

# Evaluation and Approval of Advisory Contract – May 2021

## **BANK LOAN CORE FUND (THE “FUND”)**

At its meetings in May 2021 (the “May Meetings”), the Fund’s Board of Trustees (the “Board”), including those Trustees who are not “interested persons” of the Fund, as defined in the Investment Company Act of 1940 (the “Independent Trustees”), reviewed and unanimously approved the continuation of the investment advisory contract between the Fund and Federated Investment Management Company (the “Adviser”) (the “Contract”) for an additional one-year term. The Board’s determination to approve the continuation of the Contract reflects the exercise of its business judgment after considering all of the information and factors believed to be relevant and appropriate on whether to approve the continuation of the existing arrangement. The information, factors and conclusions that formed the basis for the Board’s approval are summarized below.

The Fund is distinctive in that it is designed for the efficient management of a particular asset class and is made available for investment only to other funds (each, a “Federated Hermes Fund” and, collectively the “Federated Hermes Funds”) advised by the Adviser or its affiliates (collectively, “Federated Hermes”) and a limited number of other accredited investors.

In addition, the Board considered that the Adviser does not charge an investment advisory fee for its services, although Federated Hermes may receive compensation for managing assets invested in the Fund.

## **Information Received and Review Process**

At the request of the Independent Trustees, the Fund’s Chief Compliance Officer (the “CCO”) furnished to the Board in advance of its May Meetings an independent written evaluation presenting on the topics discussed below. The Board considered the CCO’s independent written evaluation (the “CCO Fee Evaluation Report”), along with other information, in evaluating the reasonableness of the Fund’s management fee and in determining to approve the continuation of the Contract. The CCO, in preparing the CCO Fee Evaluation Report, has the authority to retain consultants, experts or staff as reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of his duties, reports directly to the Board, and can be terminated only with the approval of a majority of the Independent Trustees. At the request of the Independent Trustees, the CCO Fee Evaluation Report followed the same general approach and covered the same topics as that of the report that had previously been delivered by the CCO in his capacity as “Senior Officer” prior to the elimination of the Senior Officer position in December 2017.

In addition to the extensive materials that comprise and accompany the CCO Fee Evaluation Report, the Board considered information specifically prepared in connection with the approval of the continuation of the Contract that was presented at the May Meetings. In this regard, in the months preceding the May Meetings, the Board requested and reviewed written responses and supporting materials prepared by Federated Hermes in response to requests posed to Federated Hermes on behalf of the Independent Trustees encompassing a wide variety of topics, including those summarized below. The Board also considered such additional matters as the Independent Trustees deemed reasonably necessary to evaluate the Contract, which included detailed information about the Fund and Federated Hermes furnished to the Board at its meetings throughout the year and in between regularly scheduled meetings on particular matters as the need arose.

The Board’s consideration of the Contract included review of materials and information covering the following matters, among others: the Adviser’s investment philosophy, revenue, profitability, personnel and processes; investment and operating strategies; the Fund’s short-term and long-term performance (in absolute terms, both on a gross basis and net of expenses, and relative to the Fund’s particular investment program and a group of its peer funds and/or its benchmark, as appropriate) and comments on the reasons for the Fund’s performance; the Fund’s investment objectives; the Fund’s fees and expenses, with due regard for contractual or voluntary expense limitations (if any); the use and allocation of brokerage commissions derived from trading the Fund’s portfolio securities (if any); and the nature, quality and extent of the advisory and other services provided to the Fund by the Adviser and its affiliates. The Board also considered the preferences and expectations of Fund shareholders; the entrepreneurial and other risks assumed by the Adviser in sponsoring and managing the Fund; the continuing state of competition in the mutual fund industry and market practices; the Fund’s relationship to the other Federated Hermes Funds, which include a comprehensive array of funds with different investment objectives, policies and strategies, and the benefits to shareholders of being part of the family of Federated Hermes Funds, which include the general right to exchange investments between the same class of shares without the incurrence of additional sales charges; compliance and audit reports concerning the Federated Hermes Funds and Federated Hermes’ affiliates that service them (including communications from regulatory agencies), as well as Federated Hermes’ responses to any issues raised therein; and relevant developments in the mutual fund industry and how the Federated Hermes Funds and/or Federated Hermes may be responding to them. The Board noted that its evaluation process is evolutionary and that the criteria considered and the emphasis placed on relevant criteria may change in recognition of changing circumstances in the mutual fund marketplace.

The Board also considered judicial decisions concerning allegedly excessive investment advisory fees in determining to approve the Contract. Using these judicial decisions as a guide, the Board observed that the following factors may be relevant to an adviser's fiduciary duty with respect to its receipt of compensation from a fund: (1) the nature and quality of the services provided by an adviser to a fund and its shareholders (including the performance of the fund, its benchmark, and comparable funds); (2) an adviser's cost of providing the services (including the profitability to an adviser of providing advisory services to a fund); (3) the extent to which an adviser may realize "economies of scale" as a fund grows larger and, if such economies of scale exist, whether they have been appropriately shared with a fund and its shareholders or the family of funds; (4) any "fall-out" benefits that accrue to an adviser because of its relationship with a fund (including research services received from brokers that execute fund trades and any fees paid to affiliates of an adviser for services rendered to a fund); (5) comparative fee and expense structures (including a comparison of fees paid to an adviser with those paid by similar funds both internally and externally as well as management fees charged to institutional and other advisory clients of the adviser for what might be viewed as like services); and (6) the extent of care, conscientiousness and independence with which the fund's board members perform their duties and their expertise (including whether they are fully informed about all facts the board deems relevant to its consideration of an adviser's services and fees). The Board noted that the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC") disclosure requirements regarding the basis for a fund board's approval of the fund's investment advisory contract generally align with the factors listed above. The Board was guided by these factors in its review of the Contract to the extent it considered them to be appropriate and relevant, as discussed further below. The Board considered and weighed these factors in light of its substantial accumulated experience in governing the Fund and working with Federated Hermes on matters relating to the Federated Hermes Funds.

In determining to approve the continuation of the Contract, the members of the Board reviewed and evaluated information and factors they believed to be relevant and appropriate through the exercise of their reasonable business judgment. While individual members of the Board may have weighed certain factors differently, the Board's determination to approve the continuation of the Contract was based on a comprehensive consideration of all information provided to the Board throughout the year and specifically with respect to the continuation of the Contract. The Independent Trustees were assisted throughout the evaluation process by independent legal counsel. In connection with their deliberations at the May Meetings, the Independent Trustees met separately in executive session with their independent legal counsel and without management present to review the relevant materials and consider their responsibilities under applicable laws. In addition, senior management representatives of Federated Hermes also met with the Independent Trustees and their independent legal counsel to discuss the materials and presentations furnished to the Board at the May Meetings. The Board considered the approval of the Contract for the Fund as part of its consideration of agreements for funds across the Federated Hermes Funds family, but its approvals were made on a fund-by-fund basis.

#### **Nature, Extent and Quality of Services**

The Board considered the nature, extent and quality of the services provided to the Fund by the Adviser and the resources of the Adviser and its affiliates dedicated to the Fund. In this regard, the Board evaluated, among other things, the terms of the Contract and the range of services provided to the Fund by the Adviser and its affiliates. The Board considered the Adviser's personnel, investment philosophy and process, investment research capabilities and resources, trade execution capabilities, experience and performance track record. The Board reviewed the qualifications, backgrounds and responsibilities of the portfolio management team primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the Fund and the Adviser's ability and experience in attracting and retaining qualified personnel to service the Fund. The Fund's ability to deliver competitive performance when compared to its benchmark index was also deemed to be relevant by the Board as a useful indicator of how the Adviser is executing the Fund's investment program.

In addition, the Board considered the financial resources and overall reputation of Federated Hermes and its willingness to consider and make investments in personnel, infrastructure, technology, cybersecurity, business continuity planning and operational enhancements that are designed to benefit the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board noted the significant acquisition of Hermes Fund Managers Limited by Federated Hermes in 2018, which has deepened the organization's investment management expertise and capabilities and expanded the investment process for all of the Federated Hermes Funds to have access to analytical resources related to environmental, social and governance ("ESG") factors and issuer engagement on ESG matters.

The Board considered the quality of the Adviser's communications with the Board and responsiveness to Board inquiries and requests made from time to time with respect to the Fund and other Federated Hermes Funds. In this regard, the Board took into account the Adviser's communications with the Board in light of the market volatility amidst the pandemic. The Board also considered that Federated Hermes is responsible for providing the Federated Hermes Funds' officers.

The Board received and evaluated information regarding the Adviser's regulatory and compliance environment. The Board considered the Adviser's compliance program, compliance history, and reports from the CCO about the Adviser's compliance with applicable laws and regulations, including responses to regulatory developments and any compliance or other issues raised by regulatory agencies. The Board also noted Federated Hermes' support of the Federated Hermes Funds' compliance control structure and, in particular, the compliance-related resources devoted by the Adviser and its affiliates in support of the Fund's obligations pursuant to Rule 38a-1 under the Investment Company Act of 1940, including the Adviser's commitment to respond to rulemaking and other regulatory initiatives of the SEC. The Board considered Federated Hermes' day-to-day oversight of the Federated Hermes Funds' compliance with their investment objectives and policies as well as with applicable laws and regulations, noting that regulatory and other developments had over time led to an increase in the scope of Federated Hermes' oversight in this regard, including in connection with the designation of the Federated Hermes Funds' investment advisers as the administrators of the Federated Hermes Funds' liquidity risk management program.

The Board also considered discussions with Federated Hermes regarding the implementation of its business continuity plans and recognized steps taken by Federated Hermes to continue to provide the same nature, extent and quality of services to the Federated Hermes Funds during the pandemic. In addition, the Board noted Federated Hermes' commitment to maintaining high quality systems and expending substantial resources to prepare for and respond to ongoing changes due to the market, regulatory and control environments in which the Fund and its service providers operate, including changes associated with the pandemic.

Based on these considerations, the Board concluded that the nature, extent and quality of the Adviser's investment management and related services warrant the continuation of the Contract.

#### **Fund Investment Performance**

For the one-year, three-year and five-year periods ended December 31, 2020, the Fund underperformed its benchmark index. The Board discussed the Fund's performance with the Adviser and recognized the efforts being taken by the Adviser in the context of other factors considered relevant by the Board.

Following such evaluation and full deliberations, the Board concluded that the performance of the Fund supported renewal of the Contract.

#### **Fund Expenses**

The Board considered that the Adviser does not charge an investment advisory fee to this Fund for its services. Because the Adviser does not charge the Fund an investment advisory fee, the Board noted that it did not consider fee comparisons to other mutual funds or other institutional or separate accounts to be relevant to its deliberations. The Board also considered the overall expense structure of the Fund, with due regard for contractual or voluntary expense limitations.

#### **Profitability and Other Benefits**

The Board also received financial information about Federated Hermes, including information regarding the compensation and ancillary (or "fall-out") benefits that Federated Hermes derived from its relationships with the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board noted that an affiliate of the Adviser is entitled to reimbursement for certain out-of-pocket expense incurred in providing administrative services to the Fund.

In connection with the Board's governance of other Federated Hermes Funds (excluding the Fund), the Board received information generally covering not only the fees under the Federated Hermes Funds' investment advisory contracts, but also fees received by Federated Hermes' affiliates for providing other services to the Federated Hermes Funds under separate contracts (e.g., for serving as the Federated Hermes Funds' administrator and distributor). In this regard, the Board considered that certain of Federated Hermes' affiliates provide distribution and shareholder services to the Federated Hermes Funds, for which they may be compensated through distribution and servicing fees paid pursuant to Rule 12b-1 plans or otherwise. The Board also received and considered information detailing any indirect benefit that Federated Hermes may derive from its receipt of research services from brokers who execute portfolio trades for the Federated Hermes Funds. In addition, the Board considered that, in order for the Federated Hermes Funds to remain competitive in the marketplace, the Adviser and its affiliates frequently waived fees and/or reimbursed expenses and have disclosed to Federated Hermes Fund shareholders and/or reported to the Board their intention to do so (or continue to do so) in the future. Moreover, the Board received and considered regular reports from Federated Hermes throughout the year as to the institution, adjustment or elimination of these voluntary waivers and/or reimbursements. The Board considered Federated Hermes' previous reductions in contractual management fees to certain Federated Hermes Funds during the prior year, including in response to the CCO's recommendations in the prior year's CCO Fee Evaluation Report.

The Board also reviewed information compiled by Federated Hermes comparing its profitability information to other publicly held fund management companies, including information regarding profitability trends over time. The Board considered the CCO's conclusion that, based on such profitability information, Federated Hermes' profit margins did not appear to be excessive. The Board also considered the CCO's view that Federated Hermes appeared financially sound, with the resources necessary to fulfill its obligations under its contracts with the Federated Hermes Funds.

#### **Economies of Scale**

Because of the distinctive nature of the Fund as primarily an internal product with no advisory fee, the Board noted that it did not consider the assessment of whether economies of scale would be realized if the Fund were to grow to a sufficient size to be particularly relevant.

#### **Conclusions**

The Board considered: (i) the CCO's conclusion that his observations and the information accompanying the CCO Fee Evaluation Report show that the management fee for the Fund was reasonable; and (ii) the CCO's recommendation that the Board approve the management fee. The Board noted that, under these circumstances, no changes were recommended to, and no objection was raised to the continuation of, the Contract by the CCO. The CCO also recognized that the Board's evaluation of the Federated Hermes Funds' advisory and sub-advisory arrangements is a continuing and ongoing process that is informed by the information that the Board requests and receives from management throughout the course of the year and, in this regard, the CCO noted certain items for future reporting to the Board or further consideration by management as the Board continues its ongoing oversight of the Federated Hermes Funds.

On the basis of the information and factors summarized above, among other information and factors deemed relevant by the Board, and the evaluation thereof, the Board, including the Independent Trustees, unanimously voted to approve the continuation of the Contract. The Board based its determination to approve the Contract on the totality of the circumstances and relevant factors and with a view of past and future long-term considerations. Not all of the factors and considerations identified above were necessarily deemed to be relevant to the Fund, nor did the Board consider any one of them to be determinative. With respect to the factors that were deemed to be relevant, the Board's determination to approve the continuation of the Contract reflects its view that Federated Hermes' performance and actions provided a satisfactory basis to support the determination to approve the continuation of the existing arrangement.