

NZ Budget 2025

22 May 2025

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Summary

- From a macroeconomic perspective, Budget 2025 contained few surprises. Tighter net discretionary fiscal policy changes have combined with a weaker economic and tax outlook, resulting in just a small downgrade to the overall fiscal outlook compared to December's Half-Year Update.
- The OBEGALx is forecast to reach surplus in the 2028/29 fiscal year, but it's wafer thin at just \$0.2bn (vs \$1.9bn at the Half-Year Update). The OBEGAL remains in deficit across the forecast horizon.
- Meanwhile, the Treasury is forecasting OBEGAL-based structural deficits to persist across the forecast horizon, unchanged from the Half-Year Update and implying it's not the state of the economy or adverse shocks driving persistent deficits; it's a fundamental mismatch between revenue and expenditure settings.
- Net core Crown debt as a share of GDP is forecast to peak at 46.0% in 2027/28, and dip to 45.5% in 2028/29. The forecast peak in the Half-Year Update was 46.5%, but one year earlier. The level of net core Crown debt is higher by the end of the forecast horizon (\$238.5bn vs \$234.1bn).
- Excluding this year's pre-funding of next year's programme, New Zealand Debt Management have lifted their bond issuance guidance by a cumulative \$4bn, but it's all in the tail. Near-term issuance guidance has been downgraded.

Debt issuance guidance (\$bn)

	Jun-25	Jun-26	Jun-27	Jun-28	Jun-29	Total (26-29)
Bonds						
2025 Budget Update	43	38	36	30	28	132
2024 Half-Year Update	40	40	38	28	22	128
Short-term borrowings (T-bills and ECP)						
2025 Budget Update	15	18	18	15	13	NA
2024 Half-Year Update	20	20	18	13	13	NA

Source: NZ Treasury

- Lower discretionary operational spending net of tax changes compared to the Half-Year Update implies marginally lower aggregate demand than otherwise. That's nothing the RBNZ can't offset with a slightly lower OCR than otherwise, all else equal.
- A stronger near-term fiscal impulse might raise a few eyebrows in the RBNZ building, but it looks like a timing story (spending being pushed into the next fiscal year due to delays). There is no reason to think a similar dynamic won't take place this time next year (it's a common phenomenon with this indicator).
- All in all, Budget 2025 is unlikely to be the last "tight" Budget we'll see in pursuit of the long-overdue fiscal consolidation. Getting the books back into the black is important if we want to preserve the fiscal headroom to respond to future shocks and other long-term challenges. But spending restraint certainly isn't the only option: new taxes could be introduced or existing tax rates increased.

Budget 2025 contains growth in new spending...

As signalled by the Minister of Finance in advance, the operating allowance for Budget 2025 has been reduced from \$2.4bn to \$1.3bn, marking the smallest allowance for new operational spending and revenue initiatives since Budget 2015. At just 0.9% of 2024/25 core Crown expenses, that's certainly not enough to keep up with the cost of delivering public services, implying the overall 'real' (cost adjusted) level of spending is poised to shrink. However, \$5.4bn in reprioritisations from within existing baselines and revenue initiatives have funded a sizable portion of the Budget 2025 operating package, meaning there's still plenty of new policy initiatives to digest.

Beyond Budget 2025, signalled operating allowances remain at \$2.4bn per Budget. But the signal from the Minister of Finance has been that future operating allowances are more likely to represent a ceiling than a floor. In that context, it's worth noting that the Treasury continues to forecast the first OBEGALx surplus will arrive one year later than the Government's fiscal strategy objective. If that's still looking likely this time next year, the operating allowance for Budget 2026 and/or the signal for Budget 2027 could be reduced from that baked into today's outlook. The Government has pre-committed \$1.5bn of the Budget 2026 operating allowance for health and defence initiatives, so if the allowance is reduced, savings and revenue initiatives would have to do the heavy lifting to make everything add up.

The capital allowance for Budget 2025 has been increased from \$3.625bn to \$4bn. Capital allowances for the next three Budgets have been reduced slightly from \$3.625bn to \$3.5bn, leaving the total for capital allowances over the forecast period the same as signalled in December's Budget Policy Statement. Unlike the operating allowance, this is a one-off injection (i.e. it doesn't get locked into baselines to the end of time). Given the relative size of capital outlays compared to operating expenses, there is less scope for reprioritisations to fund new demands and priorities. Therefore, we wouldn't be surprised to see the capital allowance lift again in coming budgets (provided it didn't compromise the Government's debt target).

Some of the key initiatives of Budget 2025 include:

- A total of \$7.0bn in net new operating expenditure for health over the forecast period.
- A total of \$6.6bn for additional tax deductions for capital expenditure, branded 'Investment Boost' by the government. This will allow businesses to deduct 20% of a new asset's value from that year's taxable income, on top of normal depreciation.
- A bunch of changes to KiwiSaver, including increasing the minimum default contribution rate to 4% by 1 April 2028, halving the government contribution from the current maximum of \$521.43 per year to a maximum of \$260.72, and removing the government contribution for those earning over \$180,000. These save the government a total of \$3.0bn over the forecast period.
- New operating spending in various areas, including \$1.9bn for defence and foreign affairs, \$1.5bn for education, \$1.1bn for law and order, and \$1.0bn for disability support services. The largest allocation of capital expenditure is \$2.7bn to defence.

The mix of initiatives will have some slight impacts on the economy. For example, the Treasury assesses that the Investment Boost policy will result in marginally higher GDP by the end of the forecast period (a productivity story). Funding tax cuts with spending cuts implies a smaller public sector but a larger private sector than otherwise going forward. In our view, these compositional effects matter less for the economy in the near term than the fact that net new operational expenditure (net of tax changes) is smaller than previous years (and smaller than signalled at HYEUFU).

...as the Government sticks to its fiscal strategy

The Government's fiscal strategy has not changed from that outlined in December's Budget Policy Statement. The plan is to:

- Put net core Crown debt on a downward trajectory towards 40% of GDP in the short term (i.e. over the Treasury's forecast horizon to June 2029) then maintain it between 20% and 40% of GDP in the long term (i.e. the next 15 years), subject to shocks.

- Return the OBEGALx to surplus by 2027/28 and ensure operating expenses are funded from revenues in the long term (as opposed to being funded from debt).
- Reduce core Crown expenses as a percentage of GDP in the short term, then control growth in government spending so that, over time, core Crown expenses reduce towards 30% of GDP.
- Ensure revenue is consistent with the short-term operating balance target and, in the long term, supports long-term productive economic growth.

In other words, the Government's near-term focus is to first stabilise the debt to GDP ratio and then set it on a downward trajectory. Part of that plan involves realigning operational spending with revenues by containing growth in new spending and waiting for growth in the nominal economy (and therefore tax revenue) to do the rest.

The line that "upside revenue surprises will contribute to reducing the deficit" has found its way back into the Government's Fiscal Strategy Report after disappearing in the Budget Policy Statement. Avoiding the temptation to spend positive revenue surprises reduces the risk of pro-cyclical government spending increases (likely requiring a higher-than-otherwise OCR to contain the additional inflation pressure). It would also promote a more symmetrical risk profile around debt issuance.

Treasury's economic outlook downgraded, as previously signalled...

As signalled by the Minister of Finance ahead of the Budget, the Treasury has downgraded its forecast for economic growth in 2025 and 2026.

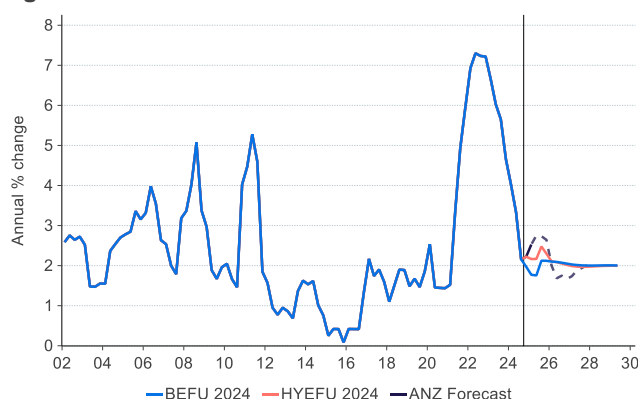
Figures 1 to 4 show the Treasury's forecasts compared to the Half-Year Update. Nominal GDP is what really matters for the fiscals and on that front the Treasury's outlook is \$6.7bn higher, as upward revisions to history (nominal GDP was revised almost \$8bn higher in the year to March 2024 since the Half-Year Update) have been more than offset by a weaker outlook for economic momentum.

Figure 1. Real GDP growth forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 3. CPI inflation forecast



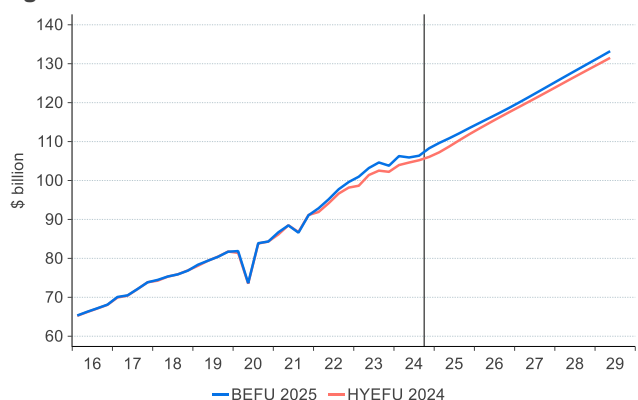
Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 2. Unemployment rate forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 4. Nominal GDP forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Overall, we'd characterise the risks around the Treasury's updated economic outlook as similar to those surrounding our forecast: mixed. The Treasury expects a little more GDP growth momentum than we do, but a slower fall in the unemployment rate

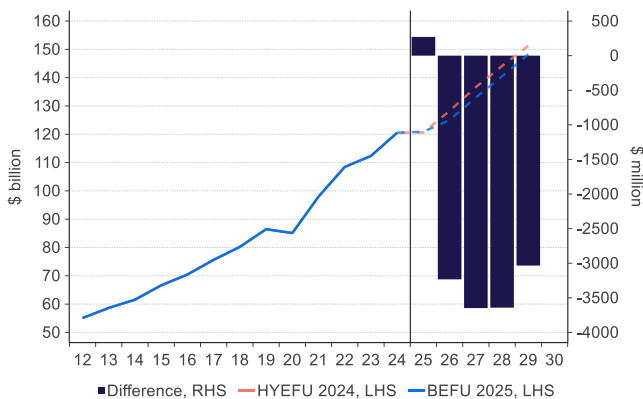
(that likely reflects slightly different population and productivity assumptions). Like the Treasury, [we have recently incorporated](#) the shock to global trade and confidence stemming from US trade policy. And just as the Treasury notes in its outlook, the likely magnitude of these impacts remains highly uncertain, with Treasury viewing the risks as skewed towards weaker outcomes than forecast.

...with forecast revenues downgrades outweighing reduction in expenditure

A softer outlook for economic momentum, another downgrade to the Treasury's tax-to-GDP ratio assumption going forward, and the cost of Investment Boost has weighed on the forecast tax take. All up, the Treasury forecasts \$13.3bn less tax will enter the Government's coffers over the forecast horizon compared to the Half-Year Update. Policy changes account for \$4.8bn of this, leaving \$8.5bn accounted for by changes to Treasury's tax forecasts – a touch larger than the \$5-7bn we were expecting.

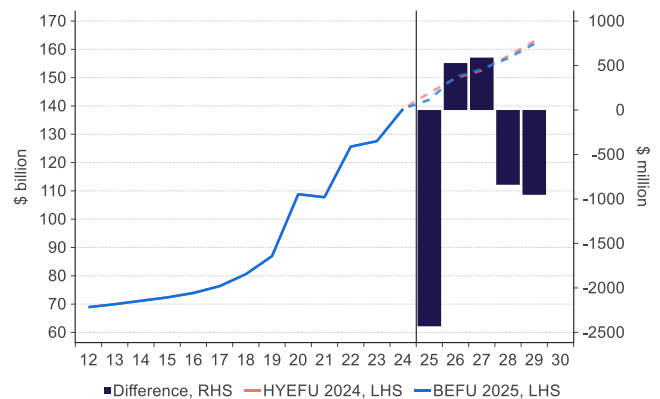
Core Crown expenses are expected to be lower on average over the forecast horizon (a cumulative \$3.1bn lower compared to the Half-Year Update) as lower discretionary spending meets higher non-discretionary spending (such as higher benefit expenses). As a share of GDP, core crown expenses reduce from 33.0% in the year to June 2024 to 30.9% in 2028/29, still above the 30% level the Government is aiming for over the longer run, but certainly on that trajectory.

Figure 5. Core Crown tax revenue



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 6. Core Crown expenses



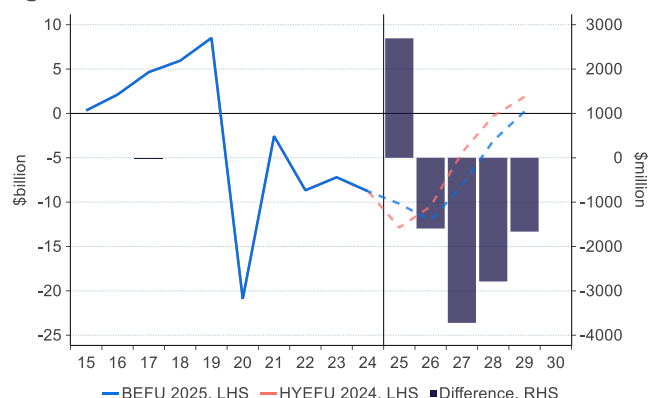
Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Forecast surplus in 2028/29 preserved, but it's slim...

Lower discretionary spending combined with a lower tax take has preserved a forecast OBEGALx surplus in 2028/29, but this has been downgraded from \$1.9bn in the Half-Year Update to just \$200m. That's still one year later than the Government's target, and the forecast deficit of \$3.1bn in 2027/28 is big enough that the odds aren't great of it being revised into a surplus if the economy and tax take beats the Treasury's forecast. To be confident in delivering a surplus in the 2027/28 fiscal year the Government may need to make further adjustments to discretionary policy settings in Budget 2026.

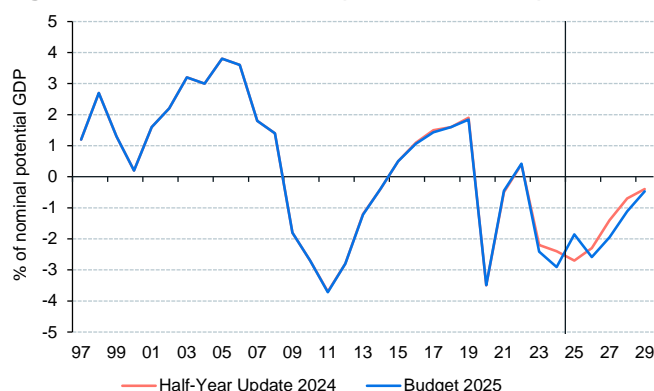
The structural balance is also a very useful indicator for assessing the overall fiscal stance, as it strips out the cyclical component of revenues and expenses as well as one-off shocks (such as natural disasters) to tell us what the underlying OBEGAL or OBEGALx would be regardless of where we are in the business cycle. Based on the OBEGAL version, the Treasury is forecasting structural deficits to persist until the end of the forecast period, unchanged from the Half-Year Update and implying it's not the state of the economy or adverse shocks driving persistent deficits; it's a fundamental mismatch between revenue and expenditure settings.

Figure 7. OBEGALx



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 8. Structural balance (OBEGAL version)

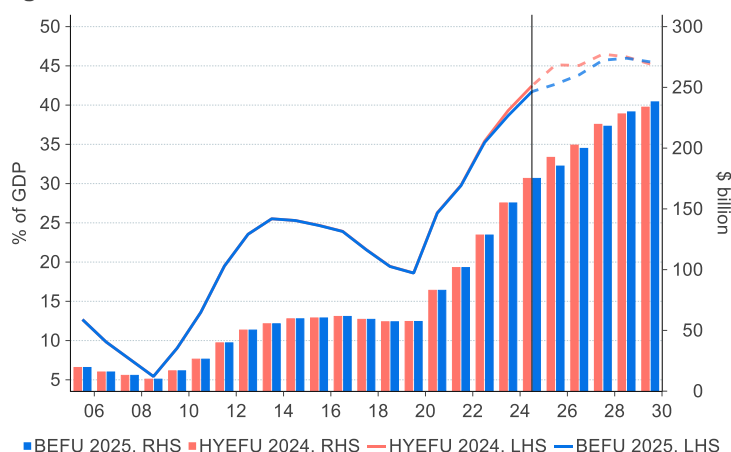


Source: NZ Treasury

...and debt is still rising

At \$238.5bn, net core Crown debt is projected to be \$4.4bn higher by the end of the forecast horizon compared to the Half-Year Update. However, upward revisions to the historical level of GDP by Stats NZ have helped improve it as a share of GDP in the near term, and it is projected to peak at 46.0% in the 2027/28 fiscal year (a touch below the Half-Year Update peak of 46.5% in the 2026/27 fiscal year). By the end of the forecast period, the debt ratio is expected to fall to 45.5%, still well above the Government's goal to reduce it below 40% of GDP.

Figure 9. Net core Crown debt



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

According to the Treasury's forecast, the net core Crown debt to GDP ratio will have lifted 27.4%pts of GDP between the onset of the pandemic and its peak (from 18.6% of GDP in 2019 to 46.0% in 2027/28). If we assume significant shocks happen around once per decade, then it's also fair to assume that the next big shock could have another ratcheting effect on the debt to GDP ratio, which could ultimately require even tougher choices around spending and taxes down the road.

Bond issuance guidance increased slightly, but it's all in the tail

Excluding this year's ~\$3bn pre-funding of next year's programme, New Zealand Debt Management have lifted its bond issuance by a cumulative \$4bn compared to the Half-Year update, a little more than the \$2bn increase we expected. However, the increase is all in the tail, with both next year's programme and that for 2026/27 downgraded by \$2bn to \$38bn and \$36bn respectively. The bond market is likely to welcome that.

For the current fiscal year (which only has about a month to go) guidance has been signalled at \$43bn – that's a smidgen higher than the \$42.5bn we expected. However, for NZDM \$0.5bn is rounding error, and we don't think there is any signal here for the June tender schedule. We expect the tender run rate to remain at the recently reduced pace of \$450m/week in June and certainly don't expect linker issuance to fill the gap in June between the \$42.5bn we've estimated and NZDM's \$43bn guidance.

Short-term borrowings (Treasury bills and Euro-Commercial Paper - ECP) guidance has also been tweaked (likely to smooth bond issuance between fiscal years). Importantly, short-term borrowings are still signalled to approach \$13bn by the end of the forecast.

In terms of syndications, NZDM note they expect to execute four syndications over the coming fiscal year (same number as 2024/25). One is expected to be a new 2050 inflation-indexed bond (linker), and the other three will be taps of existing-nominal bond lines. The first cab off the ranks will be a tap of the 2031 NZGB by the end of August, subject to market conditions.

NZDM note that gross linker issuance is expected to be between \$1.5bn and \$3bn in 2025/26 (subject to demand and market conditions). This range includes both the 2050 syndication and issuance via tender.

There are also plans to commence repurchase of the 2026 NZGB prior to maturity (subject to market conditions). Further details will be announced closer to the time.

NZDM reiterated that intra-year short-term borrowings are expected to vary between \$10bn to \$25bn, and that the composition will include a minimum of USD3bn of ECP and NZD3bn of T-bills.

Table 1. Issuance guidance (\$bn)

	Jun-25	Jun-26	Jun-27	Jun-28	Jun-29	Total (26-29)
Bonds						
2025 Budget Update	43	38	36	30	28	132
2024 Half-Year Update	40	40	38	28	22	128
Short-term borrowings (T-bills and ECP)						
2025 Budget Update	15	18	18	15	13	NA
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Source: NZ Treasury

As expected, no material changes have been made to NZDM's liquidity strategy (to maintain a buffer of around \$15bn) and the pace of LSAP repurchases is unchanged. As was the case in the Half-Year Update, Kāinga Ora bonds that mature within the Treasury's forecast horizon are captured in today's guidance.

Market reaction

Markets reacted positively to the Budget on account of the fact that projected bond issuance over the next two fiscal years was reduced by \$2bn per annum. While total projected issuance was increased by \$7bn over the forecast period, \$3bn of that was for the current fiscal year, which is now almost over, and all of the remaining increases were flagged for 2027/28 and 2028/29. For markets it's all about the pace of issuance, and we think markets will be relieved by these new near-term issuance forecasts, which are consistent with the run rate of nominal bond issuance holding at \$450m, or even falling in time. But for now, as noted earlier, we expect that pace to be maintained for the time being.

By the numbers, across the full 52 weeks of 2025/26, if we take out 3 weeks for the Christmas/New Year break and 4 weeks for syndications, that leaves 45 weeks for tenders. We think NZDM can be confident of issuing \$16bn to \$17bn of bonds each of the 3 slated syndicated nominal bond taps (this year's syndications raised at average of \$5.1bn per event). If we further assume that NZDM will be able to sell at least \$2bn of linkers (via the launch of the new 2050 bond and at tenders), that'll leave them with just \$19bn to \$20bn of bonds to issue to get to their \$38bn projection, which can, in turn, be achieved by issuing \$425m to \$450m of nominal bonds per week.

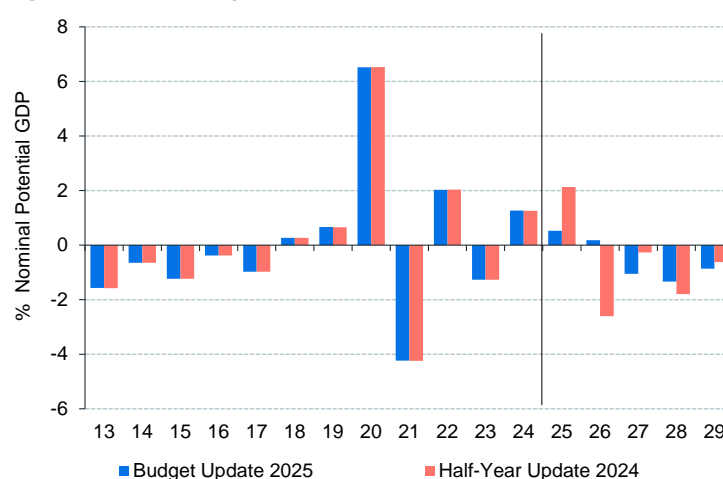
Implications for monetary policy appear limited

Overall, the stance of discretionary fiscal policy is looking a smidgen more contractionary than that presented at the Half-Year Update. The lower operating allowance represents around 0.25% of GDP, meaning it's worth only a few basis points on the OCR. Higher capex in the near term will provide some offset to that.

Lower taxes have been paid for with government spending cuts, meaning the net impact of tax cuts on aggregate demand is likely to be small – too small to move the dial on our expectation for aggregate demand and inflation pressures. But this will have small compositional effects on the economy going forward: a smaller public sector, but a larger private sector (all else equal).

The fiscal impulse provides an assessment of the impact of changes in fiscal settings on aggregate demand, but this indicator is far from perfect. It tells us if fiscal policy is adding more or less to demand compared to the year prior. Overall, the near-term fiscal impulse shows the current fiscal year (to June 2025) is less expansionary than estimated at the Half-Year Update (0.5% vs 2.1%), but the 2026 fiscal year has flipped from contractionary to expansionary (+0.2% vs -2.6%). This kind of rephasing is very common with this indicator, as spending delays gets pushed into the next fiscal year (i.e. we can expect a similar dynamic to occur this time next year). Therefore, it is also important to gauge the average impulse over the forecast horizon (2025-2029), and on that front we're looking at -0.5% of GDP vs -0.6% at the Half-Year Update.

Figure 10. Fiscal impulse



Source: NZ Treasury

All up, changes in discretionary fiscal policy since the Half-Year Update look set to have a relatively modest impact on monetary conditions: around 5-10 basis points less pressure on the OCR, all else equal. That's not enough to move the dial if the RBNZ is cutting in 25bp increments, but it will all go into the mix in next week's Monetary Policy Statement.

Summary

From a macroeconomic perspective, Budget 2025 contained few surprises (given most of the key information was revealed in advance, as has become typical). Some might focus on the stimulatory impacts of tax cuts, but given that's been paid for with lower government spending the net impact on aggregate demand is likely to be small. Indeed, compared to the Half-Year Update, operational spending net of tax changes has been decreased (as captured in the lower operating allowance). For the RBNZ, changes to fiscal settings are unlikely to be the most significant development when today's information is incorporated into the May MPS forecasts.

The broader fiscal backdrop is also little changed: the Government continues to pursue its fiscal strategy to gradually get the books back into the black by restraining growth in new spending and waiting for growth in the nominal economy (i.e. tax revenues) to catch up. Budget 2025 is unlikely to be the last "tight" Budget we'll see in pursuit of this goal.

For markets, the main focus today was on the bond programme, and on that front the news was mixed: fewer bonds for 2025/26 and 2026/27, but more thereafter. While the overall change has been an increase in bond issuance guidance (\$4bn overall), the drop in the near term will be welcomed by markets.

Looking forward, while spending restraint can put more emphasis on public sector efficiency, there's only so much this approach can achieve in the longer run. Ongoing pressure on health and superannuation spending from an aging population, pressure on infrastructure from past underinvestment, and rising debt-servicing costs as higher Government bond yields meet the previous Government's pro-cyclical debt-funded spending increases are all major challenges waiting for us down the road – challenges that will be difficult to overcome in an equitable way without broadening the tax base. But in the short term at least, adjusting revenue (i.e. tax) policy to address such challenges and achieve surpluses more quickly does not appear to be on this Government's agenda.

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