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Forecast updates

Recent ANZ NZ Forecast Updates can be found here.

- ANZ NZ Data Wrap CPI: Petrol and housing pump up prices
- Farmgate milk price forecast revised up
- ANZ NZ Quarterly Economic Outlook: The journey back

Our other recent publications are on page 2.

What's the view?

- GDP moves broadly sideways over 2021
- Unemployment peak: 4.7%
- Inflation picks up
- OCR on hold

Our forecasts are on page 3.

Balance of risks

Risks skewed to higher inflation



Unemployment





Monetary policy



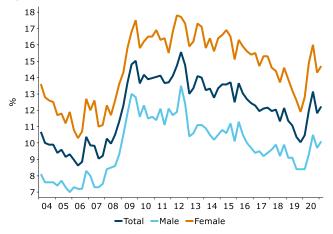
What happened this week?

The Household Labour Force Survey lived up to its reputation for delivering surprises, with the unemployment rate falling from 4.9% in Q4 2020 to 4.7% in Q1 2021. The details of the data were very robust, and a stronger-than-expected 0.6% q/q rise in employment saw the unemployment rate fall, despite a rise in participation to 70.4% (70.2% previously). Consequently, we've upgraded our labour market outlook (see next page).

The undeniable strength in the labour market poses upside risk to the monetary policy outlook, as the labour market is probably closer to full employment than we, or the RBNZ, expected. A quicker return to full employment would be welcomed by the RBNZ, as a tight labour market is a much more sustainable driver of inflationary pressure than current temporary drivers (which include higher oil prices, base effects, and supply chain disruptions).

But it wasn't all good news, with the underutilisation rate ticking up 0.4ppts to 12.2% (figure 1). The underutilisation rate is a more comprehensive measure of labour market slack, as it counts people who don't fit neatly into the definition of "unemployed". The rise in underutilisation over the March quarter will be on the RBNZ's radar, since they want to see significant (and persistent) improvements in a range of labour market indicators before they'll be ready to change their policy stance. Nevertheless, the labour market is well on the way to recovery, and this could put some pressure on the RBNZ's 'watch, worry and wait' approach.

Figure 1. Underutilisation rate



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond

Key data summary

GlobalDairyTrade auction. The GDT price index fell 0.7% on higher offer volumes, but WMP prices rose 0.7% to USD4115/tonne.

Financial Stability Report. There were no surprises from the RBNZ, with advice on DTIs and interest only borrowing due at the end of May.

Labour Market Statistics – Q1. The unemployment rate fell to 4.7%.

ANZ Commodity Price Index - April. The index rose 2.3% m/m.

Building Permits – March. Rose 17.9% m/m, largely erasing the unexpected 19.3% m/m fall in February.

ANZ Business Outlook Flash – May. Business confidence jumped 9 points to +7.0, while pricing intentions and cost expectations continued to surge higher.

Looking ahead



Recent Publications

ANZ produces a range of in-depth insights.

- NZ Property Focus: Policy plethora
- NZ Agri Focus: Slow boat to China
- ANZ NZ Insight: Where to now for the LSAP?
- ANZ NZ Insight: Bubbling over with excitement
- ANZ NZ Insight: The road to full employment
- NZ Housing Policy Changes: Recalibrating the demand pulse
- NZ Insight: Climate change and the path ahead
- ANZ NZ Insight: The path to normal

Click here for more.

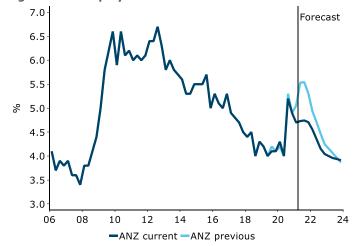
Data calendar

| Date | Data/event |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Tue 11 May (10:00am) | ANZ Truckometer - Apr |
| Tue 11 May | Electronic Card |
| (10:45am) | Transactions – Apr |
| Thu 13 May (10:45am) | Food Prices – Apr |
| Thu 13 May | Rental Price Index |
| (10:45am) | – Apr |
| Fri 14 May | BusinessNZ Manuf |
| (10:30am) | PMI – Apr |
| Mon 17 May | Performance |
| (10:30am) | Services Index Apr |
| Mon 17 May | Net Migration - |
| (10:45am) | Mar |
| Wed 19 May (early am) | GlobalDairyTrade auction |
| Wed 19 May (10:45am) | PPI – Q1 |
| Thu 20 May (2:00pm) | NZ Budget |
| Mon 24 May (10:45am) | Retail Sales - Q1 |
| Wed 26 May | Merchandise Trade |
| (10:45am) | – Apr |
| Wed 26 May (2:00pm) | RBNZ MPS |
| Fri 28 May | ANZ-RM Consumer |
| (10:00am) | Confidence – May |
| Mon 31 May | ANZ Business |
| (1:00pm) | Outlook – May F |
| Mon 31 May | RBNZ Sectoral |
| (3:00pm) | Lending – Apr |

A stronger labour market outlook

We've upgraded our labour market forecasts on the back of Wednesday's data. There was a lot of genuine strength in the release, and it looks like jobs growth will just about be able to keep pace with higher labour force participation over 2021. Consequently, we expect that the unemployment rate will hold steady at around 4.7% over the rest of 2021 (figure 2). This reflects our expectation that further strong employment gains will be hard won while the border remains closed, due to matching issues, and employment growth is likely to drop to low (but positive) levels over H2. Combined with a slight uptick in the participation rate to 70.5% in Q2 (vs 70.4% in Q1), this sees the unemployment rate drift sideways for the next 12 months.

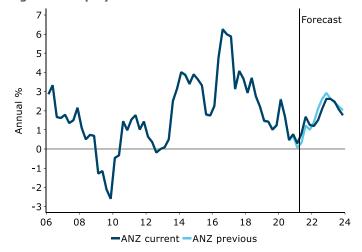
Figure 2. Unemployment rate forecast



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Our current assumption is that a successful vaccination programme will see the country open up in 2022, seeing the economy gradually normalise throughout the year. This should see jobs growth take off as sectors that are still struggling (like accommodation and hospitality) are finally able to recover (figure 3), and firms unable to find workers domestically can, to a greater extent, hire employees from overseas. With economic momentum building, we forecast that robust employment growth will see the unemployment rate drop back to around 4% by the end of 2023. But in practice, opening the border won't be a switch flick and uncertainty about what the new normal will look like remains extremely high, including both tourism and immigration.

Figure 3: Employment forecast



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Rising wages are likely to be a source of considerable domestic inflationary pressure over 2021. While some industries are still not hiring, others (such as construction) are going gangbusters, leading to intense pockets of wage pressure. Add low unemployment and a large minimum wage hike in Q2, and we're expecting annual wage inflation to peak at 2.2% y/y in Q4 (figure 4).

This will be good news for the RBNZ, which wants to see inflation pressures coming from sustained sources, and rising income growth is one of these. However, stronger wage growth may prove difficult to sustain once the border opens and businesses have access to global labour markets. As a result, we expect that wage growth will be more restrained heading into 2023, settling around 2.0% y/y.

4.0 Forecast 3.5 3.0 % Annual 2.5 2.0 1.5 1.0 80 10 12 14 16 20 22 24 06 18 —ANZ current —ANZ previous

Figure 4: Wage inflation forecast

Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Overall, we see a labour market that is much closer to full employment than the RBNZ (and we) thought it would be this soon after a massive shock. In their February Monetary Policy Statement, the RBNZ did not expect the unemployment rate to drop to 4.7% until 2023 - we're already there. And while there is still some way to go before the labour market reaches the pre-COVID low of 4% unemployment, we are clearly much closer to maximum employment than the Monetary Policy Committee was anticipating. While they'll still be watching and waiting, there'll be a little less worrying. Regarding the activity outlook, our updated labour market forecasts present some upside risk to GDP, but with capacity constraints being amplified by imported labour and goods disruption, upside risks still appear capped, with prices more likely to budge than activity.

The week ahead

RBNZ Inflation Expectations - Q2 (Friday 7 May, 3:00pm). We could see a stronger near-term pulse coming through (as we did in the ANZBO), but longer-term expectations are likely to remain anchored.

ANZ Truckometer - April (Tuesday 11 May, 10:00am).

REINZ House Prices - April (13-14 May, 9:00am). April will be the first month of data where we may see the impacts of the Government's housing policy announcements. While there is a risk that prices fall, our assessment is house prices may just increase more slowly than before.

Food Prices - April (Thursday 13 May, 10:45am). Usual seasonal patterns would suggest a small rise in the food price index is likely.

Rental Price Index - April (Thursday 13 May, 10:45am). Rent prices usually increase 0.3%-0.4% in April.



Markets and forecasts

Markets outlook

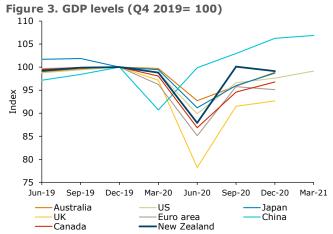
Global bond yields have drifted lower over the course of this week, confounding expectations of a rebound amid what has been, and is expected to remain, a solid run of US data. Consensus expectations for US non-farm payrolls have lifted over the course of the week, and now stand at 1.0m, up from last month's +916k result. Fears of tapering by the Fed have also intensified over the past few weeks, and some central banks like the Banks of England and Canada have actually begun paring back bond purchases. Despite this, US bond yields have fallen, and things are not panning out quite as we expected (our forecasts have US bond yields rising over the remainder of the year). Tempting as it is to dismiss it and perhaps chalk it up to positioning and market dislocation, it is also a sign that markets don't necessarily buy into the post-vaccine recovery thematic as inflation expectations rise but real yields hold steady (at negative levels). That leaves us very cautious and open-minded about the possibility of the implications of this recovery being quite different for financial markets than the post-GFC period. Local demand for bonds remains solid ahead of next week's jump in duration, and we expect that theme to remain in play until NZDM issues the new 2032 bond in June. However, NZ short-end interest rates have risen in the wake of strong labour market data. While that's understandable, we doubt short-end rates can go much higher in the absence of economists bringing forward forecasts for OCR hikes, which would be at odds with RBNZ rhetoric. The NZD has performed well amid a surge in commodities this week. The NZD's correlation with US equities has faded, and it is instead taking a lead from the AUD, which in turn tends to be well correlated with commodity prices.

| | Actual | | | | Forecast (end month) | | | | |
|-------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| FX rates | Mar-21 | Apr-21 | Today | Jun-21 | Sep-21 | Dec-21 | Mar-22 | Jun-22 | Sep-22 |
| NZD/USD | 0.700 | 0.716 | 0.723 | 0.75 | 0.76 | 0.77 | 0.77 | 0.77 | 0.77 |
| NZD/AUD | 0.919 | 0.928 | 0.929 | 0.95 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.94 | 0.94 |
| NZD/EUR | 0.596 | 0.596 | 0.600 | 0.60 | 0.60 | 0.60 | 0.60 | 0.59 | 0.59 |
| NZD/JPY | 77.4 | 78.3 | 78.9 | 77.3 | 77.5 | 78.5 | 78.5 | 78.5 | 78.5 |
| NZD/GBP | 0.508 | 0.518 | 0.521 | 0.52 | 0.52 | 0.53 | 0.52 | 0.51 | 0.51 |
| NZ\$ TWI | 74.0 | 75.3 | 75.4 | 76.5 | 76.8 | 77.0 | 77.0 | 76.5 | 76.5 |
| Interest rates/QE | Mar-21 | Apr-21 | Today | Jun-21 | Sep-21 | Dec-21 | Mar-22 | Jun-22 | Sep-22 |
| NZ OCR | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 |
| NZ 90 day bill | 0.35 | 0.36 | 0.37 | 0.32 | 0.33 | 0.34 | 0.34 | 0.34 | 0.34 |
| NZ 10-yr bond | 1.81 | 1.65 | 1.71 | 2.00 | 2.10 | 2.20 | 2.30 | 2.30 | 2.50 |

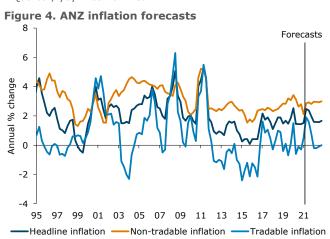
Economic forecasts

| | Dec-20 | Mar-21 | Jun-21 | Sep-21 | Dec-21 | Mar-22 | Jun-22 | Sep-22 | Dec-22 |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| GDP (% qoq) | -1.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 1.5 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| GDP (% yoy) | -0.9 | 0.3 | 13.3 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| CPI (% qoq) | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.2 |
| CPI (% yoy) | 1.4 | 1.5 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 2.0 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.7 |
| Employment (% qoq) | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.7 |
| Employment (% yoy) | 0.8 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 2.1 | 2.6 |
| Unemployment Rate (% sa) | 4.9 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.4 | 4.2 | 4.0 |

Figures in bold are forecasts. mom: Month-on-Month; qoq: Quarter-on-Quarter; yoy: Year-on-Year



Source: Macrobond, Statistics NZ, ANZ Research



Source: Statistics NZ, ANZ Research



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