

# PROXY VOTING POLICY

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## PROXY VOTING POLICY

### I. Introduction

NS Partners have a fiduciary duty to vote proxies both in a timely manner and in the best interest of clients. The central tenet of our proxy voting policy is that good corporate governance enhances long-term shareholder value. NS Partners utilizes the proxy research and voting services of Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) to help assess and vote proxies in accordance with this voting policy. Additionally, NS Partners receives assistance from the Stewardship and Engagement team at Connor, Clark, and Lunn Financial Group, in the execution and tracking of proxies voted. Taking into account NS Partners' guidelines below, ISS prepares voting recommendations for all proposals on which we are entitled to vote. NS Partners uses these recommendations as a guide; however, certain situations will warrant additional review. Where there is a recommendation to vote against management, we either reach out to the fund manager for a decision, as our managers have close relationships with smaller companies particularly in emerging markets, or to the company to gain a better understanding of the issue at hand. As a result of this engagement and our assessment of the relevant information, NS Partners may choose to vote contrary to the ISS recommendation. The policy that follows is not meant to be exhaustive due to the variety of proxy voting issues NS Partners may be required to consider and we may depart from these guidelines to avoid voting decisions that we believe may be contrary to our clients' best interest.

While NS Partners takes its voting responsibilities very seriously and uses its best efforts to exercise these rights in all cases, there may be situations when it may be impractical or impossible for NS Partners to vote. Such circumstances include a limited number of international markets where share blocking applies or when securities are on loan to a third party. Due to the liquidity and administrative challenges, NS Partners will typically not vote in these situations. NS Partners may deviate from this approach if the situation warrants.

### II. Shareholder Rights

**General guidelines:** NS Partners will generally vote in favour of proposals that improve corporate governance practices and give shareholders a greater voice in the affairs of the company and, conversely, oppose measures that seek to limit those rights. NS Partners believe that shareholders with meaningful ownership should have the right to call a special meeting and will generally vote against proposals restricting this right. Regarding proxy access, NS Partners will generally support giving shareholders the right to nominate directors, provided nominations reflect a reasonable level of stock ownership and the nominees are well qualified and prepared to act in the interests of all shareholders. Additionally, NS Partners will generally oppose advance notice bylaws that impose unreasonable conditions on shareholders who wish to nominate directors to the board. NS Partners will generally vote against proposals that give management the authority to adjourn or extend a meeting unless compelling reasons are provided. NS Partners will review proxy contests on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the long-term company performance, background to the contested election, nominee qualifications and other relevant factors.

**Voting standard:** NS Partners believe that shareholders should have the right to vote in proportion to their ownership and therefore support the principal of one-share, one-vote. Accordingly, NS Partners will generally vote against the authorization or issue of shares that do not have full and equal voting rights, against proposals that support or perpetuate dual share class structures and for proposals to eliminate dual share class structures. NS Partners prefer that companies adopt a majority voting for individual directors in uncontested elections. NS Partners will generally oppose supermajority voting requirements if they are in attempt to diminish the rights of minority shareholders.

**Anti-takeover measures:** NS Partners believe measures that impede takeovers or entrench management not only infringe on the rights of shareholders but may also have a detrimental effect on the value of the company. Accordingly, NS Partners will analyse such proposals on a case-by-case basis. NS Partners will generally oppose proposals that entrench management or excessively dilute shareholder

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ownership, regardless of whether they are advanced by management or shareholders. Conversely, NS Partners will generally support proposals that restrict or otherwise eliminate anti-takeover measures that have already been adopted by corporate issuers.

### III. Board of Directors

**General guidelines:** NS Partners believe that directors have a duty to shareholders, and we may withhold votes for directors that fail to act on key issues.

**Staggered boards:** NS Partners oppose staggered boards as it is our belief that they can entrench existing management and unduly deter takeovers. Therefore, NS Partners will generally vote for proposals to declassify the board of directors.

**Independence:** NS Partners believe in the importance of an independent board of directors and consider a board to be sufficiently independent when greater than fifty percent of directors are independent. In Japan, this threshold is lowered to one third, which NS Partners believe to be sufficient at present, however this will be revisited as corporate governance reform progresses in the Japanese market. If the proposed board does not meet our independence criteria, NS Partners will generally vote against all non-independent candidates, except for the CEO, as this position is by nature non-independent and in most situations voting against a CEO could be unnecessarily disruptive. While NS Partners support insiders as board members as we feel they provide valuable knowledge and insight to the company, we believe that insider representation should largely reflect level of ownership or control, and therefore we may refrain from voting against certain non-independent candidates or vote against insiders if the number of insiders serving on a board is excessive. Furthermore, NS Partners believe that key committees (Audit, Compensation, Nomination and Governance) should be purely independent and will typically vote against non-independent directors serving on these committees.

**Separation of Chair and CEO:** NS Partners believe that the responsibilities of the CEO and board Chair are fundamentally different and should thus be filled by different individuals. Therefore, NS Partners will support proposals to separate the roles of CEO and Chair and will consider voting against the Chair of the Nomination Committee when the roles are combined, and a lead independent director has not been established.

**Gender diversity:** NS Partners believe that board diversity has positive, long-term implications for a company's performance, and therefore, will generally vote against the Chair of the Nomination Committee if a board lacks female representation.

**Attendance:** NS Partners will typically vote against directors who have attended less than 75% of the board meetings held within a given year without a valid reason for these absences.

**Tenure:** NS Partners oppose age and term limits for individual directors and prefer to see board renewal occur through an annual evaluation process which assesses the effectiveness of the board, its committees and individual directors. If the average tenure of the board exceeds 10 years, NS Partners may vote against the longest-serving member of the board, other than the CEO.

**Over-boarding:** NS Partners will generally vote against directors who are over boarded. We consider a director over boarded if he/she: i) sits on more than a total of five public company boards; or ii) is a CEO and sits on more than a total of two public company boards.

### IV. Corporate Structure

**General guidelines:** Changes in a company's charter, articles of incorporation or by-laws are often technical and administrative in nature. Absent a compelling reason to the contrary, NS Partners will most often vote in accordance with the company's management on such proposals. However, NS Partners will review and analyze on a case-by-case basis any non-routine proposals that are likely to affect the structure and operation of the company or have a material economic effect on the company.

**Mergers & acquisitions:** NS Partners will review proposed mergers and acquisitions transactions on a case-by-case basis considering them based on their strategic rationale, valuation, long-term interest, and impact on shareholders' rights.

**Share issuance:** NS Partners oppose increases in authorized common stock where there is evidence that the shares will be used to implement a poison pill or other anti-takeover devices, or if the issuance of new shares could excessively dilute the value of the outstanding shares.

**Buybacks:** NS Partners will consider share buyback proposals on a case-by-case basis taking into account the impact on long-term shareholder value, the level of disclosure, whether there is evidence that the buyback is being carried out to reward company insiders, and other relevant factors.

### V. Executive Remuneration

**General guidelines:** NS Partners believe that robust executive remuneration guidelines are vital to the functioning of public companies and are a key expression of good corporate governance. While NS Partners are mindful of the complexity of this subject and the varying practices across markets, industries and capitalizations, the following principles guide our voting on matters of executive remuneration. NS Partners will consider factors such as company performance, pay-for-performance alignment, and level of disclosure when voting on proposals related to compensation. Additionally, NS Partners will consider metrics such as CEO base pay, overall CEO compensation, the multiple of annual CEO remuneration to median remuneration of all other employees, the multiple of annual CEO remuneration to the median of all other senior executives, dilution, and the annual burn rate. Should NS Partners have concerns regarding any of these metrics, we may vote against an advisory vote on executive compensation and may also consider voting against the Chair and members of the Compensation Committee.

### VI. Director Remuneration

**General guidelines:** NS Partners believe that that pay for non-executive directors should be structured in such a way that ensures independence, objectivity, and alignment with shareholders' interests. Non-executive directors should not receive performance-based pay such as performance stock units (PSUs) or stock options, as this can encourage excessive risk-taking and impair objectivity. Instead, NS Partners prefer non-executive directors receive compensation in the form of cash or alternatively, restricted stock units (RSUs) or deferred stock units (DSUs), which have the same economic interest as shares, and therefore directly align the interests of directors with those of shareholders.

### VII. Audit Function

**General guidelines:** NS Partners believes that the company remains in the best position to select an auditor and will generally support management's recommendation. However, NS Partners recognize there may be inherent conflicts of interest arising when a company's auditor provides substantial non-audit related services for the company. Therefore, NS Partners may vote against the appointment of an auditor if the fees for non-audit related services are disproportionate to the total audit fees paid by the company or there are other reasons to question the independence of the company's auditors.

### VIII. Responsible Investment

**General guidelines:** As a signatory of the UN-backed Principles for Responsible Investment, NS Partners takes into account environmental and social implications in our proxy voting. Specific proposals related to Environmental and Social issues will be reviewed and analyzed on a case-by-case basis, however NS Partners will generally vote in favour of shareholder proposals that seek to improve disclosure of environmental risks and will also generally vote in favour of shareholder proposals to improve transparency regarding social issues provided it is in the best interest of shareholders.

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NS Partners recognizes that climate change poses both risks and opportunities for companies. As supporters of the now disbanded Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), we continue to encourage companies to strengthen governance oversight of climate change, adopt cost-effective GHG emissions reduction measures, and provide transparency and comprehensive climate-related disclosures.

NS Partners will vote on a case-by-case basis, but generally supports climate-related proposals seeking increased disclosure of climate-related risks.

### **IX. Proxy Voting Records**

NS Partners provides a summary of its proxy voting record to its clients on a quarterly basis. Additional information is available to our clients on request.