



Quarterly Economic Outlook

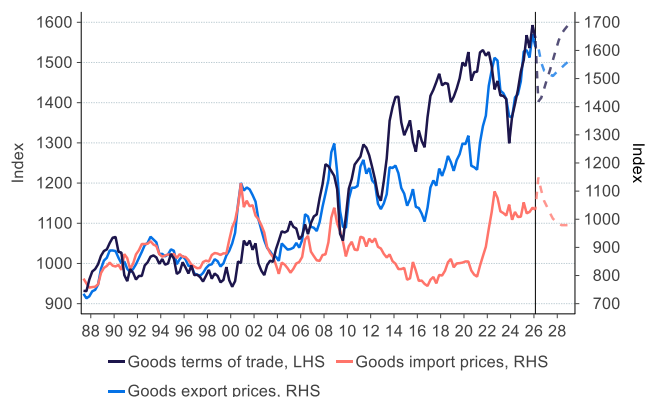
Navigating through the fog

August 2026

At a glance

High fuel prices are weighing on the terms of trade

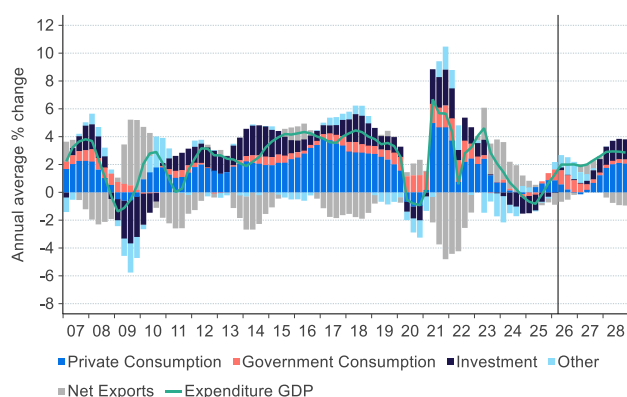
Despite solid export prices



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

That's not expected to derail New Zealand's economic recovery

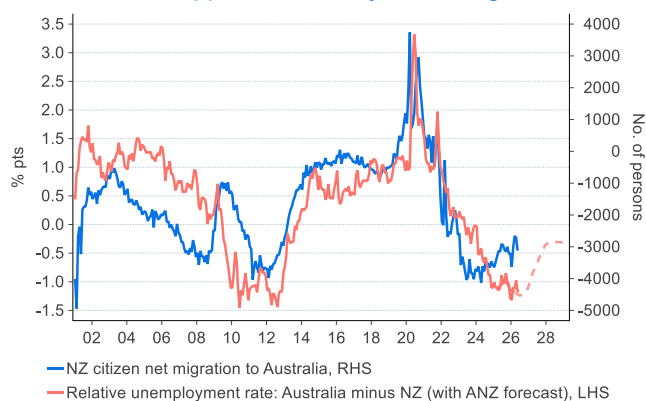
But it is expected to slow growth in 2026



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

New Zealand's weak starting position lowers the bar for relative outperformance

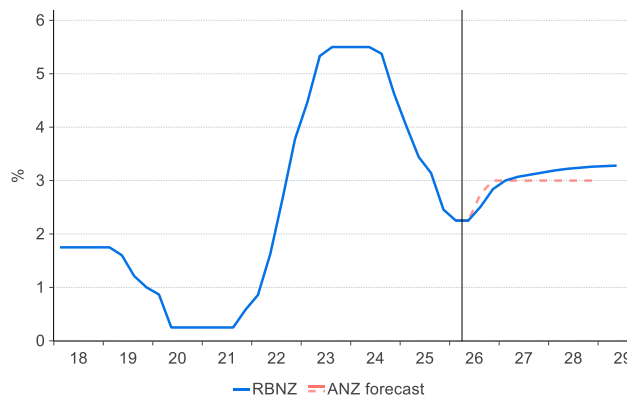
Which should support a recovery in net migration



Source: ABS, Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

We continue to pencil in an OCR peak of 3%

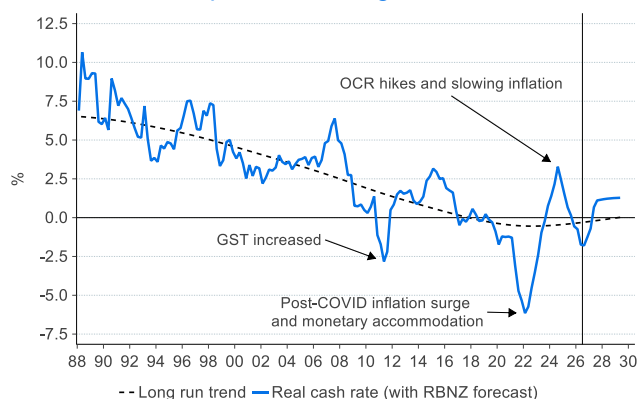
However, the evolution of inflation pressures will ultimately determine where it settles



Source: RBNZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Risks to the equilibrium OCR (neutral) are skewed higher

But this is near-impossible to diagnose in real time



Source: RBNZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

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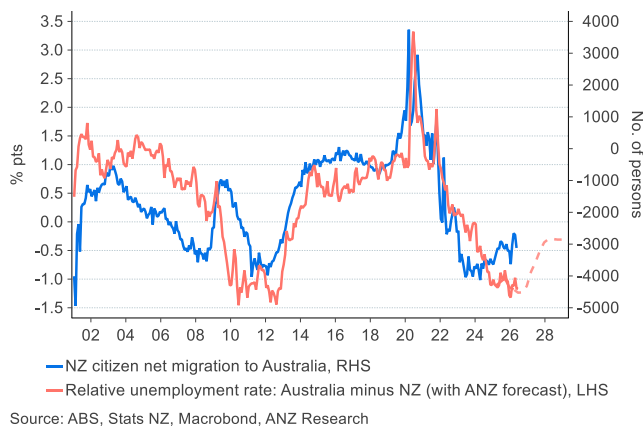
The big picture

Recovery intact, but not assured

New Zealand's economic recovery remains intact, but it is proving uneven, gradual, and increasingly vulnerable to upside inflation risks. Since our last QEO in May, confidence has improved from the lows reached during the early days of the oil price shock, and the economy still appears to be on a recovery path. However, with significant headwinds and tailwinds buffeting the economy simultaneously, the recovery is unlikely to be smooth or evenly felt across households and businesses. Uncertainty remains elevated, particularly around the global outlook, meaning the RBNZ is effectively navigating through fog. In that environment, facing into the uncertainty with the OCR at a relatively neutral level is a good first port of call.

The good news is that, while they do not directly benefit everyone, **several important growth drivers remain intact**. Export incomes remain strong. The combination of favourable prices for many agricultural exports and a low NZD continues to provide a significant income boost to large parts of regional New Zealand. Tourism is also continuing to recover, albeit in a patchy fashion, particularly in the South Island, where international visitor spending remains a major tailwind. While a weak currency is not much fun for consumers, given it makes imports and overseas holidays more expensive, it does act as a shock absorber. It boosts NZD export revenues (including tourism) and the broader tradable sector by improving international competitiveness and encouraging spending to shift toward domestically produced goods and services. Net migration appears poised to become a more meaningful tailwind too, with a gradual recovery from exceptionally low levels expected. New Zealand's improving labour market relative to Australia's should help (figure 1).

Figure 1. NZ citizen net migration vs trans-Tasman unemployment rate



At the same time, **some of the traditional cyclical drivers of growth are better described as closer to neutral than stimulatory**. The OCR is no longer restrictive in the way it was through much of 2023-24, but equally it is no longer providing meaningful support. Fiscal policy remains mildly supportive via ongoing deficits, but these are forecast to narrow (a drag on growth). However, the post-election fiscal outlook remains uncertain. Meanwhile, house prices have been in somewhat of a holding pattern, and that's unlikely to change any time soon, as elevated housing supply, election uncertainty, rising mortgage rates and still-high

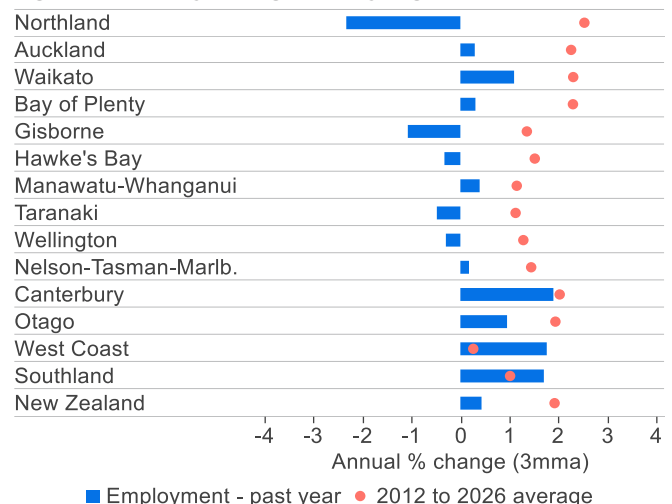
unemployment mean house prices are unlikely to be a meaningful tailwind for some time, despite the expected economic recovery.

Going the other way, **several powerful headwinds are containing growth**. The oil price shock is the most obvious. Prices are well below the worst-case-scenario levels that were feared earlier in the year, but volatility remains elevated and ongoing geopolitical tensions continue to create uncertainty for households, firms and markets. This isn't over. More importantly, higher fuel prices are only part of the story. Administrative price inflation – including council rates – remains elevated, squeezing households and raising the risk that inflation proves sticky above 2%. Further, global food price inflation could be under upward pressure: given fertiliser disruptions, bird flu arriving on New Zealand's shores (a threat to egg prices), and [El Niño](#) knocking on the door we're not short of risks.

The global backdrop also remains less supportive than it was a year ago. Growth among several of New Zealand's major trading partners is moderating, while policy uncertainty remains elevated. Although export prices have remained remarkably resilient to date, softer global demand could eventually weigh on the terms of trade and tourism demand. Financial markets have also become more volatile as investors grapple with inflation uncertainty, geopolitical risks and differing views on where neutral policy rates are heading. For a small open economy like New Zealand, these global forces continue to matter enormously.

Importantly, the recovery is not being experienced evenly across the country. Examining [New Zealand's North-South divide](#) highlights that the South Island has significantly outperformed much of the North Island over recent years. Strong agricultural incomes, international tourism and relatively affordable housing have underpinned activity in Canterbury, Otago, Southland and the West Coast. In contrast, Auckland has continued to feel the effects of weak migration, higher interest rates and a subdued housing market. The implication is that headline GDP growth is masking very different regional experiences. A sustained national recovery will ultimately require more of a pickup in the North Island.

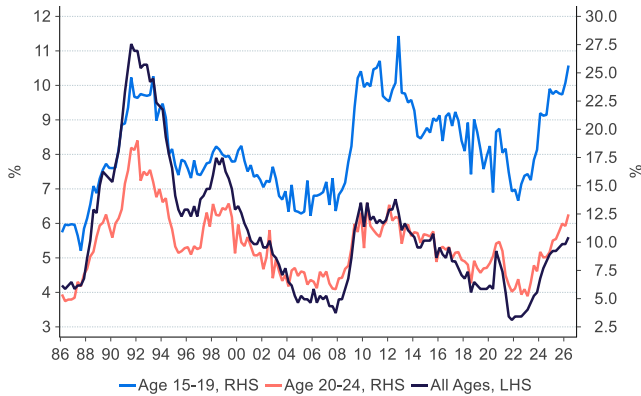
Figure 2. Employment growth by region



The big picture

The labour market tells a similar story, and it's not just the regional cut. Youth unemployment remains particularly high, with younger workers once again bearing a disproportionate share of the downturn. The economy-wide unemployment rate remains elevated too, but both should come down gradually as the economy recovers.

Figure 3. Youth unemployment rate



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

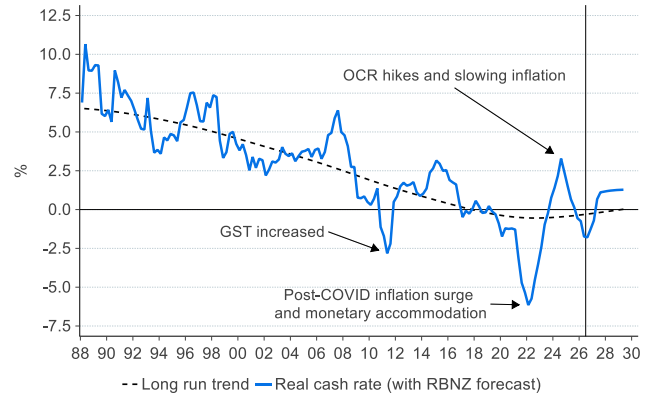
Elevated unemployment and broader spare capacity continue to generate disinflationary pressure. However, the RBNZ must balance this against the risk that inflation proves more persistent due to oil-price spillovers, high administrative price inflation (such as council rates), and signs that firms have become quicker to raise prices but slow to lower them. As a result, OCR hikes remain appropriate to contain inflation pressures in the more interest rate-sensitive parts of the economy, including rents, residential construction and discretionary household spending. Assessing all these moving parts in real time is no easy feat!

Another key challenge for policymakers is that neither the neutral OCR nor the non-inflationary rate of unemployment can be observed directly, and both evolve over time. Figure 4 suggests the RBNZ believes the four-decade decline in the real interest rate required to balance savings and investment may be coming to an end, with neutral interest rates potentially beginning to drift higher.

The forces that determine where this equilibrium interest rate ultimately settles once cyclical pressures have faded are numerous, often unobservable, and difficult to separate from the cycle itself, particularly in real time. They include demographics, the responsiveness of investment to interest rates (through productivity growth, for example), policy changes that affect saving behaviour, and public saving or dissaving. Moreover, it is not just domestic forces that matter. New Zealand's open capital markets mean global

saving and investment developments also influence where our neutral interest rate sits. And right now, all that AI-related investment appears less sensitive to interest rates than your typical bricks and mortar / plant and machinery. This amounts to a potential upwards force on neutral rates.

Figure 4. Real (inflation adjusted) OCR



Source: RBNZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Finally, risks to the outlook remain elevated. Geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation and global market volatility could weigh on global growth and financial conditions, while stretched asset valuations, rapid growth in private credit and high public debt burdens leave parts of the global economy vulnerable to adverse shocks. At home, inflation could prove more persistent than expected, and the looming [El Niño](#) could quickly take the shine off for some of our key exporters.

Middle East conflict risks appear to be broadening from outright physical shortages of oil toward a prolonged period of elevated fuel supply-chain costs. While crude prices have eased from their peak as Gulf tensions show tentative signs of stabilisation, refinery outages, lower inventories, diesel market tightness, and growing risks around Red Sea and Suez shipping mean New Zealand remains exposed to renewed fuel price inflation and higher transportation costs.

All in all, New Zealand's recovery remains on track, but it is still fragile and uneven. If inflation risks do not recede, the RBNZ may ultimately need to do more than is currently anticipated. Conversely, over time, the data may reveal that the OCR is already more restrictive than necessary. Ultimately, it is a matter of balancing the risk of doing too little now and having to compensate with an even higher OCR later, against the risk of doing too much and having to correct course with OCR cuts further down the track. In that context, getting the OCR back to a more neutral level makes sense as a first port of call.

Table 1. Summary of key forecasts

Calendar Years	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026f	2027f	2028f
Real GDP ¹ (annual average % change)	5.5	2.6	2.2	-0.3	0.2	1.7	2.6	2.8
Unemployment Rate (sa; Dec qtr)	3.2	3.4	4.0	5.1	5.4	5.6	5.2	4.9
CPI Inflation (annual % change; Dec qtr)	5.9	7.2	4.7	2.2	3.1	3.5	1.9	2.0
Official Cash Rate (Dec qtr end)	0.75	4.25	5.50	4.25	2.25	3.00	3.00	3.00

¹ Production based

Source: Stats NZ, RBNZ, ANZ Research

Forecasts finalised 13 August 2026. Please click [here](#) for full up to date ANZ forecasts. See page 8 for detailed forecast charts.

Our forecasts

Our stake in the ground

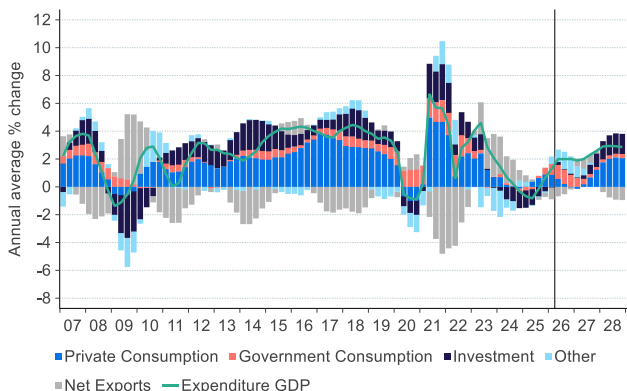
As alluded to in the previous section, uncertainty remains unusually high. Geopolitical risks, election uncertainty, questions around neutral interest rates, and weather-related risks to agricultural production all mean there are wider-than-usual confidence bands around any forecast. With that health warning, our central view remains that the recovery will continue in a relatively gradual way, that inflation will ease towards 2%, and the OCR peaks at 3%.

Growth to remain gradual and uneven

The economy lost momentum in mid-2026 as higher fuel costs and elevated uncertainty weighed on confidence and spending. However, the combination of strong export incomes, a competitive exchange rate, recovering tourism and gradually improving migration dynamics should allow growth to strengthen over time. We continue to expect GDP growth to recover only gradually, with activity likely to remain uneven across sectors and regions. Export-oriented industries are expected to outperform domestically focused sectors in the near term.

Overall, following on from 2025's weak 0.2% y/y expansion (annual average % change), we expect growth over the 2026 calendar year to come in at 1.7% y/y, before accelerating to 2.6% and 2.8% in 2027 and 2028 respectively as the oil shock and associated hit to confidence and balance sheet stress dissipate and the OCR sits at a neutral setting consistent with trend growth.

Figure 5. Contributions to GDP growth



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Soft labour market contains wage and inflation pressure

A labour market recovery is underway, but spare capacity remains significant and is expected to take time to absorb. The unemployment rate rose to 5.6% in Q2 2026, while the broader underutilisation rate lifted to 13.8%, its highest level in 12 years, highlighting that labour supply continues to outpace demand. Although employment growth surprised modestly to the upside in Q2, a range of labour demand indicators, including hours worked, hours paid and jobs filled, point to a patchy recovery. We expect employment growth to gradually strengthen from here, but not sufficiently to drive a rapid reduction in spare capacity. As a result, the unemployment rate is forecast to remain

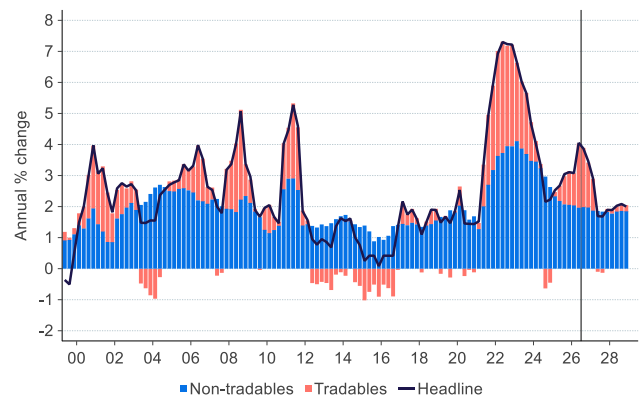
at 5.6% through the second half of 2026 before declining only gradually to around 5.1% by early 2028.

Wage inflation has already slowed markedly, with private sector Labour Cost Index inflation running at 2.0% y/y in Q2, and we expect it to soften a little further before gradually stabilising. Ongoing slack in the labour market should keep wage growth contained, providing a meaningful offset to broader CPI inflation pressures arising from spillovers from the fuel price surge and ongoing increases in administered prices.

Annual inflation hopefully past the peak

We're hopeful that the Q2 2026 read of 4.1% y/y was the high-tide mark for CPI inflation following the oil shock, but with the global situation still uncertain we can't rule anything out. Based on our lengthy list of [assumptions](#) (see page 7), we expect annual inflation to slow to 3.5% by year end, before stabilising around 2% by the end of 2027 as the fuel-induced surge in tradable inflation unwinds, and non-tradable inflation gradually slows towards 3% y/y.

Figure 6. Inflation forecasts

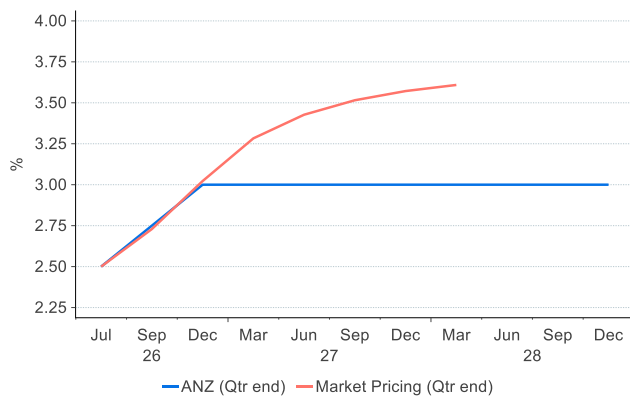


Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

OCR forecast unchanged, but risks tilted higher

We continue to forecast a peak OCR of 3%, reflecting our view that policy needs to get to around neutral in order to balance competing inflation and growth risks. However, confidence around that endpoint is lower than usual. A more expansionary fiscal stance, a stronger-than-expected recovery, further oil shocks or evidence of inflation persistence could all require the RBNZ to tighten more than currently envisaged. The market is seeing risks tilted towards the OCR needing to go higher than 3%, and we have no beef with that (Figure 7). However, the risks are not one-sided. If spare capacity proves more disinflationary than anticipated, the next move after reaching 3% may not ultimately be higher. In short, while our OCR forecast is unchanged, the distribution of risks around it remains wide.

Figure 7. ANZ forecasts vs market pricing



Source: ICAP, Bloomberg, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Outlook for short-end rates still nuanced, and dependent on how risks evolve

The outlook for short-end interest rates is very nuanced, with our forecasts calling for higher 90-day bill rates but lower 2-year swap rates. We have landed on these forecasts because we have not built an OCR above 3% nor higher oil prices into our wider forecasts and instead see them as risks. The main driver of 90-day bill rates is where the OCR goes, and with a September hike all but locked in, and another hike expected in October, we expect them to continue rising. Because of their very short tenor, 90-day bill rates have less capacity to anticipate future moves beyond the near term and will be held back by where the OCR goes. Should the RBNZ need to be more forceful and take the OCR beyond the 3% peak we are forecasting, which is possible if upside inflation risks materialise, then 90-day bill rates may move higher than our forecasts anticipate.

Consistent with our call for a 3% peak in the OCR, which is well below market expectations (as noted earlier and shown in figure 7), we expect a mild moderation in key short-end swap rates like the 2-year. The forecasts we published last quarter called for a similar correction, and that eventuated in June. The lift in oil prices has since driven swap yields higher. However, rather than second-guessing where oil prices are headed, we assume oil prices normalise over time, as oil futures markets indicate. We would thus highlight that, given the sensitivity of swap rates to oil prices and upside risks to the OCR, there is some risk that we do not see the downward correction in 2-year swap rates that we are forecasting. However, because we have not centralised either risk into our forecast, we continue to see scope for slightly lower 2-year rates.

Global fiscal unsustainability concerns keep local long-end interest rates elevated

Our 10-year bond yield forecast is lower than it was last quarter. The two main drivers of this are our less-hawkish forecasts for both the OCR and the US fed funds rate than markets, and our global forecast for lower US bond yields.

As with our short-end forecasts, our long-end forecasts are thus conditional on upside risks not materialising. If they do, we will centralise them in our forecasts, but if our

base scenario eventuates, that is expected to fuel a moderation in NZ bond yields. This is expected to take the form of the NZ/US 10-year bond spreads stabilising around current levels and NZ bond yields following their US counterparts lower over coming quarters.

On the US side of the equation, we expect the Fed to leave policy on hold for the foreseeable future. While US inflation has been elevated, it is now moderating and with payroll and hourly earnings growth easing, we do not see a strong case for Fed hikes at this juncture. Much has been made about new Fed chair Warsh's communication style and his preference not to provide forward guidance. While that has unsettled markets, who have been used to what Warsh has called "spoon-feeding", he has doubled down on the Fed's commitment to getting inflation back to 2%, and that should ultimately be a tailwind for US bonds.

That said, fiscal stresses have not eased, and global bond investors remain concerned about fiscal sustainability in the US, UK and across much of Europe. While that is clearly a source of upside risk to bond yields, this risk is not new, and instead it has been a developing story. And with US 30-year bond yields at 22-year highs, a lot is now in the price. However, for New Zealand, it is more of a relative story. While the return to surplus has been slow, Budget forecasts are at least showing an eventual return to surplus, and our low level of public debt as a share of GDP remains the focus for global investors.

Near-term NZD forecasts downgraded

We have downgraded our 2026 NZD/USD forecasts from 0.64 to 0.60 but left our 2027 forecast unchanged at 0.67. Given that the Kiwi ended 2025 at 0.58, that implies a small uplift for 2026 (which is still notable considering the negative terms of trade effects from the Middle East conflict) but maintains a much more optimistic view for 2027 in light of improving domestic fundamentals and higher carry for the NZD.

USD strength has persisted for longer than we expected, due in part to massive AI investment, market expectations of possible Fed hikes and the rise in US bond yields. However, we expect a number of factors to drive the USD lower in combination: we see yields falling over the rest of 2026 and 2027, paring of US exceptionalism, and policy uncertainty. We see the risks around our Kiwi forecasts as balanced. If tensions in the Middle East don't cool and oil prices remain elevated, that is likely to play into a stronger USD as markets focus on downside growth risks. However, if oil prices pull back, that is likely to support both global risk appetite and New Zealand growth and be less supportive of the USD.

The NZD/AUD is still expected to remain around current levels into year-end before recovering over 2027. Like our NZD/USD forecast, this is directionally similar to our earlier forecast, but the recovery is delayed. This reflects ongoing headwinds from Australia's higher interest rates, which will lessen over time as the RBNZ hikes the OCR.

Our forecasts

Table 2. Forecasts (end of quarter)

FX Rates	Current (13-Aug)	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28
NZD/USD	0.586	0.580	0.600	0.620	0.640	0.660	0.670	0.670	0.670
NZD/AUD	0.830	0.817	0.822	0.838	0.853	0.868	0.870	0.870	0.870
NZD/EUR	0.508	0.504	0.513	0.521	0.533	0.541	0.545	0.540	0.536
NZD/JPY	93.4	91.6	93.6	95.5	97.3	99.0	99.2	97.8	96.5
NZD/GBP	0.434	0.436	0.448	0.459	0.471	0.482	0.486	0.486	0.486
NZ\$ TWI	66.6	65.9	67.4	69.1	70.9	72.7	73.4	73.3	73.1
Interest Rates	Current (13-Aug)	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28
NZ OCR	2.50	2.75	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
NZ 90-day bill	2.96	3.27	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35
NZ 2-yr swap	3.64	3.60	3.55	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45
NZ 10-yr bond	4.68	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25

Source: Bloomberg, ANZ Research

Please click [here](#) for full up to date ANZ forecasts

Key assumptions underpinning our forecasts

Oil prices	Remain elevated relative to recent history but avoid a return to earlier extremes. Our forecast is consistent with Brent falling to USD80/bbl by the second half of 2027.
No rationing needed	Price is the only mechanism that rations fuel – i.e. New Zealand can secure enough fuel to meet demand at the global market price. The Government doesn't have to decide who gets what.
Global supply chains and shipping routes	Gradually normalise.
Medium-term inflation expectations	Remain anchored despite near-term inflation pressures.
Administered price inflation	Continues to slow gradually from here.
Second-round inflation impacts from higher fuel costs:	Are largely partial and temporary.
Agricultural commodity prices	Remain supportive, offsetting part of the drag from softer global growth. Our milk price forecast for 2026/27 is \$9.20/kgMS.
The terms of trade	Recovers back toward its pre-oil shock peak by the end of 2028.
The NZD	Remains relatively weak in the near term, supporting export incomes and tourism.
Global growth	Slows but avoids recession.
Net migration	Gradually lifts as labour market conditions improve.
Housing	Remains broadly flat rather than re-entering either boom or bust territory.
Fiscal policy	Remains modestly supportive in the near term, neutral over 2027/28 and mildly contractionary thereafter. In line with the Treasury's Budget outlook.
Potential GDP	Is only modestly affected by the oil shock.
The output gap	Narrows but remains negative through the rest of 2026 and 2027.
The labour market	Continued slack in the labour market prevents a material change in wage-setting behaviour, containing elevated inflation persistence risks. We assume NAIRU is around 4.5%.
The neutral OCR	Is assumed to be around 3% over the medium term.

Forecast charts

Figure 1. Production GDP level (headline vs per capita)

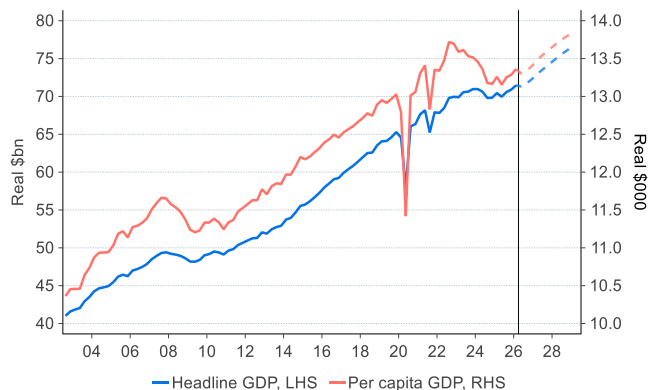


Figure 2. Production GDP growth

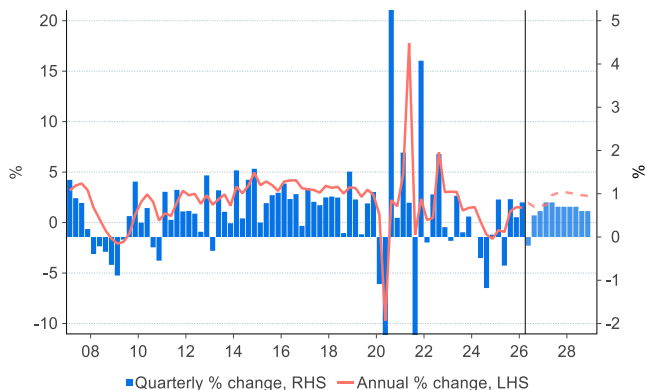


Figure 3. Contributions to GDP growth (detailed)

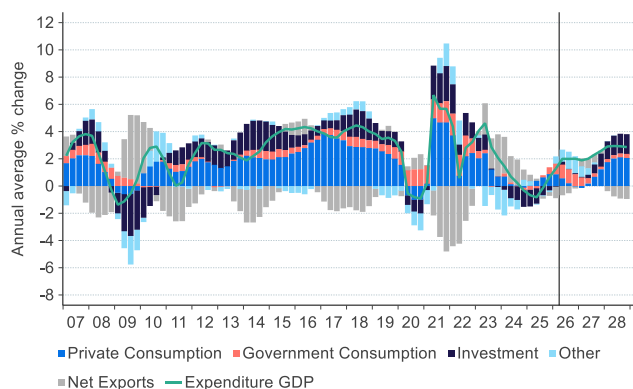


Figure 4. Real investment

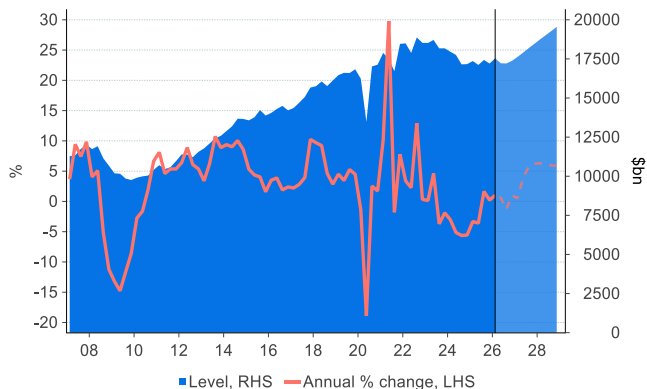


Figure 5. Real private consumption

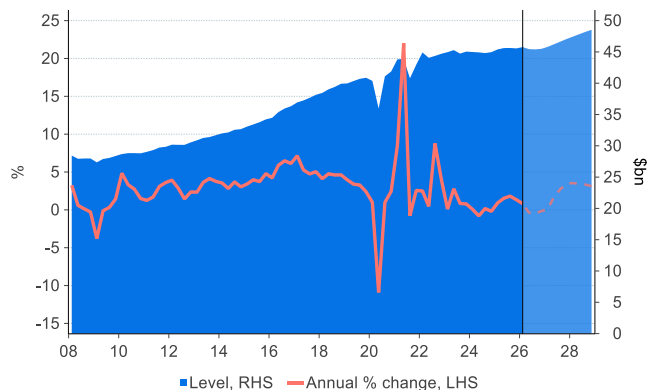


Figure 6. Real government consumption

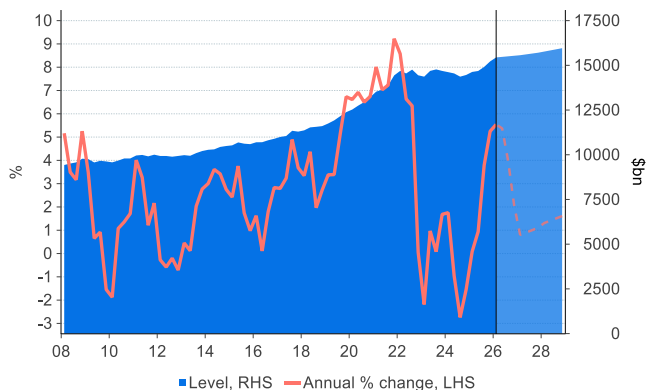


Figure 7. Real exports (goods and services)

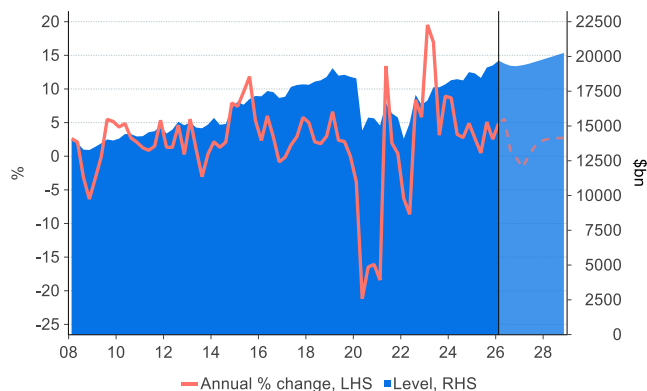
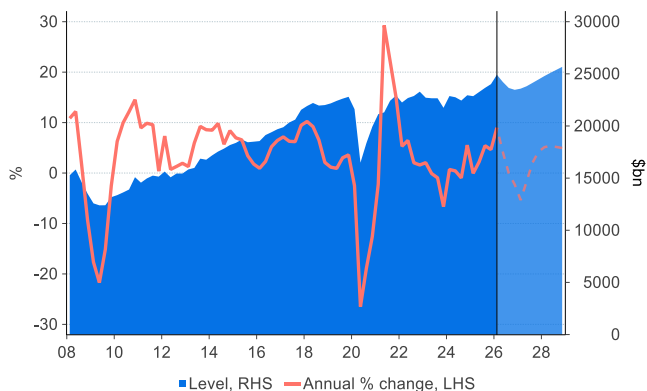


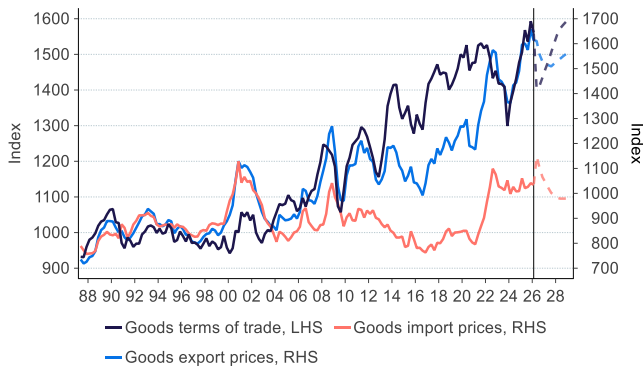
Figure 8. Real imports (goods and services)



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Forecast charts

Figure 9. Terms of trade



Source: Stats NZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Figure 10. Current account balance

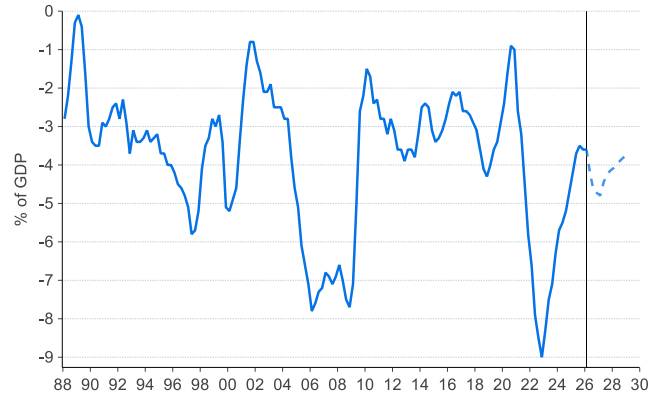


Figure 11. Output gap

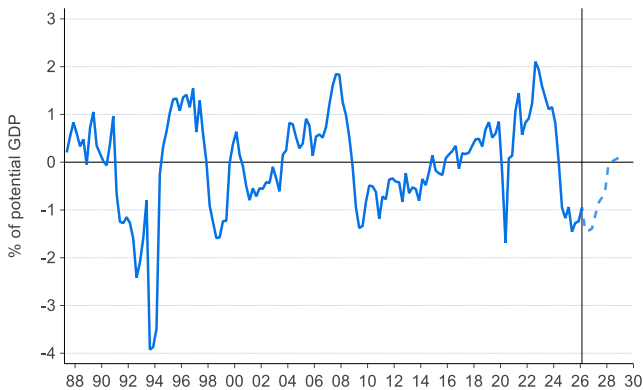


Figure 12. House prices (REINZ HPI)

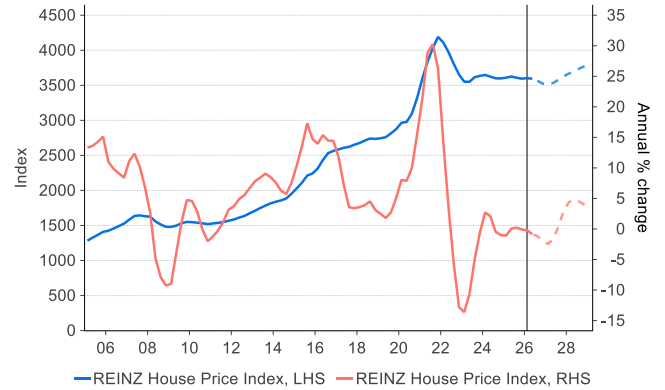


Figure 13. Annual migration

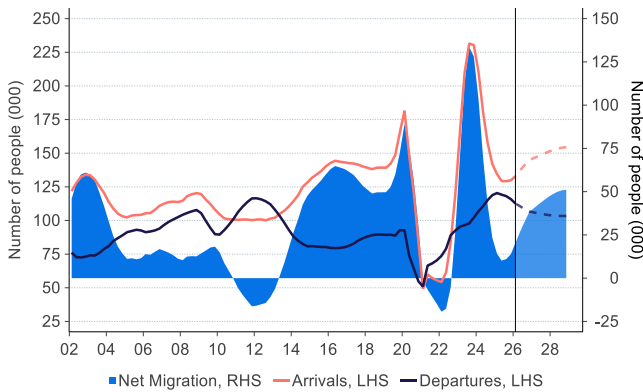


Figure 14. Resident population

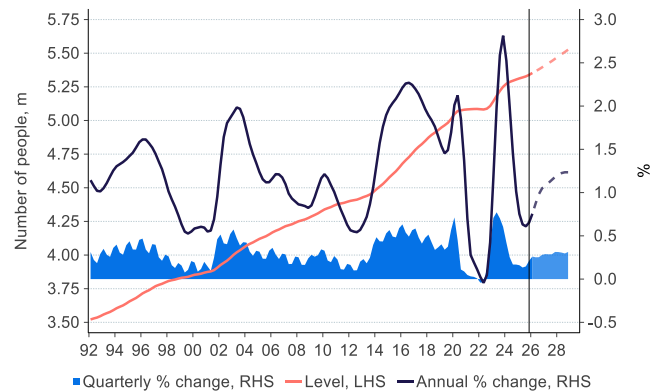


Figure 15. Participation and employment rate

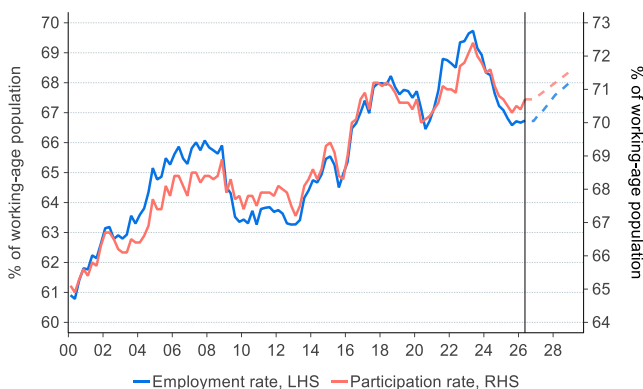
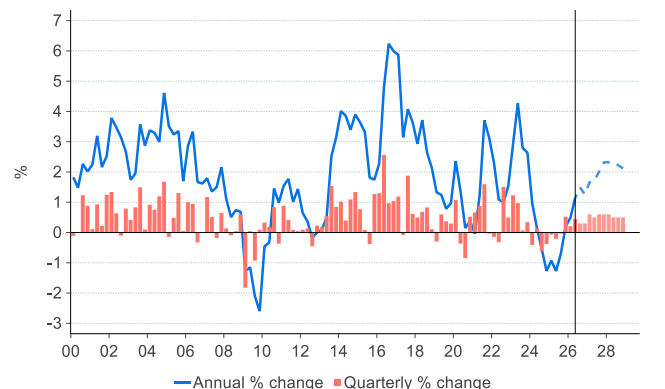


Figure 16. Employment



Source: Stats NZ, REINZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

Forecast charts

Figure 17. Unemployment rate decomposition

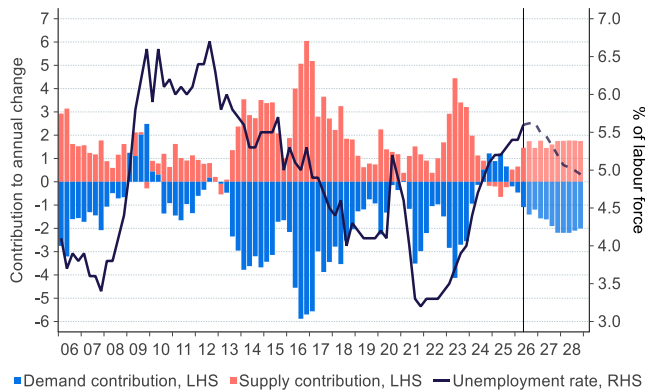


Figure 18. Wages and labour costs

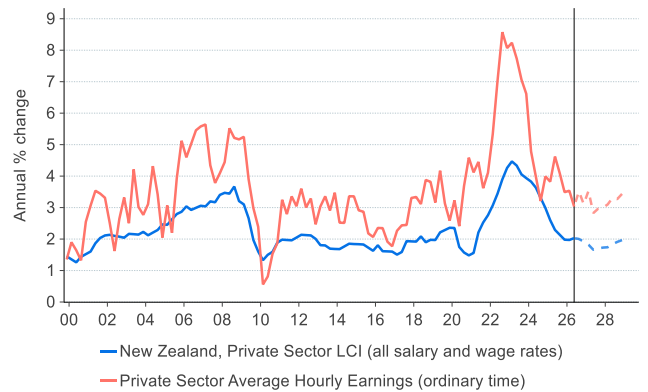


Figure 19. Inflation forecasts

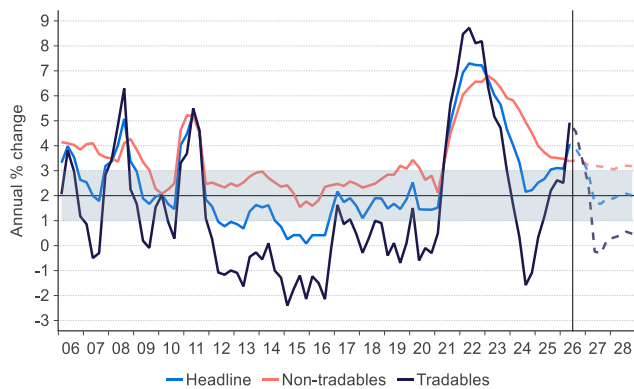


Figure 20. Headline inflation forecast decomposition

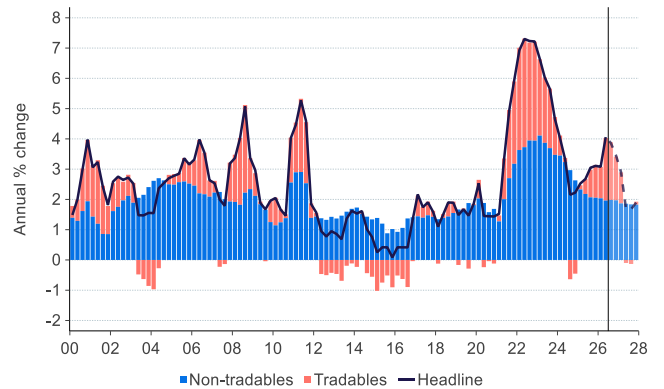


Figure 21. OCR and 90-day rate

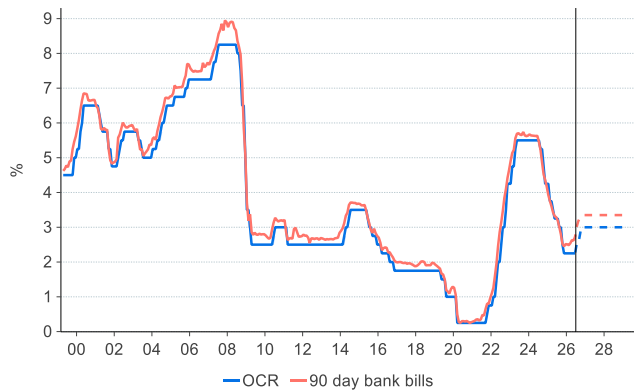


Figure 22. 2-year swap rate and 10-year bond yield

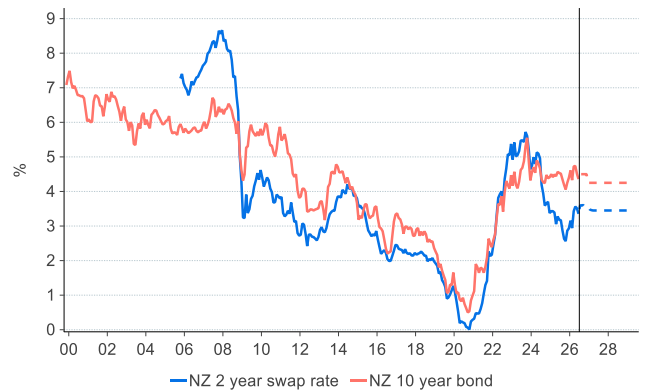


Figure 23. NZD against JPY and CNY, and TWI basis

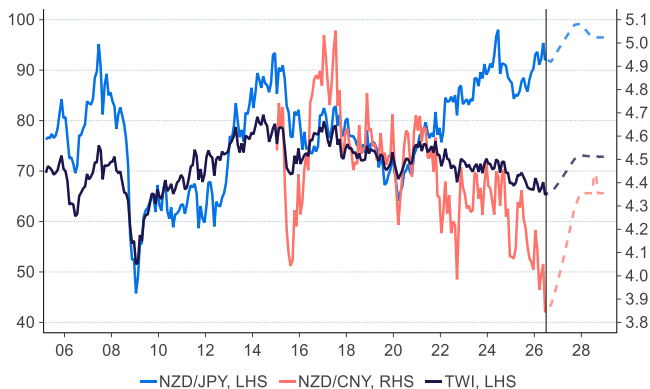
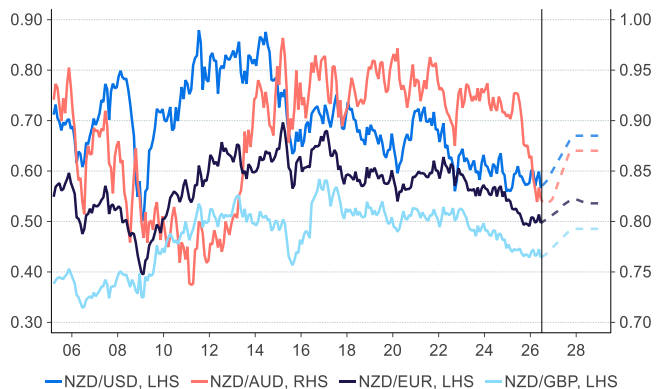


Figure 24. NZD against USD, AUD, EUR and GBP



Source: Stats NZ, Bloomberg, Macrobond, ANZ Research

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