CR 2010/16 - Income tax: proposed return of capital: Oceania Capital Partners Limited

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Page status: legally binding

Page 1 of 14

Class Ruling

Income tax: proposed return of capital: Oceania Capital Partners Limited

Contents P	ara
LEGALLY BINDING SECTION:	
What this Ruling is about	: 1
Date of effect	8
Scheme	9
Ruling	24
NOT LEGALLY BINDING SECTION:	
Appendix 1:	

Appendix 1:

Explanation 30

Appendix 2:

Detailed contents list 71

This publication provides you with the following level of protection:

This publication (excluding appendixes) is a public ruling for the purposes of the *Taxation Administration Act 1953*.

A public ruling is an expression of the Commissioner's opinion about the way in which a relevant provision applies, or would apply, to entities generally or to a class of entities in relation to a particular scheme or a class of schemes.

If you rely on this ruling, the Commissioner must apply the law to you in the way set out in the ruling (unless the Commissioner is satisfied that the ruling is incorrect and disadvantages you, in which case the law may be applied to you in a way that is more favourable for you – provided the Commissioner is not prevented from doing so by a time limit imposed by the law). You will be protected from having to pay any underpaid tax, penalty or interest in respect of the matters covered by this ruling if it turns out that it does not correctly state how the relevant provision applies to you.

What this Ruling is about

1. This Ruling sets out the Commissioner's opinion on the way in which the relevant provision(s) identified below apply to the defined class of entities, who take part in the scheme to which this Ruling relates.

Relevant provision(s)

- The relevant provisions dealt with in this Ruling are:
 - subsection 6(1) of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 (ITAA 1936);¹
 - section 45A of the ITAA 1936;
 - section 45B of the ITAA 1936:
 - section 45C of the ITAA 1936:
 - section 104-25 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 (ITAA 1997);
 - section 104-135 of the ITAA 1997; and
 - section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997.

¹ All subsequent legislative references in this Ruling are to the ITAA 1936 unless indicated otherwise.

Page 2 of 14 Page status: **legally binding**

Class of entities

- 3. The class of entities to which this Ruling applies are the shareholders of Oceania Capital Partners Limited (OCP) who:
 - (a) are registered on the OCP share register on the Record Date, being the date for determining entitlements under the proposed return of capital as described in paragraphs 9 to 23 of this Ruling; and
 - (b) who hold their initial ordinary shares and ordinary shares (as applicable) on capital account.

In this Ruling, these entities are referred to as 'OCP shareholders' and both an initial ordinary OCP share and ordinary OCP share are referred to as an 'OCP share'.

Qualifications

- 4. The Commissioner makes this Ruling based on the precise scheme identified in this Ruling.
- 5. The class of entities defined in this Ruling may rely on its contents provided the scheme actually carried out is carried out in accordance with the scheme described in paragraphs 9 to 23 of this Ruling.
- 6. If the scheme actually carried out is materially different from the scheme that is described in this Ruling, then:
 - this Ruling has no binding effect on the Commissioner because the scheme entered into is not the scheme on which the Commissioner has ruled; and
 - this Ruling may be withdrawn or modified.
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Page status: **legally binding** Page 3 of 14

Date of effect

8. This Ruling applies from 19 May 2010 to 30 June 2010. The Ruling continues to apply after 30 June 2010 to all entities within the specified class who entered into the specified scheme during the term of the Ruling. However, this Ruling will not apply to taxpayers to the extent that it conflicts with the terms of a settlement of a dispute agreed to before the date of issue of this Ruling (see paragraphs 75 and 76 of Taxation Ruling TR 2006/10).

Scheme

9. The following description of the scheme that is the subject of this Ruling is based on the application for Class Ruling dated 9 March 2010 lodged by Mallesons Stephen Jaques (the Applicant) on behalf of OCP and correspondence from the applicant dated 28 and 30 April 2010.

Note: certain information has been provided on a commercial-in-confidence basis and will not be disclosed or released under Freedom of Information legislation.

- 10. OCP is an Australian investment company (formerly known as Allco Equity Partners Limited) which was incorporated on 12 November 2004. It was listed on the Australian Securities Exchange on 22 December 2004 following the completion of an initial public share offer (IPO).
- 11. OCP raised \$550,000,088 in share capital under the IPO and from the issue of initial ordinary OCP shares. OCP intended to use the capital raised in making investments.
- 12. Between June 2007 and November 2008 OCP undertook two on-market share buy-backs as part of its capital management strategy. The capital management strategy at that time involved the return of capital which had not been deployed by OCP in making investments. The on-market share buy-backs resulted in OCP acquiring 9,930,556 shares for a total cost of \$29,916,938 (net of brokerage and transaction costs).
- 13. On 9 July 2009 OCP, returned capital of \$59.749 million to shareholders (2009 return of capital).
- 14. The share capital of OCP, as at 31 December 2009, net of adjustments, was \$426,216,000.
- 15. Although the period of the second on-market share buy-back has been extended to 27 August 2010 it is not expected that further shares will be bought back under the program.

Page 4 of 14 Page status: **legally binding**

Proposed return of capital

- 16. On 25 February 2010, OCP announced that it proposed to make a further return of capital of approximately \$27.6 million to shareholders, which equates to \$0.30 per OCP share. The proposed return of capital forms part of a four part program announced by OCP on 3 April 2009 which is aimed at maximising OCP shareholder value. The program includes the suspension of new investments by OCP and the maintenance of existing investments and their profitable realisation.
- 17. The proposed return of capital will be sourced from OCP's existing cash funds, which were approximately \$44.5 million as at 31 December 2009. The cash funds are referable to the capital raised by OCP from the issue of OCP shares under the IPO in December 2004.
- 18. The proposed return of capital is subject to OCP shareholders' approval and will be considered at a meeting to be held on 26 May 2010. The proposed return of capital will be applied equally to each holder of an OCP share on the register on the Record Date, being 4 June 2010, by way of cash distribution per share held on that date. Payment of the proposed return of capital is expected to be made within approximately 10 business days of approval by OCP shareholders of the scheme, currently anticipated to be 9 June 2010 (the Payment Date).
- 19. OCP will debit the entire amount of the proposed return of capital against the share capital of OCP. There will be no change in either the number of OCP shares held by each OCP shareholder or the proportionate interest of each OCP shareholder in OCP as a result of the proposed return of capital.
- 20. There will have been no transfers to OCP's share capital account, as defined in section 975-300 of the ITAA 1997, prior to the proposed return of capital which would cause the share capital account to become tainted in terms of section 197-50 of the ITAA 1997.

Other aspects

- 21. OCP has paid dividends to OCP shareholders in respect of the income years ended 30 June 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.
- 22. The proposed return of capital will be made in addition to the payment of any final dividends by OCP in respect of the year ended 30 June 2010. The proposed return of capital will not affect OCP's current dividend policy under which the company intends to distribute all realised after tax profits.
- 23. The Applicant has advised that shares in OCP fail the principal asset test in section 855-30 of the ITAA 1997 for the purposes of determining whether they are indirect Australian real property interests under section 855-25 of the ITAA 1997 and therefore taxable Australian property under section 855-15 of the ITAA 1997.

Page status: **legally binding** Page 5 of 14

Ruling

Distribution is not a dividend

24. The proposed return of capital to OCP shareholders will not be a dividend, as defined in subsection 6(1).

The application of sections 45A, 45B and 45C to the proposed return of capital

25. The Commissioner will not make a determination under sections 45A or 45B that section 45C applies to the proposed return of capital. Accordingly, no part of the proposed return of capital will be taken to be a dividend for income tax purposes.

Capital gains tax

- 26. CGT event G1 (section 104-135 of the ITAA 1997) will happen when OCP pays the proposed return of capital to an OCP shareholder in respect of an OCP share that they own at the Record Date and continue to own at the Payment Date.
- 27. CGT event C2 (section 104-25 of the ITAA 1997) will happen when OCP pays the proposed return of capital to an OCP shareholder in respect of an OCP share that they own at the Record Date but cease to own before the Payment Date.

Foreign resident shareholders

- 28. A foreign resident OCP shareholder who is paid the proposed return of capital disregards any capital gain made when CGT event G1 happens if their OCP share is not 'taxable Australian property' (section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997).
- 29. A foreign resident OCP shareholder who is paid the proposed return of capital disregards any capital gain or capital loss made when CGT event C2 happens if their right to receive the proposed return of capital is not 'taxable Australian property' (section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997).

Commissioner of Taxation

19 May 2010

Page 6 of 14 Page status: **not legally binding**

Appendix 1 - Explanation

• This Appendix is provided as information to help you understand how the Commissioner's view has been reached. It does not form part of the binding public ruling.

Distribution is not a dividend

- 30. Subsection 44(1) includes in a shareholder's assessable income any dividends, as defined in subsection 6(1), paid to the shareholders out of profits derived by the company from any source (if the shareholder is a resident of Australia) and from an Australian source (if the shareholder is a non-resident of Australia).
- 31. The term 'dividend' in subsection 6(1) includes any distribution made by a company to any of its shareholders. However, this broad definition is subject to specific exclusions.
- 32. Paragraph (d) of the definition 'dividend' in subsection 6(1) specifically excludes from the definition:
 - ...moneys paid or credited by a company to a shareholder ... (not being moneys ... to which this paragraph, by reason of subsection (4), does not apply or moneys paid or credited ... for the redemption or cancellation of a redeemable preference share), where the amount of the moneys paid or credited ... is debited against an amount standing to the credit of the share capital account of the company;
- 33. The proposed return of capital will be wholly debited against the share capital account of OCP. There have been no transfers to OCP's share capital account, as defined in section 975-300 of the ITAA 1997, prior to the proposed return of capital which would:
 - cause the share capital account to become tainted in terms of section 197-50 of the ITAA 1997; or
 - prevent OCP's share capital account from being treated as a share capital account for the purposes of paragraph (d) of the definition of 'dividend' in subsection 6(1).
- 34. Therefore, paragraph (d) of the definition of 'dividend' in subsection 6(1) applies and the proposed return of capital will not be a dividend.

Subsection 6(4)

- 35. The exclusion in paragraph (d) of the definition of dividend in subsection 6(1) is limited by subsection 6(4) which applies in circumstances where, under an arrangement:
 - (a) a company raises share capital, receiving either cash or property from a person or group of persons crediting it to its share capital account; and

Page status: **not legally binding** Page 7 of 14

- (b) returns it to another person or group of persons, giving them either cash or property, debiting it to its share capital account.
- 36. In the present case, no arrangements exist under which OCP raised capital from certain shareholders and then distributes the capital raised to other shareholders. Accordingly, subsection 6(4) will have no application in respect of the proposed return of capital.

The application of sections 45A, 45B and 45C to the proposed return of capital

Section 45A – streaming of dividends and capital benefits

- 37. Section 45A applies in circumstances where capital benefits are streamed to certain shareholders who derive a greater benefit from the receipt of capital (the advantaged shareholders) and it is reasonable to assume that the other shareholders (the disadvantaged shareholders) have received or will receive dividends.
- 38. Although OCP will be providing its shareholders with a 'capital benefit' (as defined in paragraph 45A(3)(b)), the capital benefit is to be provided to all OCP shareholders in direct proportion to their shareholding. The circumstances of the scheme do not indicate that there is a 'streaming' of capital benefits to advantaged shareholders and of dividends to disadvantaged shareholders. Accordingly, section 45A will not apply to the proposed return of capital and the Commissioner will not make a determination under subsection 45A(2) that section 45C applies in relation to the whole, or a part, of the capital benefit.

Section 45B – schemes to provide capital benefits in substitution for dividends

- 39. Section 45B applies where certain payments are made to shareholders in substitution for dividends.
- 40. Subsection 45B(2) sets out the conditions under which the Commissioner may make a determination under subsection 45B(3) that section 45C applies. These conditions are that:
 - there is a scheme under which a person is provided with a capital benefit by a company (paragraph 45B(2)(a));
 - under the scheme, a taxpayer (the relevant taxpayer), who may or may not be the person provided with the capital benefit, obtains a tax benefit (paragraph 45B(2)(b)); and

Page 8 of 14 Page status: **not legally binding**

having regard to the relevant circumstances of the scheme, it would be concluded that the person, or one of the persons, who entered into or carried out the scheme or any part of the scheme did so for a purpose (whether or not the dominant purpose but not including an incidental purpose) of enabling the relevant taxpayer to obtain a tax benefit (paragraph 45B(2)(c)).

Each of the conditions is considered below.

- 41. The proposed return of capital will be a 'scheme' for the purposes of section 45B.
- 42. The phrase 'provided with a capital benefit' is defined in subsection 45B(5). Relevantly, it includes a distribution to a person of share capital. As OCP proposes to debit the proposed return of capital against its untainted share capital account, OCP shareholders, under the scheme, will be provided with a capital benefit.
- 43. A shareholder 'obtains a tax benefit', as defined in subsection 45B(9) of the ITAA 1936, if:
 - the amount of tax payable; or
 - any other amount payable under the ITAA 1936 or the ITAA 1997,

would, apart from the operation of section 45B of the ITAA 1936,

- be less than the amount that would have been payable; or
- be payable at a later time than it would have been payable,

if the capital benefit had instead been a dividend.

44. Ordinarily, a return of capital would be subject to the CGT provisions of the income tax law. Unless the amount of the distribution exceeds the cost base of the shares, there will only be a cost base reduction under CGT event G1 (section 104-135 of the ITAA 1997). It is only to the extent (if any) that the distribution exceeds the cost base of the shares that a capital gain arises. A capital gain may not arise at all for foreign resident shareholders: see paragraphs 67 to 70 of this Ruling. By contrast, a dividend would generally be included in the assessable income of a resident shareholder, or in the case of a non-resident be subject to dividend withholding tax. Therefore, an OCP shareholder will generally obtain a tax benefit from the proposed return of capital.

Relevant circumstances

45. For the purposes of paragraph 45B(2)(c), the Commissioner is required to consider the 'relevant circumstances' set out in subsection 45B(8) to determine whether any part of the scheme was entered into for a purpose, other than an incidental purpose, of enabling a relevant taxpayer to obtain a tax benefit.

Page status: **not legally binding** Page 9 of 14

- 46. The test of purpose is an objective one. The question is whether, objectively, it would be concluded that a person who entered into or carried out the scheme or any part of the scheme did so for the purpose of obtaining a tax benefit for the relevant taxpayer in respect of the capital benefit. The purpose does not have to be the most influential or prevailing purpose, but it must be more than an incidental purpose.
- 47. The relevant circumstances under subsection 45B(8) cover the circumstances of the company and the tax profile of the shareholders. In this instance, as the proposed return of capital is made to all OCP shareholders regardless of individual circumstances, paragraphs 45B(8)(c) to (h) do not incline for, or against, a conclusion as to purpose. The circumstances covered by paragraphs 45B(8)(i) and (j) pertaining to the provision of ownership interests and demerger are not relevant in this case. The relevant matters, however are those covered by the circumstances described in paragraphs 45B(8)(a), (b) and (k).
- 48. Paragraph 45B(8)(a) refers to the extent to which the capital benefit is attributable to capital and profits (realised or unrealised) of the company or an associate (within the meaning of section 318) of the company. In this case, the proposed return of capital is sourced from cash funds existing as at 31 December 2009 of approximately \$44.5 million. The existing cash funds, of which approximately \$27.8 million is to be used to fund the proposed return of capital, are referable to the capital raised by the issue of OCP shares under the IPO. In these circumstances, the proposed return of capital is attributable to capital and not to any realised or unrealised profits of OCP.
- 49. Paragraph 45B(8)(b) refers to the pattern of distributions made by a company or an associate (within the meaning of section 318) of the company. Since the IPO, OCP has adopted a dividend policy of distributing all realised after tax profits. The proposed return of capital will be made in addition to the payment of final dividends by OCP in respect of the year ended 30 June 2010. The proposed return of capital will not affect the current dividend policy of OCP. The capital returns OCP undertook between June 2007 and November 2008, by way of on-market share buy-backs, and the 2009 return of capital, arose under similar circumstances as this proposed return of capital. Accordingly, OCP's pattern of distributions does not suggest that the proposed return of capital will be made in substitution for dividends.
- 50. Paragraph 45B(8)(k) refers to the matters in subparagraphs 177D(b)(i) to (viii). These are matters by reference to which a scheme is able to be examined from a practical perspective in order to identify and compare its tax and non-tax objectives. The matters include the manner in which the scheme is carried out, its form and substance, and its financial and other implications for the parties involved. In this case, the practical implications of the scheme for OCP and its shareholders are consistent with it being, in form and substance, a distribution of share capital.

Page 10 of 14 Page status: **not legally binding**

51. Therefore, having regard to the relevant circumstances of the scheme involving the proposed return of the capital, as discussed in paragraphs 45 to 50 of this Ruling, it cannot be concluded that OCP will enter into, or carry out, the scheme for a purpose other than a merely incidental purpose of enabling the OCP shareholders to obtain a tax benefit. Accordingly, the Commissioner will not make a determination under subsection 45B(3), that section 45C applies to the whole, or a part, of the capital benefit represented by the proposed return of capital.

Section 45C

52. As the Commissioner will not make a determination under subsection 45A(2) or subsection 45B(3) in relation to the scheme as described, section 45C will not deem any part of the proposed return of capital to be an unfranked dividend for the purposes of the ITAA 1936 or the ITAA 1997.

Capital gains tax

CGT event G1 - section 104-135

- 53. CGT event G1 will happen when OCP pays the proposed return of capital amount to an OCP shareholder in respect of a share that a shareholder owns at the Record Date and continues to own at the Payment Date (section 104-135 of the ITAA 1997).
- 54. If the proposed return of capital (\$0.30 per OCP share) is less than, or equal to, the cost base of the OCP share at the Payment Date, the cost base and reduced cost base of the share will be reduced (but not below nil) by the amount of the proposed return of capital (subsection 104-135(4) of the ITAA 1997).
- 55. An OCP shareholder will make a capital gain if the proposed return of capital is more than the cost base of their OCP share. The amount of the capital gain is equal to the excess (subsection 104-135(3) of the ITAA 1997).
- 56. If an OCP shareholder makes a capital gain when CGT event G1 happens, the cost base and reduced cost base of the OCP share are reduced to nil (subsection 104-135(3) of the ITAA 1997). An OCP shareholder cannot make a capital loss when CGT event G1 happens.
- 57. A capital gain made when CGT event G1 happens will be a discount capital gain under Subdivision 115-A of the ITAA 1997 provided that the OCP share was acquired at least 12 months before the payment of the proposed return of capital (subsection 115-25(1) of the ITAA 1997) and the other conditions of that Subdivision are satisfied.

Page status: **not legally binding** Page 11 of 14

CGT event C2 - section 104-25

- 58. The right to receive the proposed return of capital is one of the rights inherent in an OCP share at the Record Date. If, after the Record Date but before the Payment Date, an OCP shareholder ceases to own their OCP shares in respect of which the proposed return of capital is payable, the right to receive the payment will be retained by the shareholder and is a separate CGT asset.
- 59. CGT event C2 will happen when the proposed return of capital is paid. The right to receive the payment (being an intangible CGT asset) will end when the payment is made (section 104-25 of the ITAA 1997).
- 60. An OCP shareholder will make a capital gain if the capital proceeds from the ending of the right are more than the cost base of the right. The capital gain is equal to the amount of the excess. An OCP shareholder will make a capital loss if the capital proceeds from the ending of the right are less than the reduced cost base of the right (subsection 104-25(3) of the ITAA 1997). The capital loss is equal to the amount of the difference.
- 61. In working out the capital gain or capital loss made when CGT event C2 happens, the capital proceeds will be the amount of the proposed return of capital (subsection 116-20(1) of the ITAA 1997).
- 62. The cost base of the OCP shareholder's right to receive the proposed return of capital is worked out under Division 110 of the ITAA 1997 (modified by Division 112 of the ITAA 1997).
- 63. The cost base of the right does not include the cost base (or reduced cost base) of the share previously owned by an OCP shareholder that has been applied in working out a capital gain or capital loss made when a CGT event happened to the share (for example when the OCP shareholder disposed of the share).
- 64. Therefore, if the full cost base (or reduced cost base) of the OCP share has been previously applied in working out a capital gain or capital loss made when a CGT event happened to that share, then the right to receive the proposed return of capital will have a nil cost base.
- 65. As the right to receive the payment of the proposed return of capital was inherent in an OCP share during the time it was owned, the right is considered to have been acquired at the time when the corresponding OCP share was acquired (section 109-5 of the ITAA 1997).
- 66. Consequently, if the OCP share to which the payment relates was originally acquired by the former OCP shareholder at least 12 months before the payment of the proposed return of capital, a capital gain made when CGT event C2 happens to the right may qualify as a discount capital gain under subsection 115-25(1) of the ITAA 1997 (provided the other conditions in Subdivision 115-A of the ITAA 1997 are satisfied).

Page 12 of 14 Page status: **not legally binding**

Foreign resident shareholders

67. A foreign resident disregards a capital gain or capital loss made from a CGT event that happens in relation to a CGT asset that is not 'taxable Australian property' (section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997). The term 'taxable Australian property' is defined in the table in section 855-15 of the ITAA 1997 and covers five categories of assets.

- 68. Broadly, these categories are:
 - taxable Australian real property which is held directly;
 - indirect Australian real property interests which are not covered by item 5 of the table in section 855-15 of the ITAA 1997;
 - CGT assets used in carrying on a business through a permanent establishment in Australia, and which are covered by item 1, 2 or 5 of the table in section 855-15 of the ITAA 1997;
 - options or rights to acquire a CGT asset covered by item 1, 2 or 3 of the table in section 855-15 of the ITAA 1997; and
 - CGT assets covered by subsection 104-165(3) of the ITAA 1997 (choosing to disregard a capital gain or capital loss on ceasing to be an Australian resident).
- 69. A foreign resident OCP shareholder who receives payment of the proposed return of capital, and makes a capital gain when CGT event G1 happens to their OCP shares, disregards the capital gain if the OCP shares are not 'taxable Australian property' (section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997).
- 70. A foreign resident OCP shareholder who has a right to the payment of the proposed return of capital disregards any capital gain or capital loss made when CGT event C2 happens to that right if the right is not 'taxable Australian property' (section 855-10 of the ITAA 1997).

Page status: **not legally binding** Page 13 of 14

Appendix 2 – Detailed contents list

71. The following is a detailed contents list for this Ruling:

	Paragraph
What this Ruling is about	1
Relevant provision(s)	2
Class of entities	3
Qualifications	4
Date of effect	8
Scheme	9
Proposed return of capital	16
Other aspects	21
Ruling	24
Distribution is not a dividend	24
The application of sections 45A, 45B and 45C to the proposed return of capital	25
Capital gains tax	26
Foreign resident shareholders	28
Appendix 1 – Explanation	30
Distribution is not a dividend	30
Subsection 6(4)	35
The application of sections 45A, 45B and 45C to the proposed return of capital	37
Section 45A – streaming of dividends and capital benefits	37
Section 45B – schemes to provide capital benefits in substitution for dividends	39
Relevant circumstances	45
Section 45C	52
Capital gains tax	53
CGT event G1 – section 104-135	53
CGT event C2 – section 104-25	58
Foreign resident shareholders	67
Appendix 2 – Detailed contents list	71

Page 14 of 14 Page status: not legally binding

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Previous draft: ITAA 1936 45B(8)(i) ITAA 1936 45B(8)(j) Not previously issued as a draft ITAA 1936 45B(8)(k) ITAA 1936 45B(9) Related Rulings/Determinations: ITAA 1936 45C TR 2006/10 ITAA 1936 177D(b)(i)

ITAA 1936 177D(b)(ii) Subject references: ITAA 1936 177D(b)(iii) banking, finance & securities - ITAA 1936 177D(b)(iv) capitalisation - ITAA 1936 177D(b)(v) finance - ITAA 1936 177D(b)(vi) return of capital on shares

- ITAA 1936 177D(b)(vii) share capital - ITAA 1936 177D(b)(viii) ITAA 1936 318

Legislative references: **ITAA 1997**

ITAA 1997 104-25 **ITAA 1936** ITAA 1997 104-25(3) ITAA 1936 6(1) ITAA 1997 104-135 ITAA 1936 6(4) ITAA 1936 44(1) ITAA 1997 104-135(3) ITAA 1997 104-135(4) ITAA 1936 45A ITAA 1997 104-165(3) ITAA 1936 45A(2) ITAA 1936 45A(3)(b) ITAA 1997 109-5 ITAA 1997 Div 110 ITAA 1936 45B ITAA 1936 45B(2) ITAA 1997 Div 112 ITAA 1997 Subdiv 115-A ITAA 1936 45B(2)(a)

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ITAA 1936 45B(8)(h)

ATO references

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ATOlaw topic: Income Tax ~~ Return of capital

Income Tax ~~ Entity specific matters ~~ companies Income Tax ~~ Capital Gains Tax ~~ CGT events C1 to

C3 - end of a CGT asset

Income Tax ~~ Capital Gains Tax ~~ CGT events G1 to

G3 - shares