

Border to Coast Global Equity Alpha Fund



Proxy Voting Report

Period: April 01, 2021 – June 30, 2021

Votes Cast	1829	Number of Meetings	113
For	1636	With Management	1576
Abstain	11	Against Management	247
Against	177	Other	6
Other	5		
Total	1829	Total	1829

In 75% of meetings we have cast one or more votes against management recommendation.

General Highlight

A new frontier in the fight against climate change

Climate change is now a cornerstone of investor stewardship but addressing this topic through votes at shareholder meetings is relatively novel. However, the 2021 proxy voting season has demonstrated that boards will be held accountable for their climate-related oversight by proxy advisors, activist groups, and institutional investors alike.

Historically, shareholders have addressed their climate change concerns to boards through filing shareholder proposals. In the US for instance, the number of climate-related shareholder proposals filed has steadily risen over the years, from 34 in 2012 to over 140 in 2020. Of the proposals filed, many get withdrawn if the request is adopted by the company, but some proposals are also challenged by companies and omitted from the AGM. Although these challenges are intended for poorly drafted or immaterial proposals, companies lagging in climate action often use this mechanism to skirt the concerns raised by shareholders. In these cases, shareholders may escalate their climate-concerns by voting against the nomination of board directors such as the chairman or members of the audit or sustainability committees.

Holding directors accountable for a company's (inadequate) approach to climate change could become the norm. Just recently, Majority Action – an ESG focused shareholder activist group – published their 'Proxy Voting for a 1.5°C World' campaign, which outlines a list of systemically important companies in the three key industries that have not set emissions targets aligned to limiting warming to 1.5°C. The campaign calls on institutional investors to use their voting rights to vote against company directors that have failed in their oversight responsibilities to address escalating climate change.

One of the challenges in adopting such a voting approach is consistently identifying which companies are not in line with a 1.5°C or Paris-aligned scenario. Companies and international organizations often use different methods to calculate their long-term 2050 climate change scenarios, which is then reflected by the discrepancies in short-term targets. Nonetheless, there are several resources like the Climate Action 100+ Net-Zero Benchmark or the Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI) that investors can use to help track the climate change targets set by companies. The Border to Coast voting guidelines incorporate the toolkit of the TPI to flag companies where a vote against the chairman of the board is warranted due to climate-related concerns. These benchmarks also enable investors to monitor the annual progress made by companies, and to determine whether to escalate their approach to voting and engagement.

These new guidelines for proxy voting underscore that, where companies are failing to develop effective climate transition plans, boards will appropriately be held accountable. While institutional investors' definitions of what is appropriate may vary, the importance and urgency of holding directors accountable are clear.

Market Highlight

Japan – Catching up on Corporate Governance

Japan is historically a laggard when it comes to corporate governance practices compared to other developed market peers. However, it is taking strides to catch up. The Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE), Japan's major stock exchange, has announced a market restructuring plan to take effect in the spring of 2022. The goal is to make the Japanese market more attractive for international institutional investors. TSE intends to create different market segments where the new Prime Market will consist of only large-cap companies and require higher standards of corporate governance.

To achieve this higher standard of corporate governance, the council of Japan's Corporate Governance Code initiated a revision of the code. The revision focused on several key topics: ensuring board independence, promoting diversity, the inclusion of sustainability and ESG. The council held a public consultation round for institutional investors. Robeco participated in this consultation in April and some of our recommendations were reflected in the final version of the code that was published in June.

The code further incorporates the importance of sustainability, referencing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). It pushes companies to improve disclosures on specific sustainability issues such as climate, diversity, and risk management. Specifically for the Prime Market, it asks companies to make relevant disclosures available in English and support electronic voting, further aligning with global best practices. Furthermore, the code pushes for an increase in independence both within the board as well as specific committees. Importantly, the code now asks for an even higher level of independence of boards when there is a controlling shareholder, a majority for the Prime Market, and one-third for other markets.

Although many welcome the changes to the corporate governance code, some are skeptical of the circumstances in which the changes were made. Since these changes were instigated by the market restructuring some argue that the changes are too focused on the Prime Market leaving too low a bar for the remaining market segments. Critics argue that because of the simultaneous changes of the market as well as the corporate governance standards, both have been diluted too much to appease the different groups affected. The Prime Market was intended to be an exclusive group of a few hundred of the largest market cap Japanese companies that could compete on the global stage. The most recent outlooks seem to be watered down, with an estimated 1500 companies qualifying for the Prime Market at a market cap threshold of around JPY 10bn instead of the original JPY 100bn. Additionally, the code will remain based on the "comply or explain" rule without legal enforcement.

Since the newest version of the code was published during the 2021 annual shareholder season in Japan, the true implications of the code will not be visible until next year. For now, although the progress might be less extensive than some corporate governance experts might have hoped, it is undeniably moving in the right direction.

Voting Highlights

Johnson & Johnson - 04/22/2021 - United States

Proposal: Shareholder Proposals Regarding Report on Access to COVID-19 Products, Independent Chair, Racial Impact Audit, and Bonus Deferral Policy

Johnson & Johnson researches and develops, manufactures, and sells various products in the health care field worldwide. It operates in three segments: Consumer, Pharmaceutical, and Medical Devices.

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) had four shareholder proposals (SHP) filed at this year's AGM. Perhaps the doubling of the number of SHPs filed at its AGMs compared to recent years was due to J&J's successful creation of a Covid-19 vaccine which put it in the limelight. Alternatively, the high number of SHPs might be a sign of the diverse topics of importance to shareholders during this AGM season. We expect shareholder resolutions to continue to grow in number in the coming years, reflecting the increased focus on ESG topics by investors.

Historically, SHPs at J&J have focused on governance topics of remuneration and independent oversight. These topics also returned at this year's AGM and received sizeable support with one SHP asking for an independent chair (43%) and another for a bonus deferral policy (22%). We supported both these proposals since they are in line with best practices.

This year's AGM also saw the introduction of two new SHPs with topics closely tied to recent events. The first SHP was filed at several pharmaceutical companies who were successful in creating a Covid-19 vaccine. It asked the company to report on how public financial support for development of a vaccine or therapeutics for COVID-19 is being taken into account in access to such products, such as price-setting. We believe this proposal helps ensure that any medical breakthroughs derived from the public's contribution will be priced in an accessible way so that communities of all income levels will benefit equally. Therefore, we supported the proposal which gained support of nearly 32% of the shareholders.

The final SHP filed at the AGM appears to be closely linked to the global support gained by the BLM movement during 2020. The proposal asks the company to conduct and publish a third-party audit to review the racial impact of its policies and practices, to provide recommendations for improving the company's racial impact. The company has already made a commitment to address certain racial issues within its products and product development and we believe this proposal would further promote the integration of diversity and inclusion. Over a third of all shareholders shared this sentiment and supported the proposal.

The wide spread of SHP topics indicates that companies need to increasingly broaden their scope of attention to meet shareholder and community expectations of good corporate responsibility.

Amazon.com Inc. - 05/26/2021 - United States

Proposal: Shareholder Proposals Asking for the Company to Act on Issues related to Climate Change, Working Conditions, Inclusivity.

Amazon.com Inc. is a U.S. multinational technology company that engages in the retail sale of consumer products and subscriptions, in North America and internationally. The company focuses on e-commerce, cloud computing, digital streaming, and artificial intelligence.

The shareholder proposals up for vote at the company's annual shareholder meeting largely concerned racial and equity issues, as well as antitrust topics, and responsible use of the company's facial recognition technology. We supported all of the 11 shareholder proposals, asking the company to take action on these topics, aiming to make the company a more transparent and conscientious corporate citizen. Even though the shareholder resolutions were non-binding, they were a way to raise our concerns on certain corporate policies and put pressure on improving Amazon's practices related to civil rights, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Among the 11 proposals submitted by shareholders, we supported the one asking from the company's board to adopt a policy to require that the chair of the board shall be an independent director who has not previously served as an executive officer. From a shareholder's point of view, we believe that an independent chair strengthens corporate governance and has a better oversight of management practices, leading to shareholder value creation.

We also supported the resolution asking the company to report on plastic packaging and setting goals to reduce the impact of plastic pollution. According to the proponent's statement, Amazon approximately generates 465 million pounds of plastic packaging waste, of which 22 million ends in the ocean. We acknowledge the environmental risks coming from plastic pollution and we encouraged the company to take necessary action to address this issue by supporting this resolution.

Additionally, we supported the resolution asking the board to adopt a policy that promotes representation of employees' perspectives among corporate decisions, by including employees in the list of candidates put forward by the Nominating and Governance Committee. Employee representation on the board helps companies consider the views of an important stakeholder group, and is standard practice in some other markets. Even though it is not prevalent in the US yet, we believe it could play an important role in ensuring more responsible company management.

Lastly, we voted in favor of the three resolutions asking for an analysis of the company's impact on civil rights, a human rights impact report assessing the risks incurred by facial recognition technology, and a report on customer due diligence related to facial recognition products. Robeco co-filed the resolution on enhanced customer due diligence as part of our engagement with the company on the social impact of artificial intelligence. The proposal received 35% of votes in favor. Amazon was among many other companies that last year made supportive statements on the Black Lives Matter movement, and those proposals practically focus on mitigating human rights risks and violations and promoting racial equality.

Facebook Inc - 05/26/2021 - United States

Proposal: Shareholder Proposals Asking for Independent Chair, Recapitalization, Report on Child Exploitation, and Human Right Expertise in the Board

Facebook Inc. is a U.S. multinational conglomerate focusing on information technology. Facebook offers products and services globally through its social networking platforms, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp.

At this year's Facebook AGM, there were once again many shareholder resolutions up for vote. These proposals were asking for Facebook to improve their corporate governance practices, to combat potential legal and reputational risks, and to promote human rights.

Shareholders requested that the company gradually eliminate the special class of super-voting shares that the CEO has, which gives him the majority voting control of the company. We supported this resolution since we believe that one vote per share generally operates as a safeguard for common shareholders. We also supported the shareholder resolution asking for the board chair to be independent. We believe that an independent chair is in a better position to uphold shareholders' best interest and oversee management decisions. We favored both proposals since they contribute to improved corporate governance practices and increase board accountability.

Regarding social issues, again this year two resolutions were submitted requesting human/civil rights expertise to be added to the board, and reporting on online child exploitation. We believe that the company should address the increasing sexual child exploitation issue due to the encrypted messaging services provided on their platforms. It is necessary for the company to assess, report and proactively address this sensitive issue, and to efficiently mitigate potential operational and reputational risks.

Shareholders proposed that the nominating committee will nominate at least one candidate on the board, who has human/civil rights expertise. We were among the 4.06% of the shareholders who supported this proposal. We believe that a director with this type of experience within the board, would better help face human-right-related risks and ensure accountability and oversight. We were pleased to see the company launching its corporate human rights policy in March 2021, but an independent director with experience in the field is highly important, given Facebook's preeminent role in the social media landscape and the risks this entails.

Finally, we supported the proposal asking the company to report on reducing false and divisive information. Shareholders need detailed information to assess how the company is managing and mitigating related risks by the misuse of their platforms.

Alphabet Inc - 06/02/2021 - United States

Proposal: Shareholder Proposals Asking for Recapitalization, Linking Executive Pay to Sustainability and Diversity, Report on Whistleblower Policies, and Human Right Expertise in the Board.

Alphabet Inc is a U.S. multinational conglomerate company that is the parent company of Google and several Google subsidiaries. Alphabet Inc provides online advertising services in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Canada, and Latin America. The company offers performance and brand advertising services.

Alphabet was another large American tech company that was targeted by a handful of shareholder proposals (SHP) focusing on social and corporate governance topics. We supported the SHP requesting the board to initiate a 7-year recapitalization plan, that would ultimately result in one vote per share. We view this plan to be on the best interest of minority shareholders, allowing them to have an equal voice and express it with their votes when it comes to important matters.

We also supported the SHP asking the nominating committee to add at least one candidate to the board who has human and/or civil rights expertise. The company has received criticism by the media for not doing enough to protect user privacy, with numerous allegations of private data misuse, and we engage with the company on the social impact of artificial intelligence. We believe that board-level oversight of human rights considerations is a positive step and in

line with our engagement asks. Additionally, we supported the SHP asking for a third-party review of the whistleblower policy effectiveness. Taking into consideration the risks the company faces due to ineffective whistleblower protections, and given the recent controversies, we believe that the request outlined in this proposal would benefit shareholders.

Lastly, shareholders requested the company prepare a report assessing the feasibility of integrating sustainability and diversity metrics in its executive compensation program. In the prior year, the same resolution was supported by 13.1% of the votes, showcasing that shareholders do value the integration of environmental and social factors into the business strategy. We believe that the adoption of this proposal is necessary, and thus we supported this SHP also this year, and we encourage the company to introduce a bonus program that links executives' compensation to specific ESG goals.

NetEase Inc - 06/23/2021 - United States

Proposal: Election of Director

NetEase Inc is a technology company, engaged in developing and operating online game services, intelligent learning services, and other products.

The AGM season always places the roles and responsibilities of boards of directors firmly into the spotlight. Shareholders must decide if directors have properly discharged their duties over the past year, and if they are fit to represent investors' interests in the future. While it is difficult to continually monitor the performance of individual board members, shareholders should aim for the boards of their companies to reflect certain elements of best practices to encourage robust oversight.

These standards vary by market but are generally based on the same philosophy: boards where highly qualified directors represent a variety of views, can dedicate sufficient time to their role, and are regularly refreshed to ensure independence are more likely to provide a healthy challenge to the C-suite, which is in the best interests of the market.

At the AGM of NetEase, we voted against two directors, as the board fell afoul of several of the above guidelines. We voted against the former CFO (until 2007) of the company, who has served on the board for 19 years and holds five further board seats at other companies. We generally believe that this level of outside commitments will inhibit the director's ability to focus fully on their responsibilities at all of these companies. Therefore, we considered director Lee 'overboarded' and opposed his re-election.

We had further structural concerns about the composition of the board. The average board tenure is excessive, with the last director having been appointed 14 years ago. Meanwhile, the board is composed of 5 male directors, with only one woman serving on the board. We believe that companies listed on large US exchanges like the Nasdaq should have at least 30% gender diversity (rounding down to account for board size). Finally, no independent Chair or lead director has been appointed, leaving the board with insufficient outside leadership.

For the above reasons, we voted against the longest-serving member of the Nominating Committee, in the absence of a committee Chair, as we believe he is responsible for the poor board composition.

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