

RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Balanced Fund



Commentary as at December 31, 2023

Economic growth in 2023 was faster than many economists had predicted at the beginning of the year, defying risks that included inflation exceeding central-bank targets, the highest borrowing costs in about 16 years and two wars on Europe's doorstep. By the end of the period, growth and inflation had begun to slow, prompting investors to anticipate that central banks were moving closer to rolling back a portion of the rate hikes that had taken place since early 2022.

The Fund's neutral position in equities and overweight position in fixed income had a minimal impact on performance. Bonds recovered to post gains in 2023 as signs of economic slowdown, especially in Canada and Europe, pushed down longer-term yields and triggered the speculation about policy-rate cuts. The lack of a recession made the job of policymakers harder, with fears persisting that lower rates, if they occurred, would rekindle inflation. Canada's 10-year benchmark yield ended the year down slightly at 3.11% but earlier touched 4.24%, the highest since July 2007. Canadian government bonds outperformed U.S. fixed income, as the weaker Canadian economy pushed domestic yields down faster than yields on Treasuries. Eurozone government bonds outperformed those in North America and Japan. Returns in the fixed-income segment of the portfolio were boosted by RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Bond Fund and RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Short-Term Bond Fund.

A distinguishing characteristic of the U.S. stock-market rally was the small number of issues powering the advance. While the "Magnificent 7" – the seven largest stocks in the S&P 500 by market value – in some cases more than doubled, most stocks lagged the index's returns significantly. The S&P 500 Index and some benchmarks in Europe reached near-record levels during the period. In emerging markets, China was a significant exception to what was otherwise an upbeat story. The removal of the country's remaining pandemic restrictions was taken as a positive, but consumers and businesses did not spend and invest as had been expected. Overall, emerging markets underperformed developed markets. Returns were bolstered by RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Global Equity Fund and RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Emerging Markets Equity Fund.

An economic slowdown appears to be underway, with businesses and consumers feeling the drag of higher interest rates and two years of exceptionally high inflation. Global trade is contracting, businesses are scaling back investments and the frenetic hiring of the past two years is on the wane, albeit gradually. The portfolio manager continues to look for a mild contraction in the U.S., Canada, the UK and the eurozone during the first half of 2024, although pathways to an economic soft landing are evident and the odds of such an outcome are improving as inflation moderates and the cost of borrowing declines.

Against this backdrop, the portfolio manager believes that central banks are likely to cut their benchmark interest rates at some point over the next year, setting up a more positive backdrop for bond returns. While the portfolio manager continues to expect stocks to outperform bonds over the longer term, the premium associated with holding equities relative to fixed income is perhaps not properly compensating investors for the risk of an economic downturn. Given the balance of risks and opportunities against both short-term and long-term investment horizons, the portfolio manager added to the Fund's fixed-income allocation over the past quarter, boosting the bond weight above neutral for the first time in two decades.

During 2023, one issuer was deemed ineligible by Sustainalytics and subsequently removed from RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Short-Term Bond Fund, an underlying fund of the Fund, for failing to meet RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Short-Term Bond Fund's ESG exclusion criteria. In this instance, Brookfield Property Finance ULC was divested from RBC Vision Fossil

Fuel Free Short-Term Bond Fund because Sustainalytics' most recent research assessment identified fossil fuel related revenues above the ESG exclusion criteria revenue thresholds. Specifically, Sustainalytics determined the issuer derived revenues from the exploration, production, refining, transportation and/or storage of oil and natural gas.

Brookfield Property Finance ULC was also divested from RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Bond Fund, an underlying fund of the Fund, for failing to meet the RBC Vision Fossil Fuel Free Bond Fund's ESG exclusion criteria based on the same reasons above.

No other material investment decision was made based on the ESG exclusion criteria during 2023. In the opinion of Sustainalytics and RBC GAM, all other holdings in the Fund, including its underlying funds, were eligible at the time of review.

This has been provided by RBC Global Asset Management Inc. (RBC GAM) and is for informational purposes, as of the date noted only. Discussion of any securities in this report is not a recommendation to buy or sell any specific security, and is subject to change. It is not intended to provide legal, accounting, tax, investment, financial or other advice and such information should not be relied upon for providing such advice. RBC GAM takes reasonable steps to provide up-to-date, accurate and reliable information, and believes the information to be so when provided. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Interest rates, market conditions, tax rulings and other investment factors are subject to rapid change which may materially impact analysis that is included in this document. You should consult with your advisor before taking any action based upon the information contained in this document. All opinions constitute our judgment as of the dates indicated, are subject to change without notice and are provided in good faith without legal responsibility. Information obtained from third parties is believed to be reliable but RBC GAM and its affiliates assume no responsibility for any errors or omissions or for any loss or damage suffered. RBC GAM reserves the right at any time and without notice to change, amend or cease publication of the information.

Please consult your advisor and read the prospectus or Fund Facts document before investing. There may be commissions, trailing commissions, management fees and expenses associated with mutual fund investments. Mutual funds are not guaranteed or covered by the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation or by any other government deposit insurer. Mutual fund unit values change frequently. For money market funds, there can be no assurances that the fund will be able to maintain its net asset value per security at a constant amount or that the full amount of your investment in the fund will be returned to you. Past performance may not be repeated. RBC Funds, RBC Private Pools, RBC Alternative Funds and PH&N Funds are offered by RBC Global Asset Management Inc. (RBC GAM) and distributed through authorized dealers in Canada.

This document may contain forward-looking statements about a fund or general economic factors which are not guarantees of future performance. Forward-looking statements involve inherent risk and uncertainties, so it is possible that predictions, forecasts, projections and other forward-looking statements will not be achieved. We caution you not to place undue reliance on these statements as a number of important factors could cause actual events or results to differ materially from those expressed or implied in any forward-looking statement. All opinions in forward-looking statements are subject to change without notice and are provided in good faith but without legal responsibility.