared statistical goodness-of-fit measure was applied to the difference between modelled and actual bond prices.

An adjusted R-squared statistic value close to 100% indicates a very good fit, whilst lower values (closer to 0%) indicate poor fits. Figure 5 shows the results of the interpolation analysis used.

**FIGURE 5: ADJUSTED R-SQUARED STATISTIC AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2020**

Regression Statistic	
Adjusted R-Squared	98.8%

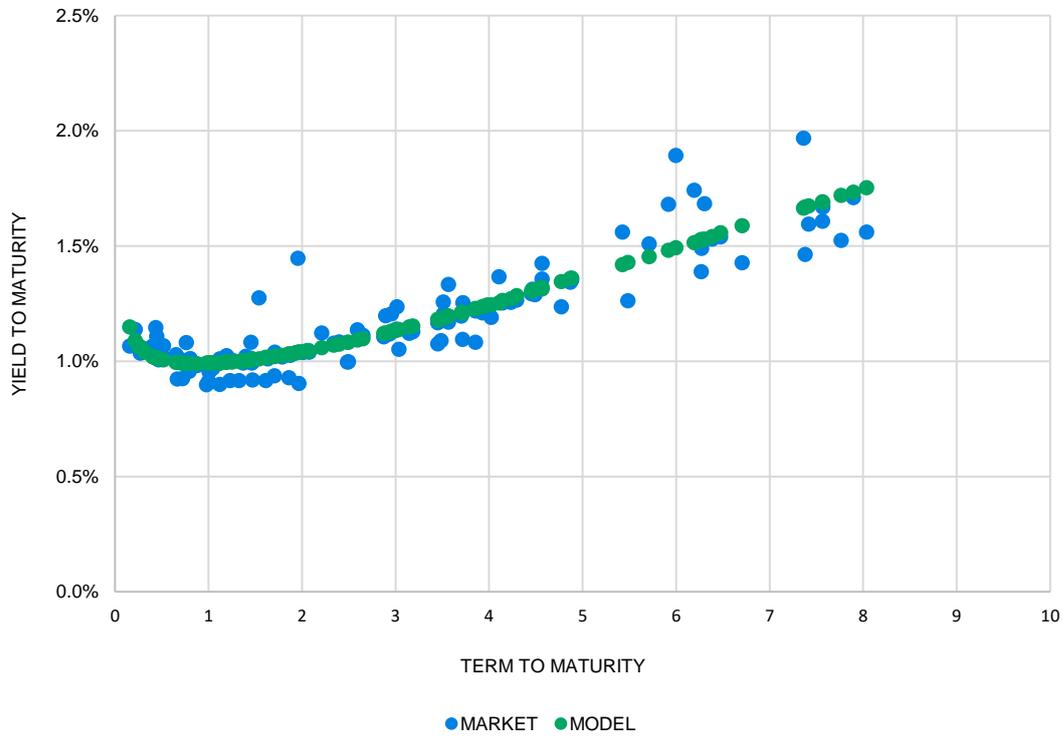
## EXTRAPOLATION METHODOLOGY

For rates beyond 10-year maturities, the fitted yield curve has been extrapolated by assuming that 1-year forward rates remain constant for all subsequent maturities. This is based on the 1-year forward rate between 9- and 10-year maturities, based on the fitted MLES model.

### 3 Fitted Yield Curve

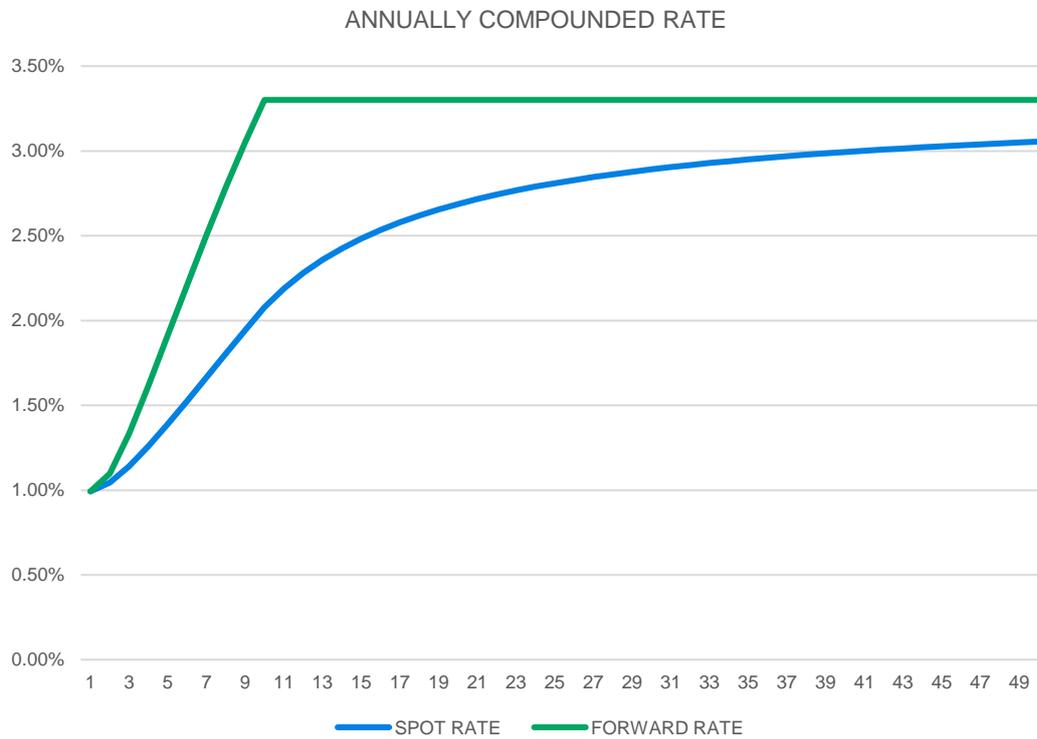
Figure 6 shows the modelled yield-to-maturity for each bond in the asset calibration set, compared with the actual yield-to-maturity, using the MLES method with inverse duration weightings. Note that these are the same bonds as those discussed and analysed in Section 2 above.

**FIGURE 6: MODELLED VS. MARKET YIELDS TO MATURITY FOR ASSET CALIBRATION SET USING THE MLES METHOD WITH INVERSE DURATION WEIGHTINGS**



Figures 7 and 8 show the resulting spot and forward yield curves of one to 50 years for the calibration set using the MLES method and extrapolated with the constant forward rate extrapolation method. Spot rates shown are quoted as annually compounded rates on zero coupon bonds with maturities of the specified term, forward rates shown are 1-year forward rates ending at the specified term.

**FIGURE 7: SPOT AND FORWARD RATE CURVES FOR ASSET CALIBRATION SET USING AN MLES INTERPOLATION AND CONSTANT FORWARD RATE EXTRAPOLATION METHOD**

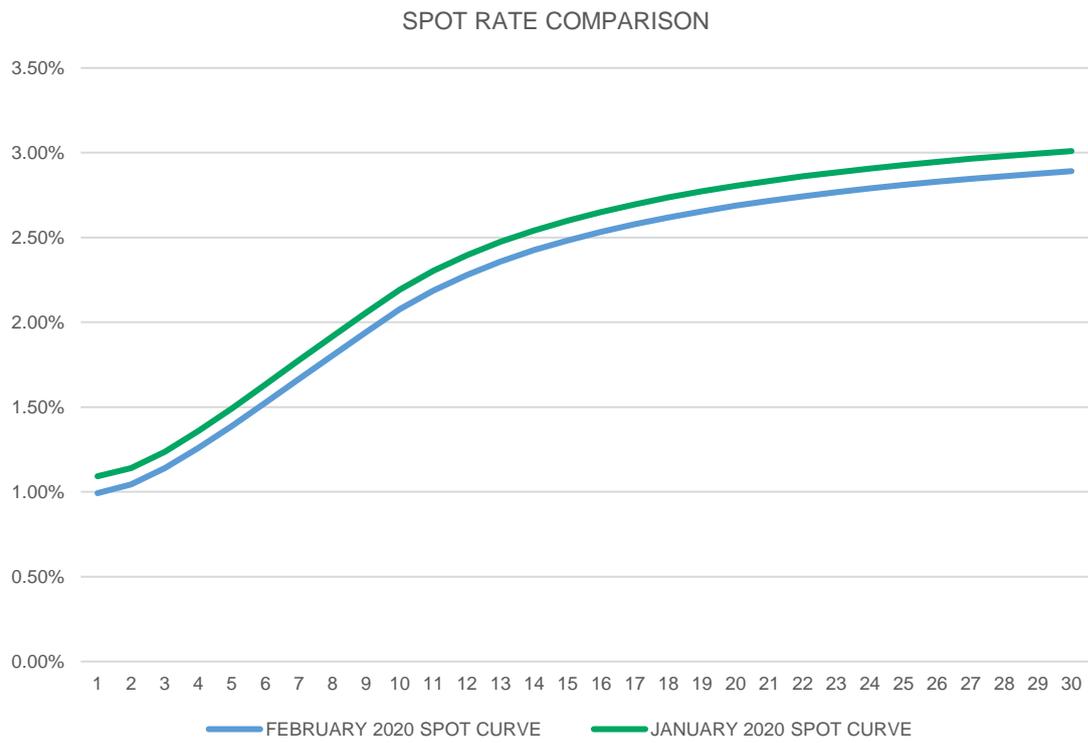


**FIGURE 8: SPOT AND FORWARD RATE CURVES FOR ASSET CALIBRATION SET USING AN MLES INTERPOLATION AND CONSTANT FORWARD RATE EXTRAPOLATION METHOD**

Term (Years)	Spot Rate	Discount Factor	Term (Years)	Spot Rate	Discount Factor
1	0.99%	0.990171	26	2.83%	0.484217
2	1.05%	0.979423	27	2.85%	0.468744
3	1.14%	0.966540	28	2.86%	0.453767
4	1.26%	0.951186	29	2.88%	0.439267
5	1.39%	0.933336	30	2.89%	0.425231
6	1.53%	0.913133	31	2.90%	0.411644
7	1.67%	0.890816	32	2.92%	0.398491
8	1.80%	0.866672	33	2.93%	0.385758
9	1.94%	0.841009	34	2.94%	0.373432
10	2.08%	0.814136	35	2.95%	0.361499
11	2.19%	0.788122	36	2.96%	0.349948
12	2.28%	0.762939	37	2.97%	0.338766
13	2.36%	0.738561	38	2.98%	0.327942
14	2.43%	0.714961	39	2.99%	0.317463
15	2.48%	0.692116	40	2.99%	0.307319
16	2.53%	0.670001	41	3.00%	0.297499
17	2.58%	0.648592	42	3.01%	0.287993
18	2.62%	0.627868	43	3.02%	0.278791
19	2.66%	0.607806	44	3.02%	0.269883
20	2.69%	0.588384	45	3.03%	0.261259
21	2.72%	0.569584	46	3.03%	0.252911
22	2.74%	0.551384	47	3.04%	0.244830
23	2.77%	0.533765	48	3.04%	0.237007
24	2.79%	0.516710	49	3.05%	0.229434
25	2.81%	0.500199	50	3.05%	0.222103

Figure 9 shows the resulting spot rate curve of one to 30 years relative to the prior period fitted curve.

FIGURE 9: SPOT RATE CURVES RELATIVE TO PRIOR PERIOD FITTED CURVE





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#### CONTACT

**Craig McCulloch**  
[craig.mcculloch@milliman.com](mailto:craig.mcculloch@milliman.com)

**Jessica Lim**  
[jessica.lim@milliman.com](mailto:jessica.lim@milliman.com)

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