

ANZ New Zealand Business Outlook

29 January 2026

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Activity indicators dip amidst inflationary signals

- Business confidence retreated 10 points from its 30-year high of 74 in December, but at 64 it is still extremely strong. Expected own activity dropped 9 points, but at 52 it is also historically very high. Past own activity eased 3 points to 26, the second highest read since August 2021, while past employment lifted 3 points to +7, the highest since October 2022.
- Inflation indicators were up: the net percent of firms expecting to raise prices in the next three months lifted 5 points to 57%, the highest read since March 2023, and the amount by which firms expect to raise prices also lifted from 1.8% to 2.1%, the highest rate in two years. Wage pressures are starting to lift modestly and inflation expectations are the highest in 15 months.

Figure 1. ANZ Business Confidence, Own Activity and Past Activity

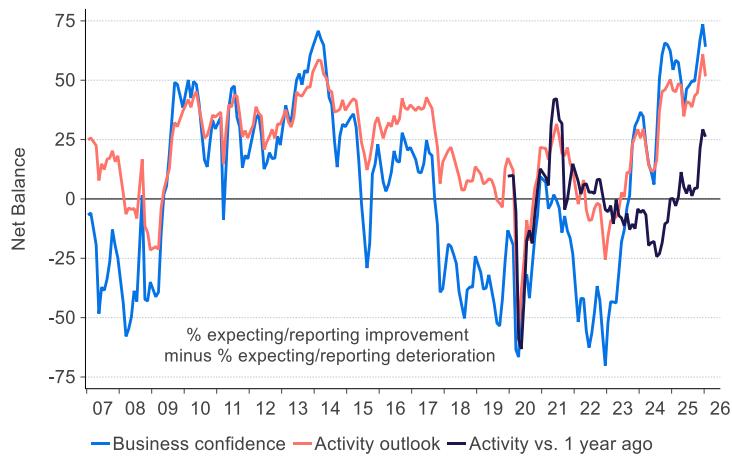
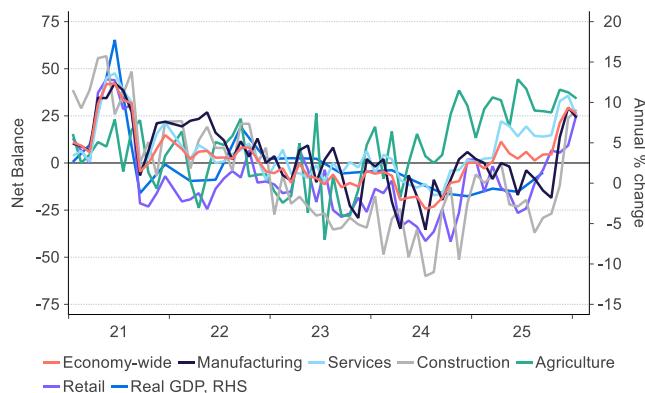


Table 1. Results versus last month

Net Balance	Jan	Dec	Comment
Business Confidence	64.1	73.6	30-year highs were never going to last!
Own Activity Outlook	51.6	60.9	Still very strong historically. Manuf highest (67).
Export Intentions	20.4	25.6	Slipped for agri, but manufacturing rose to 36.
Investment Intentions	28.3	28.1	Highest since 2014, led by services and construction.
Employment Intentions	22.4	27.5	Retail is picking up but other sectors slipped.
Residential Construction	58.8	54.8	Highest since early-2014 despite house prices being flat last year.
Commercial Construction	44.7	57.1	Bouncing around at high levels.
Profit Expectations	32.9	42.7	Aside from Dec spike, strongest since 2016.
Ease of Credit	16.3	28.4	The bounce in interest rates has been noted.
Activity vs. 1 year ago	26.2	29.3	Retail surged from 9 to 26.
Employment vs. 1 yr ago	6.8	4.4	All sectors in the black – first time since late '22.
Cost Expectations % 3m out	2.58%	2.47%	Climbing. Only construction is sub-2%.
Wage Expectations % 12m out	2.82%	2.70%	Highest since late-2024.
Pricing Intentions % 3m out	2.08%	1.81%	Highest since January 2024. Retail top: 2.78%.
Inflation Expectations 1y out	2.77%	2.69%	Still in the target band.

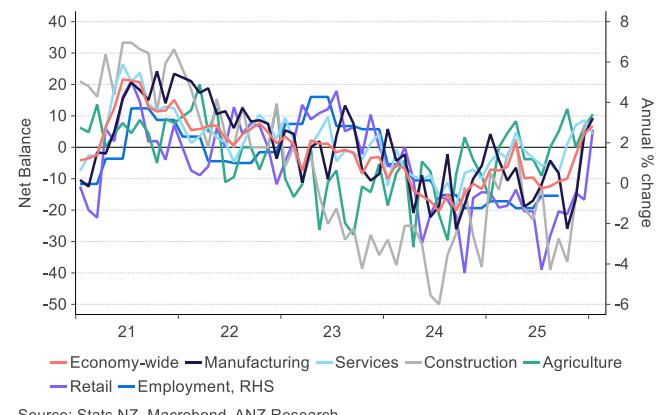
The economy has clearly turned higher. Reported past activity (the best indicator of GDP) is suggesting a solid Q4 GDP result could be on the cards, with a broad-based lift (figure 2), and the strength has been largely maintained into January. Reported past employment is also rising and is back in the black for all sectors (figure 3). That hasn't been the case since late 2022.

Figure 2. ANZBO past activity vs GDP



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

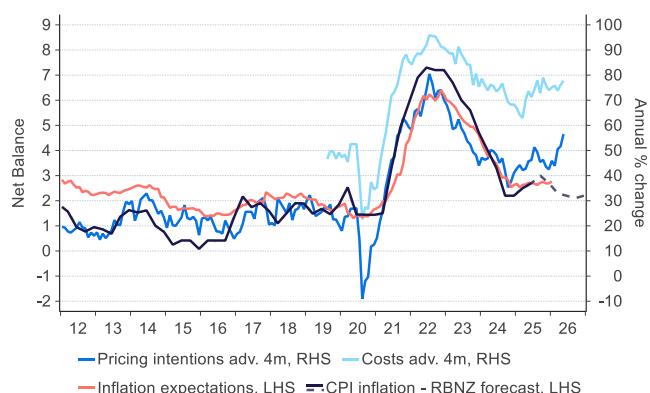
Figure 3. ANZBO past employment vs actual



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

The less-good news is re-emerging signs of inflation pressure. The net percent of firms expecting to increase their prices lifted sharply to 56.5, the highest level since March 2023. This indicator is heading in the opposite direction to the RBNZ's inflation forecasts (figure 4). Cost and inflation expectations were more benign.

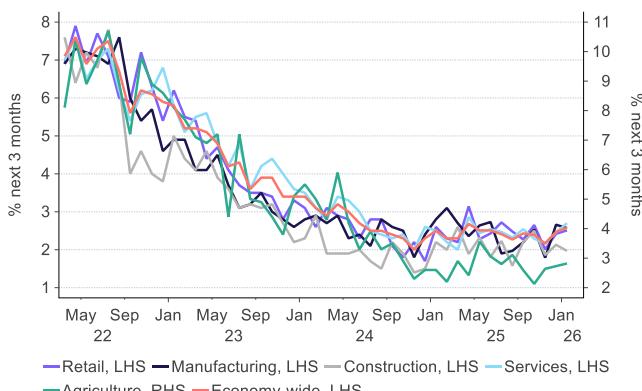
Figure 4. ANZBO inflation indicators and RBNZ CPI forecasts



Source: Stats NZ, RBNZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

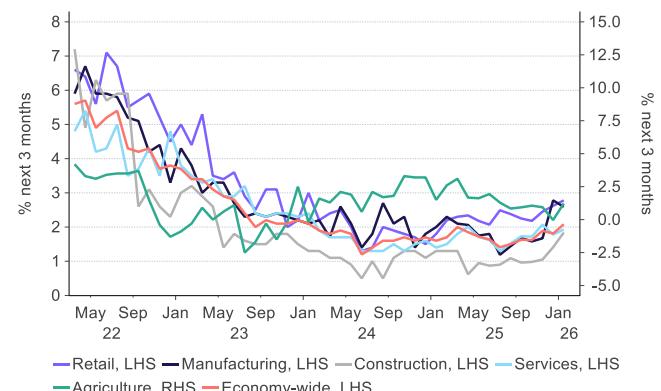
Those are the traditional directional indicators. Figures 5 and 6 show firms' expected average costs and price changes over the next three months. Average numerical pricing intentions remain within recent ranges overall, though that's a harder case to make for retail and construction.

Figure 5. Cost expectations by sector



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 6. Pricing intentions by sector



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Mild upward pressure is also starting to emerge in wages. The expected wage increase of 2.8% is hardly strong but has turned higher. In terms of past outcomes, the proportion of firms who said they have raised wages in the past 12 months increased from 67% to 72%, the highest since April 2024 (figure 7), while the average reported wage increase lifted from 2.6% to 2.8% (figure 8).

Figure 7. Net % reporting wage increases (net %)

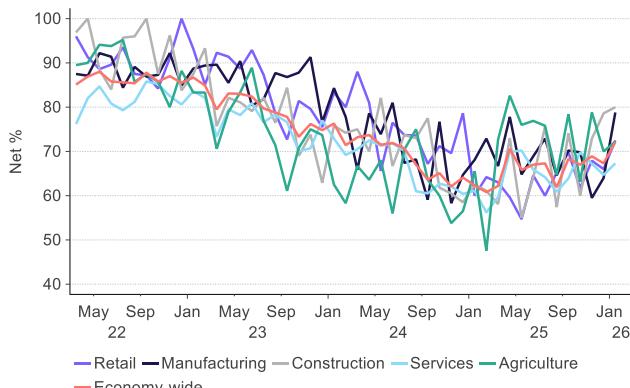
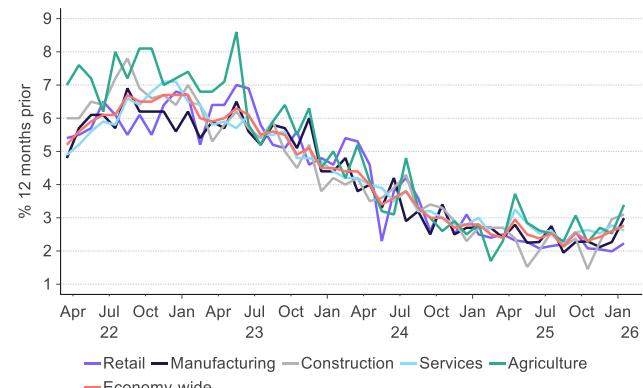


Figure 8. Estimated wage increases last 12 months



The monthly change heatmap has a lot of blue, but important context is that the previous month saw a spike in many series. Retail has perhaps been a little late to the party with more of that sector's increases coming through this month. In level terms, export intentions are the only weak spot. However, it's important to bear in mind that the levels of these indicators are mostly still answers to questions phrased in change terms. The weak level of activity experienced last year does lower the bar considerably for a positive response. It's best to interpret these results as indicating very widespread experienced and expected improvement, rather than firms being – or expecting to be – flat out.

Table 2. Heatmap

	Levels					Monthly changes				
	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Serv
Business Confidence	63.0	74.1	60.5	61.7	61.3	-4.9	-9.6	-5.1	-14.5	-12.4
Own activity outlook	44.4	66.7	34.2	48.9	52.6	-11.2	-1.9	3.0	-8.2	-14.2
Activity vs. same month one year ago	25.9	24.1	34.2	28.3	24.6	16.6	-5.3	-3.3	4.5	-11.1
Exports	14.0	36.4	25.0	3.6	17.4	-6.0	3.1	-10.7	-12.5	-8.5
Investment	17.0	21.6	13.2	32.6	33.0	1.9	-7.6	-8.7	-5.5	1.7
Residential Construction	...	...	...	32.3	...	...	...	...	5.5	...
Commercial Construction	...	...	...	36.7	...	...	...	...	11.7	...
Employment	17	22.2	5.3	40.0	21.7	3.8	-19.8	-7.2	-2.9	-4.6
Employment vs. same month one year ago	5.6	9.3	10.5	8.7	4.3	22.3	5.3	4.0	1.6	-4.3
Profits	24.1	44.4	7.9	41.3	34.0	-22.2	-6.6	1.7	-6.3	-11.2
Ease of Credit	22.2	13.5	15.8	32.6	11.8	9.2	-18.5	-12.3	0.9	-20.9
Costs	78.8	79.6	86.1	73.9	76.4	5.2	2.0	2.2	-7.1	2.4
Pricing Intentions	80.8	70.4	30.6	50.0	52.4	6.7	0.4	24.1	-2.4	4.5

Note: Red indicates high, and blue, low, becoming more intense at the extremes. The colours 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 blue.

Our take

There was good news and bad news in this month's ANZ Business Outlook survey. The good news is that much of the surge in activity indicators in December has been largely maintained into January, despite the bounce in interest rates following the November Monetary Policy Statement (MPS). The next few months will show whether talk of rate hikes this year will snuff out momentum.

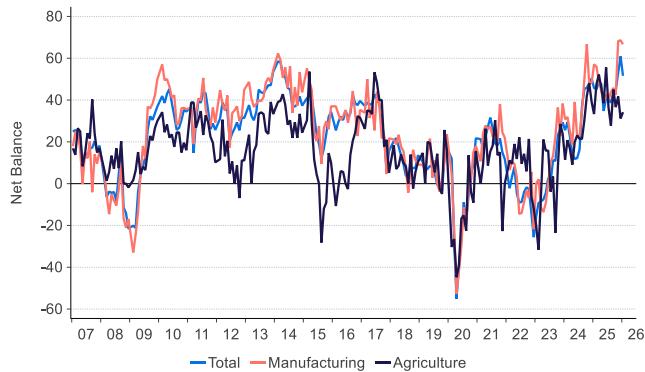
That talk won't be dampened by signals that inflation pressures could be turning higher in a way that doesn't look consistent with the RBNZ's (or our) inflation forecasts. It is very early in the economic recovery for that to be the case. Potential causes are rapid margin recovery (a risk the RBNZ talked about in the MPS), or the degree of spare capacity in the economy being less than expected. We are forecasting the first OCR hike to come in December this year, but if these pricing intentions manifest in hard data, it'll come earlier than that. On the other hand, if the fall in the activity indicators this month proves to be the start of a meaningful loss in momentum, risks could tilt back the other way.

Survey Results January 2022

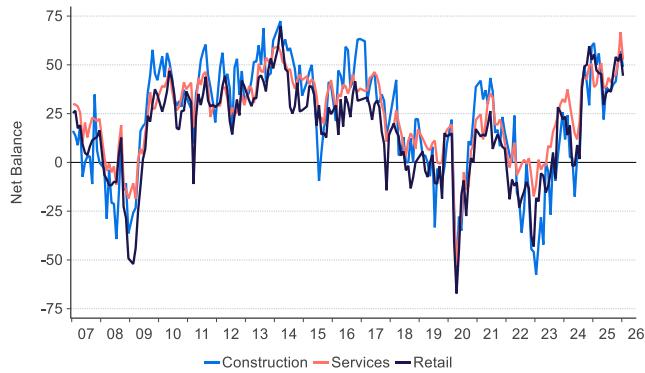
Net Balance	January	Previous (Dec)	Retail	Mfg	Agric	Constrn	Services
Business Confidence	64.1	73.6	63.0	74.1	60.5	61.7	61.3
Own Activity Outlook	51.6	60.9	44.4	66.7	34.2	48.9	52.6
Export Intentions	20.4	25.6	14.0	36.4	25.0	3.6	17.4
Investment Intentions	28.3	28.1	17.0	21.6	13.2	32.6	33.0
Cost Expectations	77.8	76.1	78.8	79.6	86.1	73.9	76.4
Residential Construction	58.8	54.8	...	...	...	58.8	...
Commercial Construction	44.7	57.1	...	...	...	44.7	...
Employment Intentions	22.4	27.5	17.0	22.2	5.3	40.0	21.7
Profit Expectations	32.9	42.7	24.1	44.4	7.9	41.3	34.0
Pricing Intentions	56.5	51.7	80.8	70.4	30.6	50.0	52.4
Ease of Credit Expectations	16.3	28.4	22.2	13.5	15.8	32.6	11.8
Inflation Expectations (%)	2.77	2.69	2.86	2.67	2.77	2.81	2.76
Activity – same month one year ago	26.2	29.3	25.9	24.1	34.2	28.3	24.6
Employment – same month one year ago	6.8	4.4	5.6	9.3	10.5	8.7	4.3
Price Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	2.08	1.8	2.8	2.6	1.2	1.8	1.9
Cost Expectations – 3 months from now (%)	2.58	2.47	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.0	2.7
Wages/Salaries – next 12 months (%)	2.82	2.70	2.0	3.2	2.4	3.0	2.9
Wages/Salaries – same month a year ago (%)	2.76	2.60	2.2	3.0	3.4	3.1	2.6

Charts

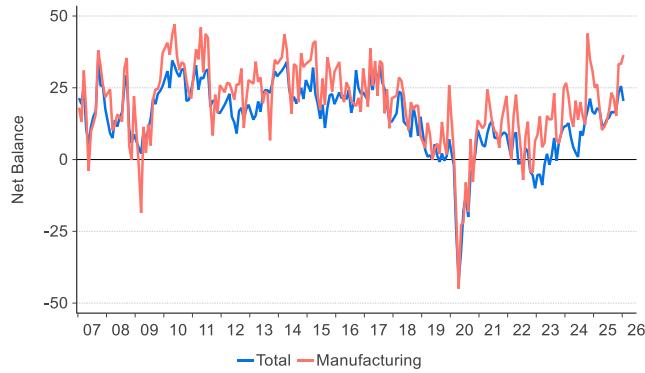
Activity outlook index



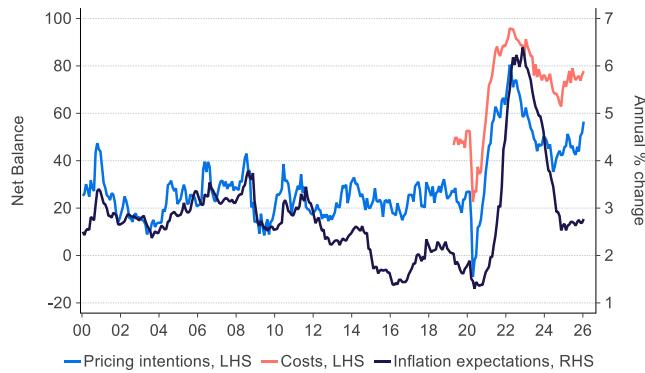
Activity outlook index



Export sales volumes



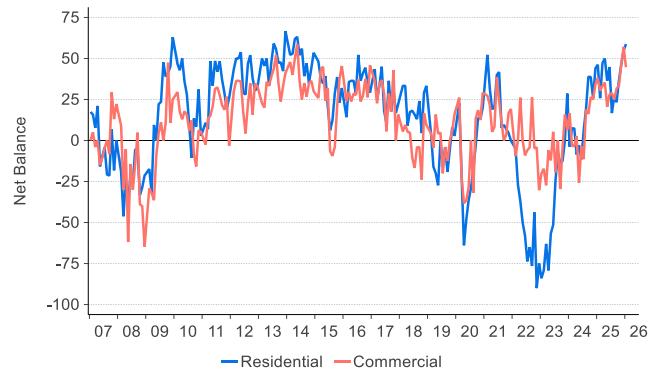
Cost and inflation pressures



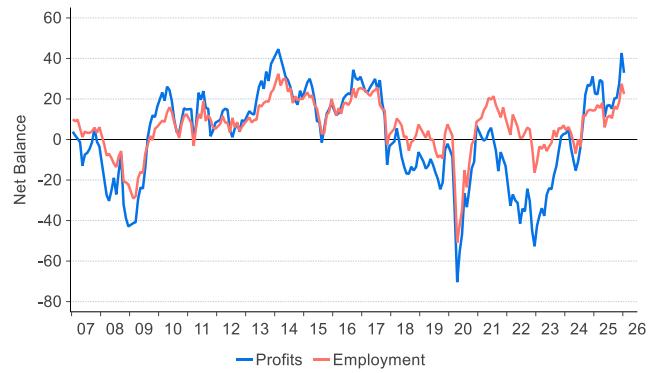
Net balance: Percentage expecting improvement minus percentage expecting deterioration

Source: Statistics NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

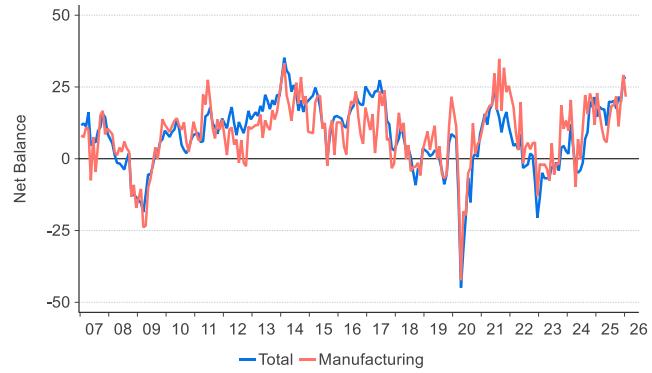
Construction intentions



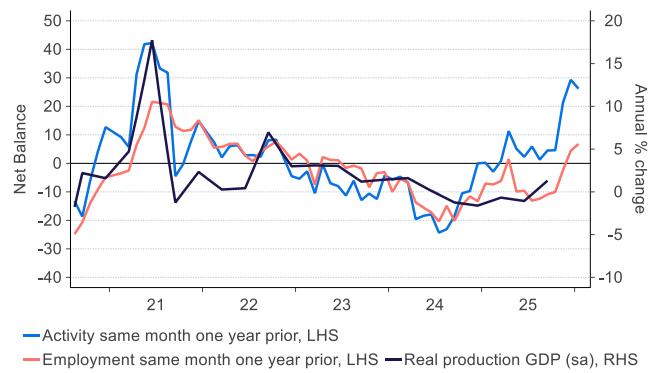
Employment and profit outlook



Investment intentions



Experienced activity and employment vs GDP



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