

# Conversation with Group Managing Director



**Ben Birks**  
Group Managing Director



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**Q: Having been JC&C's Group Managing Director since 2019, what were some key achievements during this time?**

**A:** Against the backdrop of a difficult macroeconomic environment marked by geopolitical tensions and a global pandemic, we are pleased that the teams across our markets have navigated through these challenges, to deliver consistent earnings and dividend growth for our shareholders. At the same time, we face the challenge of fundamental shifts in several of our core businesses such as changing competitive landscapes and customer demands, all of which have informed our strategic and operational responses.

To this end, we have been executing our strategy to position the JC&C portfolio to achieve resilience and growth through cycles. In respect of capital allocation, we committed to a more dynamic approach to recycle capital to strengthen the return and the growth profile of our portfolio.

We released US\$344 million from the disposal of Siam City Cement (“SCCC”) and monetised a further US\$268 million from non-core assets within our portfolio. This capital discipline has enabled us to reduce debt at the holding company level for greater balance sheet flexibility to deploy capital to accelerate growth.

To increase exposure to the exciting and growing profit pools of Vietnam, we invested US\$185 million to increase our shareholding in REE from 24.9% since 2019 to 41.4%, and subscribed to THACO’s US\$350 million five-year convertible bond. Both companies have a proven track record of growth and possess the potential to scale beyond their current size.

We are also excited to steer and support Astra in pursuing opportunities that will strengthen its position as one of the top companies in Indonesia. In the last five years, Astra has invested over US\$2.5 billion to evolve and reinforce its existing businesses, as well as into new growth areas such as nickel, healthcare and renewable energy.

In addition, we have made progress to embed Environmental, Social and Governance (“ESG”) into our portfolio businesses. The companies are developing their sustainability plans, taking into consideration their specific sector operations and challenges, as well as working towards improving disclosures.

### **Q: Where are some of the future growth areas within JC&C’s portfolio businesses?**

**A:** In Indonesia, Astra sees growth opportunities in both its existing businesses as well as in new sectors.

In automotive, Astra’s comprehensive ecosystem, from manufacturing,

distribution and retail, aftersales, to financial services and insurance, allows Astra to capture more opportunities and reinforce its competitive advantage. Astra also has established channels that stretch beyond Java, enabling it to reach a wider customer base. To further strengthen its position, Astra is building downstream capabilities. Through the acquisition of OLX, an online used car platform, Astra is now the largest used car player in Indonesia, offering a wide range of options through a proprietary digital marketplace. Astra Otoparts is also expanding into the manufacturing of its line of electric vehicle (“EV”) chargers and collaborating with power distributor PT PLN to develop infrastructure such as public EV charging stations.

At United Tractors, Astra has invested over US\$1.2 billion into nickel and geothermal assets. The nickel and renewable energy sectors are expected to be key contributors of Indonesia’s economic growth going forward.

A high growth sector that Astra has expanded into is healthcare. It has invested approximately US\$300 million in telemedicine and hospitals. They will serve as a foundation for Astra to build a new business pillar that will tap into opportunities from the healthcare value chain.

Similarly in Vietnam, JC&C’s portfolio is well-positioned to capitalise on growth through THACO and REE. THACO’s participation in key and integrated sectors of Vietnam’s economy such as automotive, manufacturing, agriculture, real estate, construction, logistics and commerce will enable it to continue capturing growth from the country’s development. REE, on the other hand, as one of the largest renewable energy developers, will be a key player and beneficiary in supporting the country’s future energy needs.

### **Q: How has JC&C been advancing its sustainability strategy?**

**A:** We aim to grow faster than Southeast Asia, sustainably. This is rooted in our commitment to safeguard shareholder value, executed through our sustainability strategy.

Our progress is measured by how we decarbonise our portfolio and how we uphold good business ethics, while creating positive community impact.

Our portfolio companies have been investing in renewable energy, transition minerals, cleaner vehicles, circular economy and carbon capture solutions. In 2024, we sold our stake in SCCC. The cement industry is widely considered as a hard-to-abate sector. The divestment improves the overall ESG posture of the JC&C portfolio.

We believe that business sustainability is grounded in accountability and transparency. These are essential elements of effective governance. We are honoured to be recognised for our efforts in this respect. In 2024, we received the “Singapore Corporate Governance Award (Big Cap Category)” and the “Most Transparent Company Award (Industrials Category)” at the Investors’ Choice Awards, organised by the Securities Investors Association (Singapore).

Finally, we continue to support longstanding community initiatives such as mental health through MINDSET, a Jardine Matheson charity. In 2024, we continued to raise funds for DigitalMINDSET, a programme designed to help youths in Singapore manage mental health issues. Since supporting the programme in 2019, we have raised over S\$1.7 million for DigitalMINDSET.