



Easter @ stone|house



As winter approaches and the weather grows cooler, the government's response to cost of living pressures in the 2024-25 Federal Budget has garnered significant attention, particularly its measures aimed at addressing inflation.

Consumers are feeling the pinch of rising living costs, keeping their wallets firmly closed. After a boost from the 'Taylor Swift effect' in the previous month, retail sales fell by 0.4% in March. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) saw a quarterly increase, pushing the annual rate to 3.6%. Notably, education, health, housing, and food recorded the most significant price hikes.

Financial markets remained subdued amid concerns over potential interest rate hikes in both Australia and the US. The S&P/ASX 200 index declined by approximately 2.5% in April, reflecting investor caution. Some economists are predicting that we may not see the first cuts in interest rates until November. Mining stocks have been generally buoyant as commodity prices continue to surge while the energy and retail sectors have struggled.

The Australian dollar recovered from its mid-month slump, ending April at just over US65c. But with a strengthening US dollar, economists are rethinking their six-month outlooks for the Aussie with predictions now of between US65c and US69c. The surprise player in our currency's fortunes has been the ailing Japanese yen. Its weakness has been our gain with the Aussie ending April above 100 yen, its highest level since 2014.



We are thrilled to announce that Matt Devin has started his Professional Year in our Sunshine Coast office. Matt's journey to become an Australian financial adviser is well underway, and we are excited to see the positive impact he will have on our Stonehouse clients.



New Increased Super Contribution Caps



Jeremy Chiel
Director

As the end of financial year gets closer, some investors are thinking about the most effective ways to boost their super balance, particularly with an increase in the caps on contributions from 1 July.

The concessional contributions cap, (the maximum before-tax contributions you can add to your super each year without paying extra tax), is increasing to \$30,000 from \$27,500 in the new financial year.ⁱ

The cap increases in line with average weekly ordinary earnings (AWOTE).

It is also useful to be aware of payment and reporting timelines. For example, your employer can make super guarantee contributions up until 28 July for the final quarter of the financial year and salary sacrifice contributions up until 30 June.

Any amounts showing on the ATO website for your account are based on when your fund reports to the ATO.

Carry Forward Unused Amounts

If you haven't made extra contributions in past years, you may have unused concessional cap amounts.

These can be carried forward, allowing you to contribute more as long as your super balance is less than \$500,000 at 30 June of the previous financial year.

You can carry forward up to five years of concessional contributions cap amounts.

Getting Close to Exceeding the Cap?

If you're worried about going over the cap, you may wish to stop any further

voluntary contributions based on an assessment of the extra tax you will pay.

For those with two or more employers, you may opt out of receiving the super guarantee from one of the employers.

Meanwhile, if special circumstances have caused you to exceed your cap, it's possible to apply to the ATO for some or all of the contributions to be disregarded or allocated to the next financial year.

But, if all else fails and you have exceeded the cap, the excess contributions will be included in your assessable income and taxed at your marginal rate less a 15 per cent tax offset. The good news is that you can withdraw up to 85 per cent of the excess contributions from your super fund to pay your tax bill. Any excess contributions left in the fund will be counted towards your non-concessional contributions cap.

Timing is Everything

The upcoming Stage 3 tax cuts, which commence on 1 July 2024, may affect the value of your concessional contributions. For some, tax benefits may be greater if contributions are made before the tax cuts begin.

Please check with us about your circumstances to make sure you make the most effective move.

Non-concessional Cap Also Increased

The non-concessional contributions cap is the maximum of after-tax contributions you can make to your super each year without paying extra tax.ⁱⁱ

The non-concessional cap is exactly four times the amount of the concessional cap so it increases from \$110,000 to \$120,000.

If you exceed the cap, you may be eligible to use the 'bring forward rule', which allows you to use caps from future years and possibly avoid paying extra tax. It means you can make contributions of up to two or three times the annual cap amount in the first year of the bring forward period.ⁱⁱⁱ

If your total super balance is equal to or more than the general transfer balance cap (\$1.9 million from 2023–24 and 2024–25) at the end of the previous financial year, your non-concessional contributions cap is zero for the current financial year.

We'd be happy to help with advice about how the changes in contribution caps might affect you and whether you are eligible for the bring forward rule.

ⁱ Understanding concessional and non-concessional contributions | Australian Taxation Office (ato.gov.au)

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ⁱⁱⁱ Non-concessional contributions cap | Australian Taxation Office (ato.gov.au)

Refinancing Your Mortgage: Your Ticket to Financial Empowerment



Steve Kellaway
Partner

In the ever-evolving world of finance, homeowners have a golden ticket to boost their financial well-being: refinancing their mortgage. This strategic move allows you to renegotiate the terms of your existing home loan, potentially scoring better interest rates, terms, or overall financial outcomes. Whether you're eyeing lower monthly payments, a shorter loan term, accessing home equity, or consolidating debt, mastering the art of refinancing is key. So, let's dive into the nuts and bolts of refinancing and arm you with actionable insights to navigate this terrain with confidence.

Understanding Refinancing: The Basics

Refinancing is like hitting the reset button on your mortgage. It involves swapping your current mortgage for a new one with more favourable terms. The goal? Achieving financial milestones like slashing your interest rate, tweaking your loan term, or unlocking equity in your property for investment.

Assessing Your Goals: Setting the Course

First things first: pinpoint your financial goals. Do you want to slash monthly payments, secure a stable interest rate, pay off your mortgage sooner, or put your home equity to work? Knowing what you want upfront helps tailor your refinancing strategy to fit your unique needs.

Evaluating Your Current Mortgage: Know Where You Stand

Take a deep dive into your existing mortgage details: interest rate, remaining balance, repayment schedule, you name it. Pro tip: reach out to your lender and see if they'll sweeten the deal with a better interest rate.

Define Your Ideal Loan: Setting Expectations

Don't settle for a loan that doesn't tick all your boxes. Decide if you need perks like a 100% offset account or multiple offset accounts for better financial organisation. Consider whether a fixed or variable repayment structure suits you best and weigh the benefits of paying principal & interest versus interest-only payments.

Exploring Refinancing Options: Shopping Around

With your goals in sight, explore your refinancing options. Compare interest rates, loan terms, and costs from various lenders. Think professional package loans, basic loans, or fixed-term loans, and pick the one that fits like a glove.

Crunching the Numbers: Financial Reality Check

Now, let's get down to brass tacks. Calculate potential costs and savings associated with refinancing. Think about exit fees, interest rates, loan terms, and ongoing fees. Online calculators or a chat with your mortgage broker can help forecast monthly savings and your break-even point.

Navigating the Application Process: Dotting the I's

You've found your match—time to seal the deal. Gather necessary documents like income proof, employment history, credit score, and property appraisal. Work hand-in-hand with your chosen mortgage broker to breeze through the application and secure final approval.

Monitoring Your Progress: Stay on Track

Post-refinancing, stay vigilant. Keep tabs on your payments, interest rates, and loan balance to ensure you're on the road to financial victory. Periodically reassess your strategy and don't hesitate to refinance again if the winds of change blow your way.

In Conclusion: Your Path to Financial Freedom

Refinancing isn't just a financial manoeuvre—it's your ticket to financial empowerment. Armed with knowledge, clarity, and the right strategy, you can steer your mortgage ship toward a brighter future. Whether it's slashing monthly payments, shortening your loan term, or tapping into home equity, refinancing puts the power in your hands. Ready to unlock your mortgage's full potential? Let us help you get started on your refinancing journey today.





Celebrating 20 Years of Dedication: Sarah Bridge

We are thrilled to announce a remarkable milestone: Sarah Bridge has celebrated her 20th anniversary with Stonehouse, previously known as Strategic Aims. This significant occasion, marked on the 10th of May, 2024, is a testament to Sarah's unwavering dedication and outstanding contributions to our firm.

Sarah's journey with us began two decades ago when she joined as a Personal Assistant (PA). At just 17 years old and with no prior

experience in the financial planning industry, Sarah quickly adapted and mastered her role. Initially employed as Ben's PA and understudy to Bel, who was Andrew's PA at the time, Sarah's rapid learning curve and exceptional performance set her apart.

Reflecting on Sarah's time with us, Andrew, Ben, the Board, Partners, Advisers, management, and team express immense gratitude and admiration for her invaluable contributions. As Ben shares, "Thank you so much for your incredible contribution to the success of our business, Sarah. You were an integral part of the team from the very outset and remain so to this day. With much love and gratitude."

Sarah's reliability, knowledge, and friendly demeanor have made her a beloved member of our Stonehouse family. Jeremy fondly remarks, "Congratulations, Sarah Bridge! You're a star! Always reliable, knowledgeable, and friendly. You've come a long way over the 20 years, and it's certainly been a journey at Stonehouse!"

Declan adds, "Congratulations, Sarah, for putting up with us for so long! Stonehouse

would be a very different business today if we weren't blessed with your help over the years. Thank you for everything that you've done and continue to do to help keep things running smoothly."

Sarah's commitment and work ethic are exemplified in her every action, making her an integral part of our business. One of our partners states, "Congratulations, Sarah, on 20 years with Stonehouse/Strategic Aims. You are such an integral member of our business, and your years of service are a reflection of your work ethic, commitment, and the value you bring to Stonehouse."

As we celebrate this incredible milestone, we invite everyone to join us in honouring Sarah Bridge for her 20 years of dedication and excellence. Her journey with us is a source of inspiration, and we look forward to many more years of shared success and achievements.

Thank you, Sarah, for your unwavering support and contributions. Here's to celebrating you and the bright future ahead! Please join us in congratulating Sarah on this incredible milestone.

5 MINUTES WITH... Cath Perry



Introducing Cath Perry: Stonehouse Group's Dynamic New General Manager

We are thrilled to announce that Cath Perry has joined the Stonehouse team as our new General Manager. Cath brings an impressive blend of expertise, experience, and vision, and she is set to lead Stonehouse towards a bright and innovative future.

What is Your Role?

As the General Manager, Cath is responsible for overseeing all operations within Stonehouse. She will manage our dedicated staff, ensure that we meet our strategic objectives, and guide our business through an evolving landscape with her exceptional leadership skills.

What Do You Enjoy About Your Role?

Cath is passionate about leveraging technology to revolutionize financial services. She believes in the transformative power of great financial advice and enjoys driving innovation and operational excellence. Her results-driven approach and visionary leadership are the cornerstones of her success, and she is eager to bring these qualities to Stonehouse.

Work History/Career Highlights

Cath's extensive career spans over 35 years at the intersection of technology and the financial industry, consistently driving innovation, operational excellence, and revenue growth. As the CEO and Founder of CP Consulting, she provided strategic guidance across various sectors, including financial advice, wealth management, and insurance, emphasizing product development and effective technology ecosystems. Her leadership roles at prominent companies like Advice RegTech, Electricity Technology, Morningstar, AdviserLogic,

IRESS, and Aon Hewitt highlight her expertise in managing financial planning technology products, empowering advisers to deliver client outcomes, developing innovative business strategies, and driving commercial success. Cath's deep industry knowledge as a former Financial Adviser and hands-on leadership style make her exceptionally well-suited to guide Stonehouse towards a prosperous future.

Family Life and Hobbies

Outside of her professional achievements, Cath is a devoted family person who loves travelling and learning new cultures and languages. She enjoys sewing, art, music, golf, sailing, and tennis, and cherishes spending time with her two grandsons.

Final Thoughts

At Stonehouse, we are confident that Cath's strategic vision, technological expertise, and exceptional leadership will drive our company to new heights. Her customer-centric approach and passion for delivering exceptional experiences align perfectly with our mission to provide intelligent, tailored financial solutions.

Please join us in welcoming Cath Perry to the Stonehouse family. We are excited about the future under her leadership and look forward to achieving great things together.

