

NZ Half-Year Economic and Fiscal Update 2025

16 December 2025

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Contact
 [Miles Workman](#), [Matthew Galt](#) or [David Croy](#) for more details.

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Shifting the goalposts

Summary

- The Treasury has downgraded its fiscal outlook, with the forecast return to OBEGALx surplus pushed out another year to 2029/30.
- The Minister of Finance has shifted the fiscal strategy goalposts, now targeting an OBEGALx surplus in the year to June 2029 (vs June 2028 in May's Fiscal Strategy Report) – so they're still forecasting missing target by a year, but not two. There have been no other major changes to the Government's fiscal strategy.
- We'd characterise risks to the Treasury's economic outlook as broadly balanced, with overs and unders versus our forecast. We see upside risk to the Treasury's near-term activity forecast, but downside risk to their outlook for prices.
- Core Crown tax revenues are forecast to be a cumulative \$1.7bn lower to June 2029 compared to the Budget forecast. Expenses are expected to be \$0.5bn higher.
- Discretionary fiscal settings are unchanged from Budget: the operating allowance for Budget 2026 and beyond continues to be \$2.4bn and the capital allowance is unchanged at \$3.5bn per budget.
- Net core Crown debt as a share of GDP is forecast to peak at 46.9% in 2027/28 (and remain stable at that ratio in 2028/29) before dipping to 46.1% in 2029/30. That's higher than the profile presented at Budget.
- For markets, the main focus today was on the bond programme and the message here is mixed. Overall issuance is expected to be \$3bn higher than the Budget on a cumulative basis, but a reduction in NZDM's liquidity buffer has facilitated a reduction to the current and next year's programme. A fourth syndication in the current fiscal year is no longer expected. Short-term borrowings are also expected to be lower in the near term.

Debt issuance guidance (\$bn)

	Jun-25	Jun-26	Jun-27	Jun-28	Jun-29	Jun-29	Total (26-29)
Bonds							
2025 HYEFU	42.6	35	34	34	32	30	135
2025 BEFU	43	38	36	30	28	NA	132
Short-term borrowings (T-bills and ECP)							
2025 HYEFU	14.5	13	18	15	13	13	NA
2024 BEFU	15	18	18	15	13	NA	NA

Source: NZ Treasury

- With little change to discretionary fiscal settings from May's Budget, we don't think there is much here to lead the RBNZ to materially change their assessment of how fiscal settings are contributing to CPI inflation pressures.
- All up, markets will welcome the near-term reduction in bond issuance guidance, but yet another shifting out of the fiscal strategy goalposts could raise questions around whether the Government intends to follow through on its fiscal strategy. Next stop Budget 2026.

Macroeconomic context and fiscal strategy

The Minister of Finance has maintained discretionary fiscal settings in the context of a modest downgrade to the Treasury's fiscal forecasts. Operating allowances for Budget 2026 and beyond remain at \$2.4bn, and the capital allowance continues to be \$3.5bn per Budget.

In response to a weaker fiscal outlook, the Government has pushed out its target OBEGALx surplus date by one year, from the 2027/28 fiscal year to 2028/29. The Treasury's forecasts have the surplus arriving one year later than that delayed target date. The Treasury has a small deficit of \$0.9b forecast for the target surplus date of 2028/29, and a surplus of \$2.3b forecast for the year following. The Government will need either an upside surprise to the economy, or additional fiscal restraint beyond what they are planning, to achieve their target surplus date.

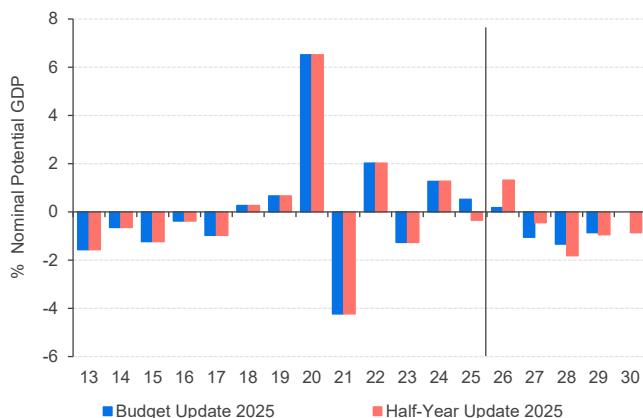
Aside from pushing out the target surplus date by one year, other elements of the Government's fiscal strategy are unchanged:

- Put net core Crown debt on a downward trajectory towards 40% of GDP over the next four fiscal years, 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 balance to surplus by 2028/29 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, that it supports long-term productive economic growth.

The comment that "upside revenue surprises will contribute to reducing the deficit" has been retained in the Budget Policy Statement. We think this is important because it adds some symmetry to the risk profile around the fiscal outlook and debt issuance.

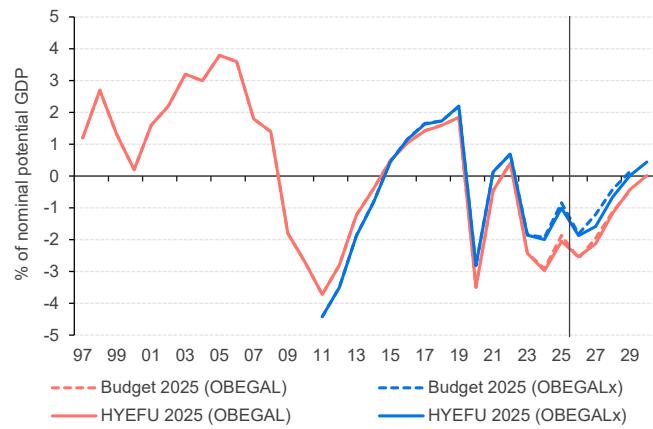
We do not expect today's release to materially alter the RBNZ's assessment of the fiscal stance relative to Budget 2025. In absolute terms, the Government is still injecting more money into the economy than it is withdrawing through taxes. However, operating deficits as a share of GDP are forecast to begin narrowing within the next year or so and the fiscal impulse is expected to turn negative from 2027, which should help contain inflationary pressure over the medium term, provided the Government adheres to its strategy. If the Government were to consolidate faster than currently planned (for example, by increasing taxes or reducing spending), the RBNZ would be well placed to respond to the smaller demand impulse with a lower OCR than otherwise, and vice versa.

Figure 1. The fiscal impulse



Source: NZ Treasury

Figure 2. Structural balance



Source: NZ Treasury

While we acknowledge that pursuing fiscal consolidation amid resistance to higher taxes and the need to deliver key public services is challenging, there remains an elephant in the Cabinet room – and it is getting bigger. As the Treasury noted in its [Long-Term Fiscal Statement](#) earlier this year, current fiscal settings are not sustainable in the long run. Significant fiscal challenges on the horizon – chiefly the fiscal cost of an ageing population – suggest substantial policy change will eventually be required. That's particularly concerning in the context of the Treasury's estimate of the structural balance, which shows current fiscal deficits are not being driven by the state of the economy, but by a fundamental mismatch between revenues and expenses. The slower the pace of fiscal consolidation today, the sooner policymakers will be forced to tame the elephant.

The Treasury's forecasts have been modestly downgraded...

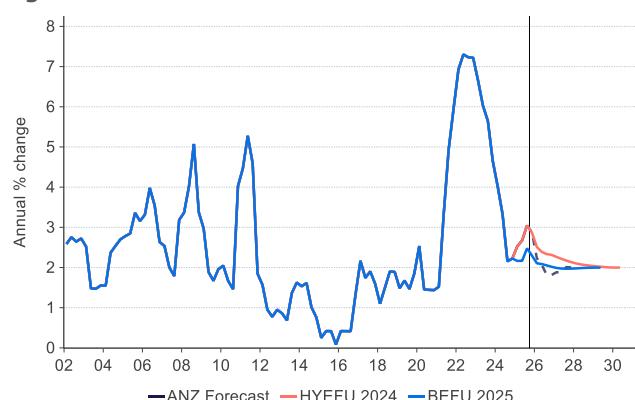
Figures 1 to 4 show the Treasury's forecasts compared to the Budget Update. The Treasury's real GDP forecast has been downgraded and the forecast unemployment rate revised higher. However, a higher forecast for inflation in the near term and the terms of trade across the forecast period provide some offset. All up, the Treasury's nominal GDP forecast has actually been revised up by a cumulative \$2.7bn to June 2029 (albeit lower at the start of the forecast period and higher at the end).

Figure 3. Real GDP forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 5. CPI inflation forecast



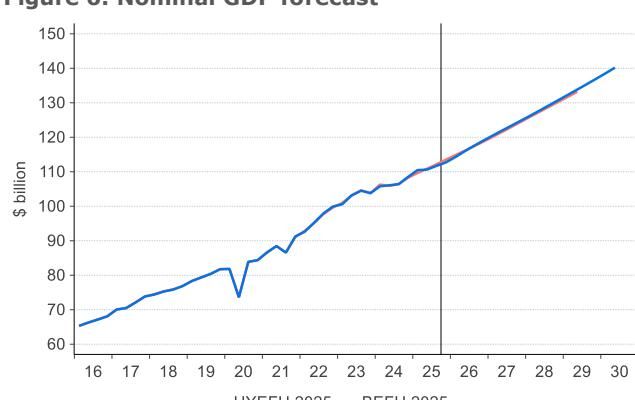
Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 4. Unemployment rate forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 6. Nominal GDP forecast



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Overall, we'd characterise the risks around the Treasury's updated economic outlook as balanced. We see some upside risk to the Treasury's near-term real GDP forecast given more positive indicators released since the Treasury finalised its forecasts. But we see some downside risk to its price assumptions. We expect a faster reduction in CPI inflation and a lower goods terms of trade in the near term.

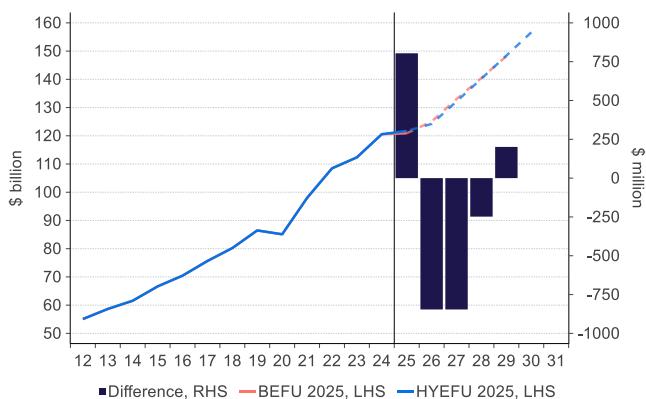
...which has reduced revenue and pushed up expenses

Despite higher cumulative nominal GDP over the forecast period, forecast changes have weakened the fiscal outlook. Changes in the composition of the economy see a marginally lower tax-to-GDP ratio over the forecast period, and core Crown tax revenue has been revised down by a cumulative \$1.7bn over the forecast period. This was not far off our expectation of around a \$3bn downgrade.

Non-tax revenue has also been revised down, seeing the overall core Crown revenue forecast revised down by a cumulative \$6.3bn in the four years to June 2029. Key drivers of this are tax impairments/student loan write-downs and downward revisions to emissions trading scheme revenues.

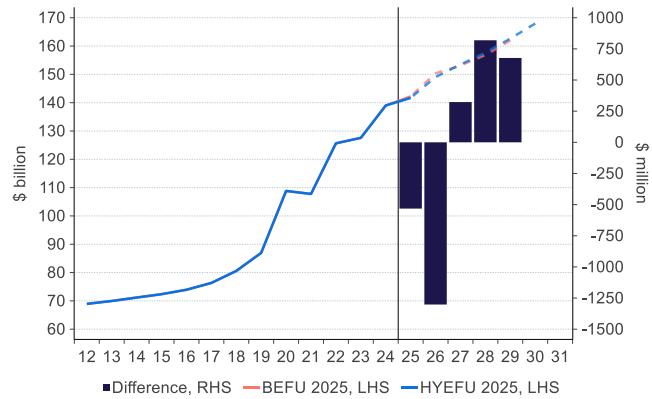
The core Crown expense forecast is little changed, having been revised up by a cumulative \$0.5bn over the forecast period. Higher benefit expenses due to a higher price level and estimated recipient numbers are a key driver of higher expenses (the Government has kept its allowances for new discretionary spending unchanged). As a share of GDP, core crown expenses are forecast to fall from their recent peak of 33.1% in the year to June 2024 to 30.5% in 2029/30, still above the 30% level the Government is aiming for over the longer run, but certainly on that trajectory.

Figure 7. Core Crown tax revenue



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 8. Core Crown expenses



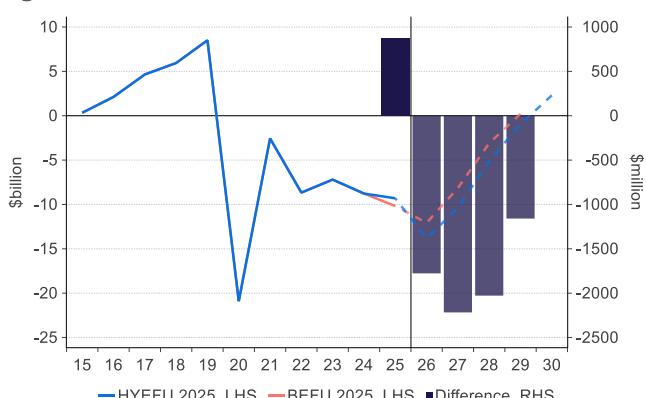
Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Surplus delayed and debt higher

Changes in the outlook for revenues and expenses have pushed out the forecast OBEGALx surplus by another year. The Treasury forecasts a small surplus of \$2.3bn (0.4% of GDP) in the year ended June 2030 – one year later than the Government's target, which itself has been pushed out by a year in today's updated Fiscal Strategy.

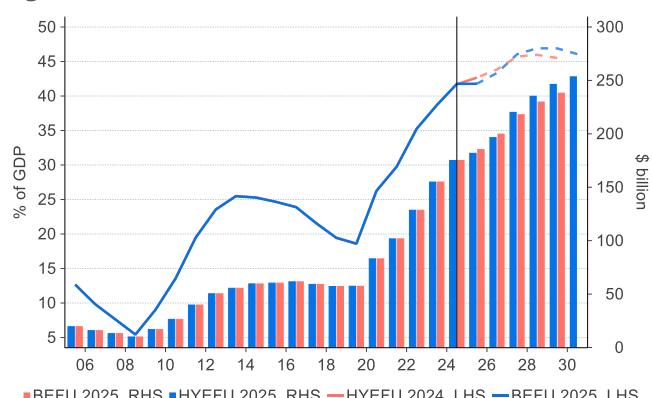
The peak in net core Crown debt is 0.9%pts of GDP higher than it was at the Budget Update. Net core Crown debt is forecast to round a corner as a share of GDP, peaking at 46.9% in 2027/28 and falling to 46.1% by the end of the forecast period, still well above the Government's goal to reduce it below 40% of GDP.

Figure 9. OBEGALx



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 10. Net core Crown debt



Source: NZ Treasury, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Bond issuance guidance increased overall, but lower in the near term

New Zealand Debt Management has increased bond issuance by a cumulative \$3bn to June 2029 compared to the Budget Update. We had pencilled in no change. However, guidance for the current and next fiscal year has been downgraded from \$38bn to \$35bn and \$36bn to \$34bn respectively. For the years to June 2028 and 2029, guidance has been lifted by \$4bn to \$34bn and \$32bn respectively. The additional forecast year (2030) has been set at \$30bn, above our expectation of \$24bn.

Changes to bond issuance guidance reflect both the weaker fiscal outlook, which has added to issuance over the latter half of the forecast horizon, and also a reduction in NZDM's liquidity buffer (from \$15bn to \$10bn), which has enabled a reduction to issuance guidance in the near term.

NZDM has published [this insight briefing](#) alongside today's guidance, which outlines NZDM's assessment of what constitutes an appropriate liquidity buffer. In short, NZDM's Euro-Commercial Paper (ECP) programme is thought to be a better backstop than previously, and durations of any periods of global financial market stress are expected to be shorter. Meanwhile, the cost of holding liquid assets is now higher. NZDM's updated liquidity strategy is not outside global norms. NZDM will review its liquidity strategy every two years.

Short-term borrowings (Treasury bills and ECP) guidance has also been lowered for the current fiscal year (from \$18bn to \$13bn), but is unchanged thereafter. Importantly, short-term borrowings are still forecast to approach \$13bn by June 2030.

Table 1. Issuance guidance (\$bn)

	Jun-25	Jun-26	Jun-27	Jun-28	Jun-29	Jun-29	Total (26-29)
Bonds							
2025 HYEFU	42.6	35	34	34	32	30	135
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2025 HYEFU	14.5	13	18	15	13	13	NA
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Source: NZ Treasury

In terms of syndications, NZDM's lower issuance guidance for the current year means they no longer expect to undertake the previously signalled fourth syndication this fiscal year. That is, no more syndications are expected in the period to June 2026.

NZDM notes that gross linker issuance is expected to be between \$2bn and \$3bn in 2025/26 (subject to demand and market conditions). That's up from guidance of \$1.5bn to \$3bn at May's Budget. This range includes both the 2050 syndication and issuance via tender.

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.

Market reaction

The bond market reacted positively to the HYEFU, with the curve marked about 6bp lower roughly 15 minutes after its release. That's a logical reaction given the focus going into today was on the short-term outlook for issuance, which has been reduced, and when we might get the next syndication. But as noted, NZDM isn't planning another syndication this year, and that's likely to see outperformance of the 20-30yr part of the curve given that markets expected the next syndication to be an ultra-long bond. It also means that issuance will only come via what we assume will be 24 more weekly tenders this fiscal year. That figure is based on our expectation that tenders will resume on 15 January after the summer recess, recalling that last week's tender was the last of calendar 2025.

We won't know for sure when tenders will resume until NZDM publishes the January tender schedule tomorrow at 8am NZT, but assuming there are 24, having issued \$24.1bn of bonds so far, they only need to issue \$10.9bn more. That can easily be achieved by maintaining a \$450m/week pace of nominal issuance alongside occasional linker issuance, give or take the usual wiggle room. In fact, we suspect the reduction in the 2025/26 bond programme to \$35bn was made precisely so NZDM could maintain the current \$450m pace of nominal issuance. Leaving the programme unchanged, or reducing it by less, may have signalled the need to increase the pace of issuance, and that makes no sense given how far ahead of plan NZDM is, whereas this projection sends an unambiguous signal.

To illustrate, had NZDM left this year's programme at \$38bn, they would have needed to issue around \$600m of bonds per week to achieve their target. Regarding the liquidity buffer, markets are likely to see the reduction as positive. Not only is \$10bn still a conservative number by OECD standards, as NZDM points out in their Insight note explaining the decision, but all else equal, a lower liquidity buffer means more cash will flow into the banking system than otherwise would have (as spending gets funded from earlier issuance). Short-end traders will welcome that in the wake of the recent sharp decline in settlement cash, which has led to tightness in the cash market at times.

Summary

A weaker starting point for the real economy and fiscal position has been carried into the outlook, resulting in yet another delay to the forecast return to OBEGALx surplus. That's been met by the Government shifting the goalposts (again) on its fiscal strategy target.

When it comes to discretionary fiscal policy settings, nothing has changed. Operating and capital allowances are unchanged. The Treasury continues to forecast the return to OBEGALx surplus occurring a year later than the Government's strategy, suggesting that unless we see positive surprises to the Treasury's forecast something will need to change: further spending restraint, higher taxes, or another shifting of the fiscal strategy goalposts.

For markets, the main focus today was on the bond programme, and on that front the HYEFU delivered mixed signals: fewer bonds in the near term, but more bonds overall. Markets will welcome the near-term shift to fewer bonds, but may conclude (as we do) that risks over the medium term are skewed to the upside.

We don't see any implications for monetary policy.

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Sharon Zollner
Chief Economist, New Zealand
Telephone: +64 9 357 4094
Email: sharon.zollner@anz.com

General enquiries:
research@anz.com

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David Croy
Senior Strategist
Market developments, interest rates, FX, unconventional monetary policy, liaison with market participants.
Telephone: +64 21 243 0945
Email: david.croy@anz.com



Matthew Dilly
Agricultural Economist
Primary industry developments and outlook, structural change and regulation, liaison with industry.
Telephone: +64 21 221 6939
Email: matthew.dilly@anz.com



Miles Workman
Senior Economist
Macroeconomic forecast co-ordinator, economic developments, labour market dynamics, inflation, fiscal and monetary policy.
Telephone: +64 21 661 792
Email: miles.workman@anz.com



Matthew Galt
Senior Economist
Macroeconomic forecasting, economic developments, GDP, housing and credit dynamics.
Telephone: +64 21 633 469
Email: matthew.galt@anz.com



Natalie Denne
PA / Desktop Publisher
Business management, general enquiries, mailing lists, publications, chief economist's diary.
Telephone: +64 21 221 7438
Email: natalie.denne@anz.com

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