

## NEW ZEALAND ECONOMICS RBNZ JUNE *MPS* REVIEW

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### PLAYING A GAME OF CHICKEN WITH THE NZD

#### KEY POINTS

- **The OCR was maintained at 2.25% as expected** (although far from universally). And while an easing bias was retained (“further policy easing may be required”) and the 90 day bank bill projection is still downwardly sloped (largely unchanged from March), the tone of the statement was slightly less dovish than previously – quite rightly in our view.
- **But there is a hook**; the RBNZ doesn’t want the currency to respond too far and it could (in fact, it is still likely) to bring the RBNZ back to the easing table.
- **We see few surprises in the Statement/assessment itself**. The RBNZ has played with a straight bat in acknowledging the obvious. The economy looks in better health and inflation is expected to strengthen. The NZD is of course problematic, but so too is housing, and this is tough balancing act. It is appropriate to pause and assess given competing demands.
- **Tensions within the RBNZ’s thinking are clearly apparent and it continues to acknowledge “many uncertainties around the outlook”**. It remains cautious about the global backdrop (so do we) and low short-term inflation expectations – although on both, it sounds less concerned than previously. But at the same time the RBNZ acknowledges housing strength, the solid domestic economy and an expectation that inflation will lift from current low levels.
- **The balance of competing tensions has shifted**. Whereas in March the alternative scenarios had a more downward skew, the scenarios presented this time were balanced. Importantly, the RBNZ is again highlighting the housing market as a financial stability risk. This not only sets the bar higher with regard to future easing, but signals that additional macro-prudential measures continue to be more likely than not.
- **The door is still open to a rate cut – on currency strength more than anything**. In fact the high NZD / OCR downside scenario (to sub 1%) has the NZD trading below where it is today! That hints of MCI-style thinking.
- **We see the odds of a cut in August at just over 50%**. The economy doesn’t need stimulus, based on information at hand. The combination of global wobbles (we expect some and it will be influential at the RBNZ), NZD strength, and pressure on local rates from higher funding costs are powerful forces that we expect will bring the RBNZ to the table again down the track. **But that’s tomorrow’s story**. Upcoming CPI and GDP reads will be very influential, along with housing, the NZD and global nuances.

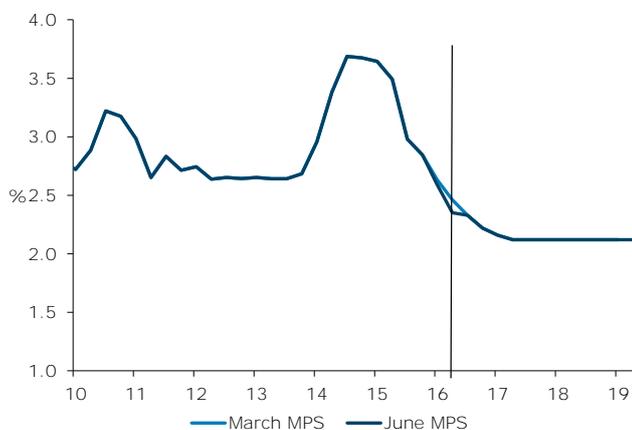
# RBNZ MPS REVIEW

## KEY POINTS

**It may have come as a surprise to some** (the consensus was split roughly 50:50), **but the RBNZ has again played with a straight bat today in deciding to maintain the OCR at 2.25%.**

Certainly, an easing bias was retained ("further policy easing may be required"), the 90-day bank bill projection was still downwardly sloped, and the RBNZ continues to be concerned about a number of elements of the outlook (NZD, global growth, dairy, low inflation expectations). But importantly, the tone of the RBNZ's *Statement* and assessment was a tad less dovish than previously – rightly so in our view.

**FIGURE 1. RBNZ BASE CASE 90-DAY BANK BILL PROJECTION**



Source: ANZ, RBNZ

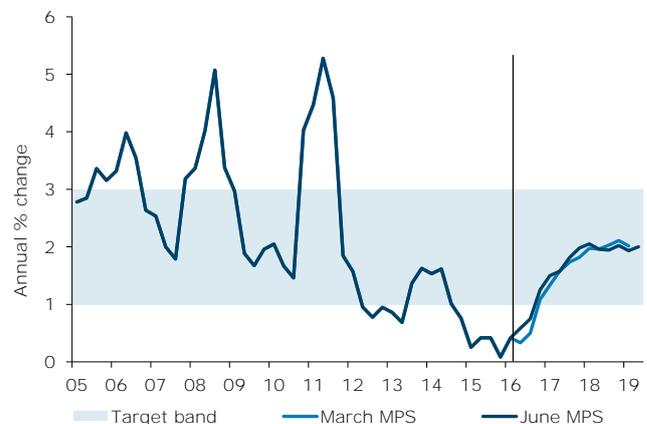
**Within the policy assessment, while similar themes were discussed and forecast changes were relatively modest, the tweaks that were made were still meaningful and fit within this more upbeat tone relative to rhetoric in March and April.** We note:

- While the RBNZ is still concerned about the global backdrop, it **notes that** "financial market volatility has abated and the outlook for global growth appears to have stabilised after being revised down successively over recent quarters."
- After previously highlighting concern over short-term inflation expectations, it now noted that they "appear to have stabilised".
- The housing market is now deemed (once again) to be a "financial stability" concern – a clear step up from previously noting that price growth in Auckland "may be picking up".
- Dairy was no longer mentioned as a key uncertainty to the domestic outlook. To be fair, it was still noted to be a "moderating influence with export prices below break-even levels for most farmers", but perhaps at the margin the RBNZ is

signalling that these dairy pressures (and their impact) are now well appreciated and a known, as opposed to being an unknown.

**Elsewhere, the RBNZ's views of the outlook were left largely unchanged.** It remains upbeat on the domestic economy, with growth supported by migration, construction, tourism and low interest rates. It also believes that inflation will lift from current low levels – in part due to the fact that temporary (commodity price) influences should wane. **The economic projections reflect this, with growth and inflation forecasts left largely unchanged relative to the March projections.**

**FIGURE 2. RBNZ CPI FORECAST**



Source: ANZ, RBNZ

**This more upbeat tone was also apparent in the alternative scenarios the RBNZ presented.**

Whereas in March, the RBNZ showed two downside scenarios (higher funding costs and a weaker global economy) and one upside (stronger house prices), the alternative scenarios were this time more balanced around the central projection. On the downside, a persistently higher NZD (ironically below current level of the TWI) results in a large monetary policy response. The upside scenario continues to be stronger house price growth. Interestingly, each scenario shows in a roughly 1%pt implied impact on the OCR.

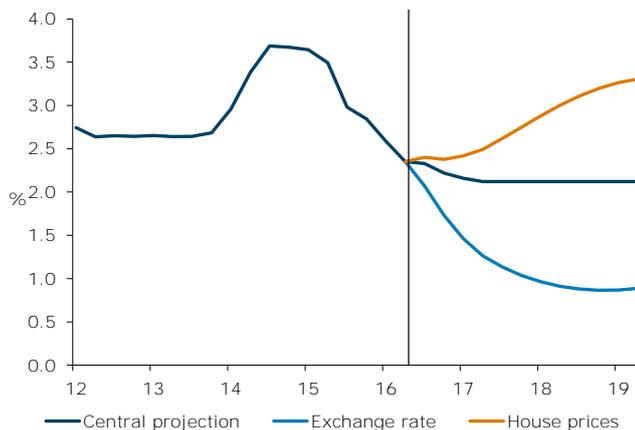
**These two scenarios (housing versus NZD) go to the heart of the tension the RBNZ is grappling with, and it still sees "many uncertainties around the outlook".**

**The fact the RBNZ sees housing as a financial stability concern once more is significant.** Not only does it raise the bar to further monetary policy easing in the future, but also provides a clear signal that additional macro prudential tools are more likely than not. **This tone was also clear in the Governor's subsequent press conference.**

## RBNZ MPS REVIEW

**But the NZD is also significant.** It is clear the RBNZ doesn't want the currency to respond too far and it could (is likely to, in fact) bring the Bank back to the easing table. It is a resurrection of old-school MCI thinking.

**FIGURE 3. RBNZ 90-DAY BANK BILL SCENARIOS**



Source: ANZ, RBNZ

## OUR VIEW

### **We can envisage (increasingly credible) scenarios where no further easing is delivered.**

Outside of dairy, the economy is performing well. We continue to detect evidence that core inflation pressures are gradually rising from low levels. Housing is booming and strong credit growth is becoming problematic once again.

### **But we still believe the RBNZ will be dragged back to the easing table again over the next 12 months or so.**

The combination of global wobbles (we expect some and it will be influential at the RBNZ), NZD strength, and pressure on local rates from higher funding costs are powerful forces shaping the economic outlook and difficult for the RBNZ to ignore.

### **That said, we see odds of a cut in August at only just over 50% at present.**

The economy doesn't need stimulus based on information at hand and when you have settings at extremes, you should be more cautious relying on forecasts. The data will ultimately be the determining factor for the August decision, and there is plenty to ponder in the lead-up, with Q1 GDP and Q2 CPI and labour market figures all due. Timely indicators like our Monthly Inflation Gauge as well as business and consumer sentiment will be important as well. There are also key events globally that will no doubt be important (Brexit and FOMC meetings). We lean towards an August cut, but only modestly so. It is far from a high conviction view. We put the odds barely above 50%.

## FINANCIAL MARKET IMPLICATIONS

**The Reserve Bank made no changes to its 90-day bill track,** preferring to express the more balanced risk profile via upside (higher house prices) and downside (higher exchange rate) scenarios. At face value, the bill track points to one more cut, and puts fair value on the 2 year swap at around 2.20%. **That's well below the market, but we expect the market to take the bill track with a grain of salt given the Bank still assumes the TWI is headed lower.**

**Near term, we expect the NZD and short end rates to be under pressure** to pop higher on adverse positioning and confirmation of no change (recall that the market was pricing in around 30% odds of a cut).

**However, with the currency still playing a role in upcoming deliberations, there's a limit to how high the NZD can go,** and we favour fading the initial knee-jerk reaction higher in both markets. **In that regard we note that the Bank's downside scenario (which takes the 90-day bill rate below 1%, pointing to an OCR at 0.75%) is associated with the TWI holding steady, rather than rising, suggesting the currency hurdle to easing is not overly high (especially if housing can be cooled via macro-prudential policy).** **In other words, we're back to MCI trading.**

RBNZ JUNE MPS PROJECTIONS (MARCH MPS IN BRACKETS)				
	90-Day	TWI (Qtr Average)	CPI (Ann % Chg)	GDP (Ann % Chg)
Q1 2015	3.6 (3.6)	77.9 (77.9)	0.3 (0.3)	3.0 (3.0)
Q2	3.5 (3.5)	76.1 (76.1)	0.4 (0.4)	2.4 (2.4)
Q3	3.0 (3.0)	69.8 (69.8)	0.4 (0.4)	2.3 (2.3)
Q4	2.8 (2.8)	72.1 (72.1)	0.1 (0.1)	2.3 (2.1)
Q1 2016	2.6 (2.6)	72.2 (72.3)	0.4 (0.4)	2.7 (2.6)
Q2	2.3 (2.5)	72.6 (70.9)	0.6 (0.3)	3.1 (3.1)
Q3	2.3 (2.3)	71.6 (70.4)	0.7 (0.5)	3.2 (3.0)
Q4	2.2 (2.2)	71.0 (70.0)	1.3 (1.1)	3.2 (3.0)
Q1 2017	2.2 (2.2)	70.6 (69.8)	1.5 (1.3)	3.4 (3.0)
Q2	2.1 (2.1)	70.2 (69.5)	1.6 (1.6)	3.4 (2.9)
Q3	2.1 (2.1)	70.0 (69.3)	1.8 (1.7)	3.1 (3.0)
Q4	2.1 (2.1)	69.8 (69.2)	2.0 (1.8)	2.8 (3.2)
Q1 2018	2.1 (2.1)	69.7 (69.2)	2.1 (2.0)	2.5 (3.1)
Q2	2.1 (2.1)	69.7 (69.2)	2.0 (2.0)	2.3 (3.1)
Q3	2.1 (2.1)	69.6 (69.2)	1.9 (2.0)	2.1 (2.8)
Q4	2.1 (2.1)	69.6 (69.2)	2.0 (2.1)	2.0 (2.4)
Q1 2019	2.1 (2.1)	69.6 (69.3)	1.9 (2.0)	2.0 (2.2)
Q2	2.1	69.7	2.0	2.0

## **JUNE MONETARY POLICY STATEMENT POLICY ASSESSMENT**

### **The Reserve Bank today left the Official Cash Rate unchanged at 2.25 percent.**

Global financial market volatility has abated and the outlook for global growth appears to have stabilised after being revised down successively over recent quarters. There has been a modest recovery in commodity prices in recent months. However, the global economy remains weak despite very stimulatory monetary policy and significant downside risks remain.

Domestic activity continues to be supported by strong net immigration, construction, tourism and accommodative monetary policy. The dairy sector remains a moderating influence with export prices below break-even levels for most farmers.

The exchange rate is higher than appropriate given **New Zealand's low export** commodity prices. Together with weak overseas inflation, this is holding down tradables inflation. A lower New Zealand dollar would raise tradables inflation and assist the tradables sector.

House price inflation in Auckland and other regions is adding to financial stability concerns. Auckland house prices in particular are at very high levels, and additional housing supply is needed.

There continue to be many uncertainties around the outlook. Internationally, these relate to the prospects for global growth and commodity prices, the outlook for global financial markets, and political risks. Domestically, the main uncertainties relate to inflation expectations, the possibility of continued high net immigration, and pressures in the housing market.

Headline inflation is low, mostly due to low fuel and other import prices. Long-term inflation expectations are well-anchored at 2 percent. After falling in recent quarters, short-term inflation expectations appear to have stabilised.

We expect inflation to strengthen reflecting the accommodative stance of monetary policy, increases in fuel and other commodity prices, an expected depreciation in the New Zealand dollar and some increase in capacity pressures.

Monetary policy will continue to be accommodative. Further policy easing may be required to ensure that future average inflation settles near the middle of the target range. We will continue to watch closely the emerging flow of economic data.

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