

## OPINION on position limits on LEAD contracts

### I. Introduction and legal basis

1. On 4 August 2017, the European Securities and Markets Authority (“ESMA”) received a notification from the Financial Conduct Authority (“FCA”) under Article 57(5) of Directive 2014/65/EU on markets in financial instruments<sup>1</sup> (“MiFID II”) regarding the exact position limits the FCA intends to set for the Lead commodity contract in accordance with the methodology for calculation established in Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/591 supplementing Directive 2014/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to regulatory technical standards for the application of position limits in commodity derivatives<sup>2</sup> (“RTS 21”) and taking into account the factors referred to in Article 57(3) of MiFID II. This notification was supplemented by additional data provided on 6 October 2017.
2. ESMA’s competence to deliver an opinion is based on Article 57(5) of MiFID II. In accordance with Article 44(1) of Regulation (EU) 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority)<sup>3</sup> (“ESMA Regulation”), the Board of Supervisors has adopted this opinion.

### II. Contract classification

Commodity base product: metals (METL)

Commodity sub product: non-precious (NPRM)

Commodity further sub product: lead (LEAD)

Name of trading venue: THE LONDON METAL EXCHANGE

MIC: XLME

Venue product code: PB

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 2014/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on markets in financial instruments and amending Directive 2002/92/EC and Directive 2011/61/EU (OJ L 173, 12.6.2014, p. 349).

<sup>2</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2017/591 of 1 December 2016 supplementing Directive 2014/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to regulatory technical standards for the application of position limits commodity derivatives (OJ L 87, 31.3.2017, p. 479).

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority), amending Decision No 716/2009/EC and repealing Commission Decision 2009/77/EC (OJ L 331, 15.12.2010, p. 84).

### III. Market description

3. Lead is a metal and non-perishable. It is extracted from lead ore or as secondary production from scrap. The main producers are China, Australia, the US, Peru and Mexico.<sup>4</sup>
4. The largest consumer of lead is China followed by the US, India and South Korea.<sup>5</sup> There is no particular seasonality noted in production or consumption of the metal which leads to price fluctuation.
5. The London Metal Exchange (LME) has a network of warehouses located across many countries from which the underlying commodity may be sourced. There are 85 approved LME brands of lead.
6. All lead must be of an LME approved brand to be deliverable against LME contracts. LME lead contracts are settled by transfer of a warrant giving ownership of metal located in the LME's own warehouse network. A source of lead is as a by-product of zinc production and supply has been affected by the closures of zinc mines in Australia and Ireland. Two mines were closed in Canada in 2012 and a mine in Australia in 2015, in addition to slowing production in Peru with idled capacity. This situation has recently reversed and mines in the US, India and Peru are expected to double output in 2017. Annual refined lead production is around 10 million tonnes which includes recycled material.<sup>6</sup>
7. The FCA is not aware of any material restrictions on the transportation of lead from the relevant warehouses.
8. The market features a wide range of participants including producers hedging their output, industrial consumers, market intermediaries and longer term investors in commodities such as funds. In addition to the LME, lead is traded on the Shanghai Futures Exchange (SHFE). The SHFE lead contract has under 10% of the open interest in the LME contract. There is a deliverable lead contract listed on the Commodity Exchange Inc. (COMEX) but there is no volume shown. The global nature of the metals markets and the associated warehousing system means that stocks held outside the LME system can be rapidly introduced to meet delivery obligations.
9. According to World Bank reports, lead prices increased in 2016 due to increased Chinese demand and battery demands for vehicle manufacturing due to increased consumer sales.<sup>7</sup>
10. Estimated number of market participants / market makers in accordance with Article 19(2) of RTS 21: 488 / 0

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<sup>4</sup> International Lead and Zinc Study Group, End Uses, <http://www.ilzsg.org/static/enduses.aspx?from=2> & International Lead Association, Lead Action 21, [http://www.ila-lead.org/UserFiles/File/ILA9927%20FS\\_Recycling\\_V06.pdf](http://www.ila-lead.org/UserFiles/File/ILA9927%20FS_Recycling_V06.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Bank Commodity Markets Outlook, January 2017

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Commodity Markets Outlook, January 2017, World Bank, Global Economic Prospects Divergences and Risks, June 2016 & Commodity Markets Outlook, January 2017. Reuters: Andy Home, 2 December 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-glencore-zinc-ahome-column-idUSKBN13R1PO>

<sup>7</sup> World Bank Commodity Markets Outlook, January 2017 & World Bank Commodities Price Data, 3 April 2017

#### **IV. Proposed limit and rationale**

##### *Spot month position limit*

11. Deliverable supply amounts to 21,573 lots. A lot is equivalent to 25 tonnes.
12. The contract is settled by transfer of a claim to (or "warrant" over) physical metal. The initial point for data for calculation of deliverable supply deliverable against the LME contract is the published data on stocks of metal held in LME warehouses. The information on LME Official Stocks is available to any person from the LME website.<sup>8</sup> The average of daily levels of LME Official Closing Stock for the calendar year 2016 represented 7,405 lots of the lead contract. This represents the most immediate stock of the commodity which is available for physical delivery.
13. Deliverable supply is represented not only by reported stocks, as there are also a number of other elements which could be used to meet the delivery obligation. These include cancelled LME warrants which may have been taken out of the LME system either to reduce storage charges, in anticipation of movement out of a warehouse, or for other operational reasons. Cancelled warrants may be reinstated on an almost immediate basis by the warehouse-keeper on the instruction of the metal-owner. LME warrants may also be delivered multiple times during the spot month period, because of the LME practice of daily settlement. This increases the quantity of potential deliverable supply. The re-use of LME warrants to meet delivery obligations is an established characteristic of the LME markets which enables participants to match their requirements for physical metal in specific locations. It also enables the timing of deliveries to take place outside the normal "Third Wednesday" monthly trading cycle which defines the spot month period for the purpose of setting limits.
14. The spot month is defined as the amalgamation of all daily prompts within the 30 days immediately preceding the relevant month's expiry as this takes into account only trading linked to the relevant expiry month.
15. An additional source of deliverable supply is unwarranted lead that is held by LME warehouse companies in their non-LME licensed warehouses and which can easily be transferred into their LME licensed warehouses and placed on warrant. Often, LME warehouse companies have LME-licensed and non-LME warehouses at the same location. Additional space within LME warehouses allows metal which is not currently within the LME system to be introduced and made eligible for delivery.
16. These additional factors mean that the amount of metal in the deliverable supply is greater than the amount recorded as on LME warrant at any point in time.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lme.com/metals/reports/stocks/>

17. In calculating deliverable supply, the FCA has excluded quantities of metal which are committed by commercial entities under long-term arrangements to supply or purchase. These amounts are therefore not available to enter the LME stock system.
18. The amount of global monthly production of lead estimated by the World Bank represents around 33,333 lots of the LME contract. This is an amount which is significantly larger than the amount calculated as deliverable supply against the LME contract. The amount of global production also does not include metal that has already been produced and is held in warehouses as stocks.
19. In summary, the breakdown of the components for calculating deliverable supply using data for the calendar year 2016 are:

<b>Deliverable Supply</b>	<b>Number (Lots)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
LME Warehouse Stocks	7,405	On-warrant and cancelled warrants
Deliverable non-LME Warehouse Stocks	5,582	Excluding non-LME branded eligible metal
Monthly Production in LME branded metal	3,803	Excluding production that would be used for commercial and alternative purposes
Re-use of LME Warrants at LME Warehouses	4,784	To reflect multiple use of warrants to settle contracts during spot period
<i>Total</i>	<i>21,573</i>	

*Deliverable non-LME Warehouse Stocks figures from estimates provided by LME*

#### Spot month position limit rationale

20. The spot month limit is 4,950 lots and represents 22.9% of the deliverable supply.
21. The baseline for the spot month limit has been set at 25% of deliverable supply as required by Article 9(1) of RTS 21.
22. Adjustments have been made to the baseline, where necessary, using the rationale for adjustments set out in RTS 21 as follows.
23. The estimated reasonably large number of market participants (488) resulted in a downward adjustment of 2 percentage points in accordance with Article 19(1) of RTS 21.
24. While a supply of metal is also needed to settle other trading venues' contracts, trading volumes at these other trading venues is small (15,900 equivalent lots) compared with LME trading. The FCA has not therefore made a downward adjustment to the limit in accordance with Article 17 of RTS 21 to reflect trading at other venues.
25. In considering the volatility in the contract, as required by Article 21 of RTS 21, there has been some variation in the price of the commodity derivative but the FCA has not found evidence that this is excessive or that lower position limits would reduce volatility.



26. Each of the factors referred to in Article 20 of RTS 21 was also considered but no further adjustment was considered necessary.
27. For the spot month, a total downward adjustment was made of 2 percentage points resulting in an adjusted baseline of 23%. This provides a figure in lots of 4,962 which has been rounded down to a figure of 4,950 lots. This equates to a final limit as a percentage of deliverable supply of 22.9%.

#### *Other months' position limit*

#### Open interest

28. The open interest amounts to 173,057 lots. A lot is equivalent to 25 Tonnes.
29. The open interest figure has been reported by the trading venue and is calculated as the daily average over a one year period of the number of open futures and delta-adjusted options contracts which have not been closed out or expired. The period used is the calendar year 2016.
30. This is not a "same" commodity derivative contract so there is no requirement to aggregate the open interest on multiple trading venues.

#### Other months' position limit rationale

31. The other months limit amounts to 33,700 of lots and represents 19.5% of the open interest.
32. The baseline for the other months has been set at 25% of open interest as required by Article 11 of RTS 21.
33. Adjustments have been made to the baseline, where necessary, using the rationale for adjustments set out in RTS 21 as follows.
34. FCA has made an upwards adjustment to the baseline of 1 percentage point for the large number of separate expiries (158) of the lead contract when considering Article 16(1) of RTS 21.
35. FCA considers the amount of the open interest to be large in relation to deliverable supply (802%), and therefore have made a downwards adjustment of 4.5 percentage points under Article 18(2) of RTS 21.
36. As in the spot month, FCA made a downwards adjustment of 2 percentage points under Article 19(1) of RTS 21 to reflect the estimated reasonably large number of market participants (488).

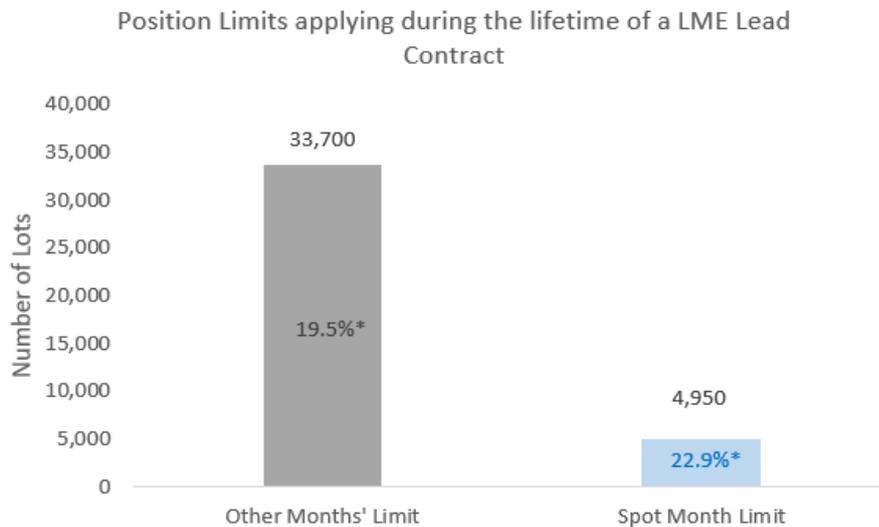
37. All other factors have been considered and are not regarded as material or relevant to require additional adjustments, either up or down, from the baseline. Although there are no market makers, as defined in RTS 21, in lead according to the data provided by the venue and this would at first sight suggest that the upper limit boundary to the position limit would be 50% (according to Article 19(2) of RTS 21), as there are many liquidity providers fulfilling an analogous role to market makers such an upward adjustment is not necessary. In considering the volatility in the contract, as required by Article 21 of RTS 21, there has been some variation in the price of the commodity derivative but the FCA has not found evidence that this is excessive or that lower position limits would reduce volatility.
38. Following consideration of the other relevant factors, no further adjustment was made for the characteristics of the lead market in other months under Article 20 of RTS 21.
39. For the other months, a total downward adjustment was made of 5.5 percentage points resulting in an adjusted baseline of 19.5%. This provides a figure in lots of 33,746 which has been rounded down to a figure of 33,700 lots.

#### **V. ESMA's Assessment**

40. This Opinion concerns positions held in lead futures and options contracts.
41. ESMA has performed the assessment based on the information provided by the FCA.
42. For the purposes of this Opinion, ESMA has assessed the compatibility of the intended position limits with the objectives of Article 57(1) of MiFID II and with the methodology for calculation of position limits established in RTS 21, in accordance with Article 57(3) of MiFID II.

#### *Compatibility with the methodology for calculation of position limits established in RTS 21 in accordance with Article 57(3) of MiFID II*

43. The FCA has set two position limits. One for the entire spot month (30 days), and one for the other months.



\*Position limit as % of Open Interest

\*Position limit as % of Deliverable Supply

### Spot month position limit

44. Deliverable supply has been calculated by assessing a combination of factors that all contributed to the average monthly amount of the underlying commodity for delivery. In this case (1) average daily LME warehouse stocks, (2) deliverable non-LME warehouse stocks, (3) monthly production in LME branded metal and (4) re-use of LME warrants at LME warehouses.
45. ESMA recognizes that the 're-use of warrants' market practice is particular to individual contracts and not ubiquitous across all LME contracts. The existence of the activity is dictated by the prevailing market nature and conditions, and as such will not be included in all deliverable supply calculations.
46. This approach is consistent with Article 10(2) of RTS 21 that sets out that "Competent authorities shall determine the deliverable supply [...] by reference to the average monthly amount of the underlying commodity available for delivery over the one year period immediately preceding the determination".
47. While the metal supply within 'non-LME warehouses' is not immediately available for delivery, ESMA accepts that it can be easily transferred into licensed warehouses, and accordingly their stock can be added to the deliverable supply.
48. ESMA notes that LME metals contracts are traded on a global basis and agree that the position limits should be set alongside comparable UK global contracts, taking into account the market characteristics of those contracts. As such, the level of adjustments was considered with reference to other metal contracts, and seems appropriate. The large number of



market participants indicate high activity in trading in aluminum contract, thus the downward adjustment to the spot month limit should not cause an impairment to trading in this commodity, while limiting the possibility of single participant to have large impact on prices.

#### Other Months' Limit

49. Open interest calculations took the average daily open interest volume over 2016 of contracts that have not expired or been closed out, including options on a delta adjusted basis.
50. ESMA considers such an approach sensible in this case as an average for a period of time gives a more stable measure of open interest and considers such approach consistent with Article 12 of RTS 21.
51. The adjustments made with reference to large open interest and number of market participants can be explained by large volume of trading, which indicate that stricter limits should not impair the trading while improving market integrity. The upward adjustment due to large number of separate expiries is made to account for numerous expiries allowing market participants to close their positions more frequently.
52. Consequently, these position limits have been set following the methodology established by RTS 21.

#### *Compatibility with the objectives of Article 57(1) of MiFID II*

53. ESMA has found no evidence indicating that the proposed position limits are not consistent with the objectives of preventing market abuse and supporting orderly pricing and settlement conditions established in Article 57(1) MiFID II.
54. ESMA considers these position limits to have been set in accordance with the above mentioned objectives and fully take into account the liquidity profiles of the contracts. Lead has a long term structure (63 months) which acts to dampen the effects of the larger other months limit. Accounting for this, and the market profile, ESMA considers these limits suitable for the market conditions within which they will be active.
55. Overall, the position limit set for the spot month and the other months, in conjunction with the position management powers of the trading venue, appear to achieve a reasonable balance between the need to prevent market abuse and to ensure an orderly market and orderly settlement, while ensuring that the development of commercial activities in the underlying lead market and the liquidity of the LME Lead futures and options are not hampered.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

56. Based on all the considerations and analysis presented above, it is ESMA's opinion that this spot month position limit does comply with the methodology established in RTS 21 and is consistent with the objectives of Article 57 of MiFID II. In addition, the other months' position



limit complies with the methodology established in RTS 21 and is consistent with the objectives of Article 57 of MiFID II.

Done at Paris, 23 October 2017

Steven Maijor

Chair

For the Board of Supervisors