# ANZ New Zealand Business Outlook

## 28 February 2023



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> Contact Sharon Zollner for more details. See page 7.

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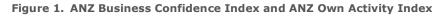
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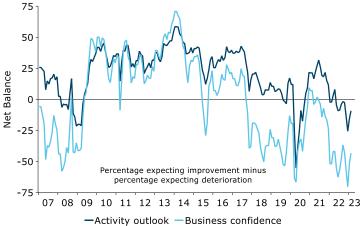
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# **Battling on**

## Key points

- Business confidence lifted another 9 points in February to -43. Expected own activity also lifted 7 points to -9.
- Pricing intentions continue to inch lower but inflation expectations remain stuck around 6%. There was a marked drop in expected wage growth, however.
- There was little difference between the early-month and late-month responses.





Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

#### Table 1: Results versus last month

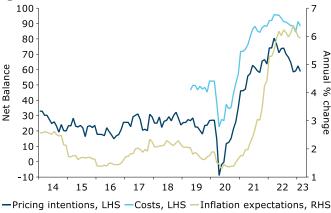
Net Balance	Feb	Jan	Comment
Business Confidence	-43.3	-52.0	Well off its lows; still very subdued.
Own Activity Outlook	-9.2	-15.8	Manufacturing & services are back in the black. Construction the weakest.
Export Intentions	-5.2	-5.4	Manufacturing increasingly upbeat.
Investment Intentions	-4.9	-13.7	Well off its lows; still subdued.
Cost Expectations	88.3	91.3	Stuck at extremely high levels.
Capacity Utilisation	-3.2	-5.3	Little changed.
Residential Construction	-79.2	-84.0	Still very low: cycle trumps cyclone.
Commercial Construction	-17.2	-20.0	Subdued.
Employment Intentions	-3.4	-11.1	Clawing its way back up.
Profit Expectations	-37.7	-42.6	Agri and construction most pessimistic.
Pricing Intentions	58.8	62.4	Well off its peak but decline is hard work.
Ease of Credit	-49.8	-53.7	Gradually lifting.
Inflation Expectations	5.94%	5.99%	6 is the new black?
Activity – vs. same month one year ago	-2.8	-5.4	Rebound in construction and services, but retail and agri fell further.
Employment – vs. same month one year ago	1.0	3.4	Manufacturing strongest, agri weakest.

February saw a further lift in all activity indicators in the ANZ Business Outlook survey, though many remain at very subdued levels compared to historical averages.

The key themes of the February survey:

- Activity measures rose, led by the construction and services sectors.
- Inflation and pricing indicators barely moved; pressures clearly remain intense (figure 2).



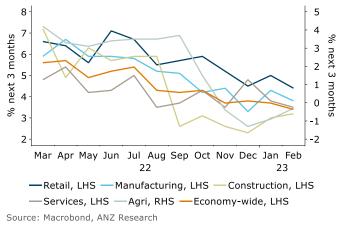


Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

A net 71% of firms in the retail sector expect to raise their prices in the next three months – still high, but well down from a peak of 96% six months ago.

As regards a specific numerical estimate of where firms' own selling prices will be in three months' time (figure 3), two sectors rose and three fell. The economy-wide measure fell from 3.7% to 3.4%.<sup>1</sup> The agriculture sector generally doesn't get to set its output prices, and is an outlier, expecting prices to fall overall. Indeed, agriculture sector pricing intentions are so out of line with everyone else, we've given them their own axis in the chart (RHS) so as not to obscure the downward trend in other sectors.

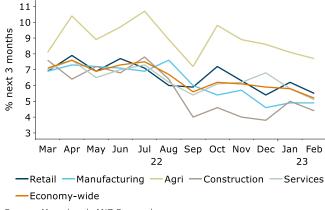
Figure 3. Pricing intentions by sector



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Note these are (anticipated) quarterly percent changes, not annual. We don't yet have enough data to judge how well these series match up with official inflation statistics.

We also survey firms' expected costs in three months' time relative to today (figure 4). A general downtrend remains evident here too. The economywide measure eased from 5.8% to 5.2%. The highest expected cost growth is in agriculture (7.7%), and the weakest in construction (4.4%). The data imply that on average, firms continue to expect margin compression, given costs are expected to lift more than prices. The implied margin compression is most extreme for agriculture, given that sector has the highest cost expectations but the lowest pricing intentions.





Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

Wage growth is a key driver of non-tradables inflation, and the RBNZ is unlikely to stop hiking until wage-price spiral risks have convincingly dissipated.

And here there was some encouraging news for the RBNZ. Reported past wage settlements fell from 6.7% to 6.0% (figure 5), falling in every sector. And expectations for wage settlements for the next 12 months fell even more, down from 5.5% to 4.7%, with no sector higher than 5% (figure 6). However, expected wage increases were 4.5% in the early-month sample before the minimum wage increase was announced, and 5.3% in the latemonth sample.

Overall, firms are anticipating to raise wages by considerably less in the next 12 months than they did in the last (figure 7, over).



#### Figure 6. Wage growth by sector: next 12 months

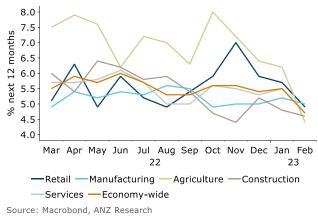




Figure 7. Past and expected wage settlements (economy-wide)

Overall, a net 81.4% of respondents reported expecting to raise wages over the next 12 months, down from 89.5% last month (and a peak of 94.4% in June 2022).

Our heatmap of indicators by sector shows the theme: another monthly bounce (outside of agriculture) that needs to be seen in the context of stillweak levels.

Points of interest:

- Construction, retail and services drove the improvement over the month, with manufacturing and agriculture much more mixed. In levels terms, agriculture remains the most pessimistic.
- Employment intentions saw the largest widespread monthly bounce relative to typical historical moves. It suggests that firms put plans on ice for a while but may now be deciding to get on with things.
- Pricing intentions remain the data that are most dramatically above their historical average, with costs in second place. Expected profitability sits the lowest below its historical average, consistent with the margin squeeze implied by the relative movements in costs and prices.

Table 2. Heatmap	Levels					Monthly changes					
	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv	
Business Confidence	-38.0	-31.9	-94.7	-58.1	-38.7	5.2	19.9	-14.7	4.4	9.9	
Own activity outlook	-20.0	2.1	-31.6	-41.9	1.4	-1.8	2.1	-11.6	15.7	12.7	
Activity vs. same month one year ago	-16.0	-6.4	<del>-</del> 21.1	-6.5	7.1	-4.6	-10.0	-6.1	20.8	8.5	
Exports	-8.6	15.0	-16.7	-50.0	-2.4	9.0	6.5	6.8	-16.7	-2.4	
Investment	6.4	<del>-</del> 2.2	-42.1	-19.4	-1.4	35.7	-0.4	-17.1	13.9	6.5	
Capacity Utilisation	-6.4	-2.2	-10.5	-13.3	0.7	5.5	-2.2	-5.5	2.8	3.0	
Residential Construction				-79.2					4.8		
Commercial Construction				-17.2					2.8		
Employment	-2.0	4.3	-26.3	-19.4	0.7	7.1	7.9	-1.3	10.9	7.8	
Employment vs. same month one year ago	2.0	4.3	-15.8	0.0	2.1	6.5	-1.1	-5.8	6.1	-7.3	
Profits	<del>-</del> 32.7	-36.2	-84.2	-61.3	-27.3	17.3	-9.4	-4.2	-6.8	12.1	
Ease of Credit	-42.9	-57.4	<del>-</del> 73.7	-38.7	-47.9	13.9	1.5	-3.7	6.8	2.1	
Costs	85.7	83.0	100.0	83.3	92.0	-7.2	-0.6	5.3	-1.1	-2.9	
Pricing Intentions	71.4	68.1	-11.8	53.3	61.9	-7.2	2.6	-11.8	-9.2	-2.1	

Note: Shades of orange indicate high, and shades of blue, low, becoming more intense at the extremes. The colour coding is based on standardised values that take into account the historical average and variation in each series. For example, a series may be low compared to others but if that's not unusual, it may not be in blue. The history of the activity and employment versus a year ago is unfortunately too short for historical comparisons to be particularly meaningful but the data is included for completeness.

Source: Macrobond, ANZ Research

# Weather impacts

The survey period this month began on 31 January, shortly after the initial Auckland flooding. A glance at the Auckland numbers at that time showed the Auckland region was actually considerably more optimistic, particularly about employment and profitability, than the rest of the country, but that this wasn't a new theme.

Between the first wave of responses and the 25% that were received later in the month, the minimum wage was increased and Cyclone Gabrielle hit. We're unable disentangle the effect, if any, of the minimum wage increase announcement. Also, the initial direct impacts of the cyclone are not captured in this month's survey – understandably, very few responses were received from the North Island east coast regions following the flooding. If you run a business in an affected region, we'd love to know how things are going over the next months and years: please email nzeconomics@anz.com to join the Business Outlook survey. Indeed, firms from all over New Zealand are very welcome! The bigger our sample, the more interesting analysis we can do with the data.

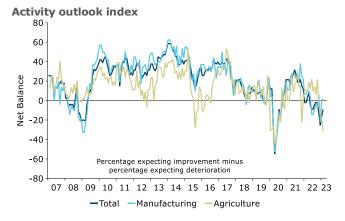
## Our take

The shock value of the November Monetary Policy Statement appears to have faded into the rear-vision mirror as firms focus on the risks and opportunities that are front and centre. Activity expectations are 17 points off their December lows, profit expectations 15 points higher, and employment intentions 13 points higher. Opportunity is clearly still knocking. That said, the level of most indicators remain subdued – firms are still very wary, and understandably so. But they are getting on with the job.

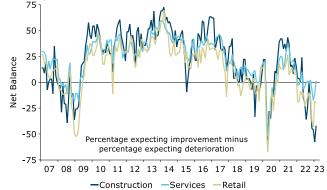
Net Balance	February	Previous (January)	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Services
Business Confidence	-43.3	-52.0	-38.0	-31.9	-94.7	-58.1	-38.7
Own Activity Outlook	-9.2	-15.8	-20.0	2.1	-31.6	-41.9	1.4
Export Intentions	-5.2	-5.4	-8.6	15.0	-16.7	-50.0	-2.4
Investment Intentions	-4.9	-13.7	6.4	-2.2	-42.1	-19.4	-1.4
Cost Expectations	88.3	91.3	85.7	83.0	100.0	83.3	92.0
Capacity Utilisation	-3.2	-5.3	-6.4	-2.2	-10.5	-13.3	0.7
Residential Construction	-79.2	-84.0				-79.2	
Commercial Construction	-17.2	-20.0				-17.2	
Employment Intentions	-3.4	-11.1	-2.0	4.3	-26.3	-19.4	0.7
Profit Expectations	-37.7	-42.6	-32.7	-36.2	-84.2	-61.3	-27.3
Pricing Intentions	58.8	62.4	71.4	68.1	-11.8	53.3	61.9
Ease of Credit Expectations	-49.8	-53.7	-42.9	-57.4	-73.7	-38.7	-47.9
Inflation Expectations (%)	5.94	5.99	5.92	6.04	6.44	5.95	5.85
Activity – same month one year ago	-2.8	-5.4	-16.0	-6.4	-21.1	-6.5	7.1
Employment – same month one year ago	1.0	3.4	2.0	4.3	-15.8	0.0	2.1
Price Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	3.4	3.7	4.4	3.8	-0.3	3.2	3.5
Cost Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	5.2	5.8	5.5	4.9	7.7	4.4	5.1
Wages/Salaries – next 12 months (%)	4.7	5.5	4.9	5.0	4.4	4.6	4.7
Wages/Salaries – same month a year ago (%)	6.0	6.7	5.2	5.4	6.8	6.4	6.4

### Survey Results February 2023



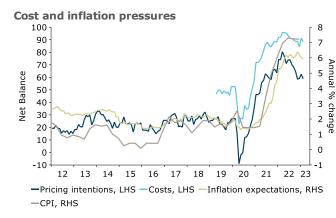


Activity outlook index



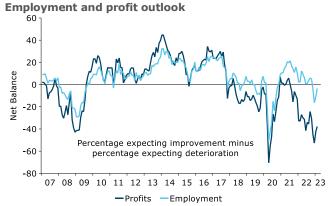
Export sales volumes





Source: ANZ, Statistics NZ, Macrobond

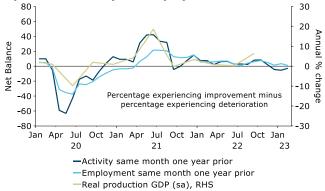




Investment intentions and capacity utilisation



Experienced activity and employment and GDP





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