

Preview: RBNZ Monetary Policy Statement

25 August 2026

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Another step closer to neutral

- We expect a 25bp hike in the OCR on Wednesday 2 September, taking it to 2.75%, accompanied by an OCR track that suggests that a third 25bp rate hike in October is roughly 50/50 odds. Beyond that, it wouldn't be a surprise to see something like the May MPS track, implying risks are tilted towards the OCR ultimately going higher than 3% but that it is far from a certainty.
- Developments in recent weeks have been mixed: there has been some good news on how inflation is shaping up in the near term, but also some data has suggested there may not be as much spare capacity in the economy as the RBNZ has been assuming.
- The market is pricing over a 90% chance of a hike at this meeting but is on the fence as regards a follow-up in late October. We could therefore see a marked reaction on the day should the RBNZ give any firm hints re that meeting.

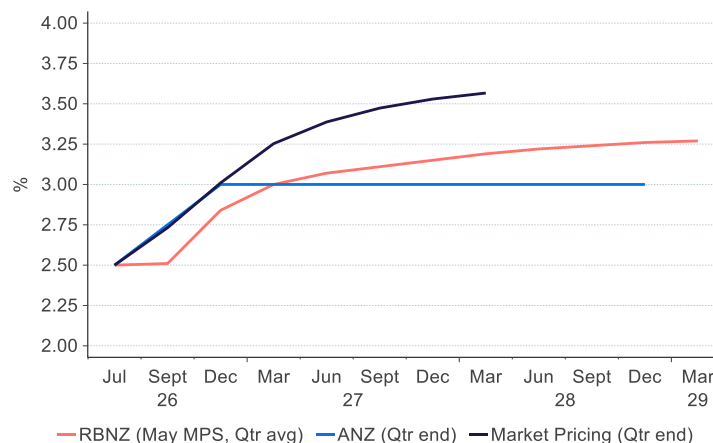
The view

In [July](#), although the decision to hike was unanimous, the RBNZ was non-committal about the path ahead. The key messages were that upside inflation risks had diminished, but not disappeared, the economic outlook was brighter, the removal of some monetary stimulus is appropriate, and more hikes are "likely to be required".

Since then, the data has shown a lull in activity in response to the oil shock but also a subsequent rebound. Near-term inflation data has been on balance a little more benign than expected, but on the other hand some data have suggested that the output gap may not be as deeply negative as the RBNZ has been assuming. That last factor provides scope for a hawkish surprise, but on balance, we read the dataflow since July as mildly dovish.

As figure 1 shows, the market's view on where the OCR will end up is considerably more hawkish than the RBNZ's May (or our current) forecast. Importantly for the market reaction on the day, pricing for a follow-up hike in October is on the fence. We could therefore see a marked reaction on the day should the RBNZ give any firm hints regarding that meeting. We suspect the RBNZ will want to keep its options open too, and will publish a track commensurate with that.

Figure 1. OCR forecasts: RBNZ (May), ANZ, market pricing



Source: RBNZ, ICAP, Bloomberg, Macrobond, ANZ Research

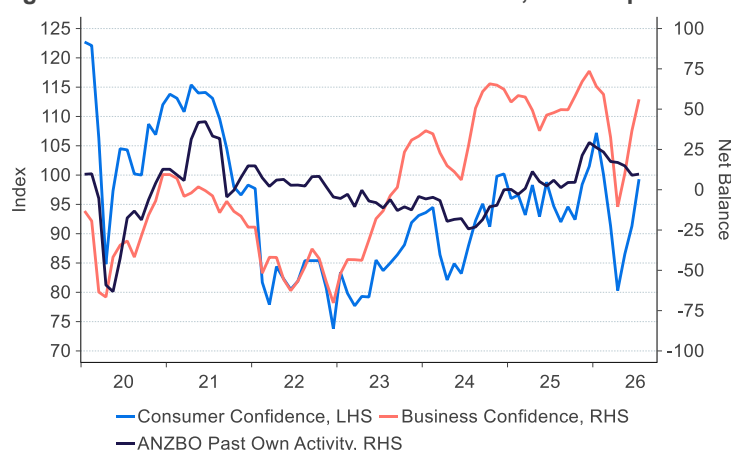
“The Committee agreed that while further OCR increases appear likely at upcoming meetings, their timing is highly uncertain. Future OCR decisions will depend on the Committee’s judgement about how price-setting behaviour and excess productive capacity affect medium-term inflation pressures.” (May)

The data

As always, let’s take a look at how the data have evolved since the RBNZ’s last Review, seven weeks ago. Our [MPS starting-point surprise chart pack](#) published earlier today provided an opinion-free rundown of how the key data have evolved versus RBNZ forecasts in the May MPS. Here, we’ll summarise that, as well as discuss data that isn’t simple to compare to RBNZ forecasts.

- Q1 [GDP](#) (released 19 June) was slightly weaker than the May MPS forecast. It showed the economy grew 0.8% q/q, a little slower than the RBNZ’s forecast of a 1.0% lift but still very respectable.
- The [Q2 CPI](#) came in slightly weaker than forecast, reflecting softer tradable inflation. Non-tradable inflation was in line with the RBNZ’s forecast.
- The [unemployment rate](#) was higher than the RBNZ’s forecast in Q2, but employment was too, and wage growth was slightly stronger. Since then, employment intentions in the ANZ Business Outlook survey have rebounded, and jobs ads have softened.
- The NZD Dubai oil price has remained below the RBNZ’s forecast but remains highly unpredictable. The NZD TWI has held close to the RBNZ’s assumption.
- Global Dairy Trade auctions have been solid. Tourist indicators dipped a little but accommodation and rental car spending both jumped in July (s.a.).
- [House prices](#) continue to go nowhere fast, consistent with RBNZ expectations.
- The Performance of Manufacturing Index, Performance of Services, and [Truckometer](#) indexes are consistent with our and the RBNZ’s expectation of ongoing but modest growth in the economy in recent months and the near term. Net migration remains subdued and building consents have been volatile, but trending higher. The RBNZ’s Kiwi-GDP Nowcast model is running close to the May MPS forecast for Q2 but suggests upside risk to the Q3 forecast.
- [Consumer confidence](#) and [business confidence](#) have rebounded sharply as fuel prices have eased. Past activity in our Business Outlook survey is yet to recover, but a lag is unsurprising (figure 2).

Figure 2. Business and consumer confidence, ANZBO past activity

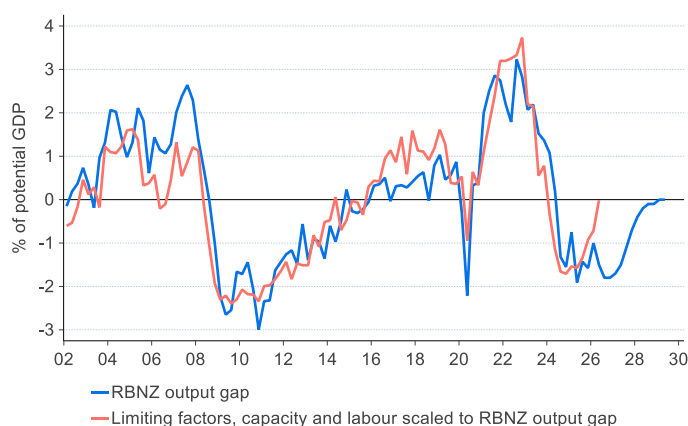


Source: Roy Morgan, Macrobond, ANZ Research

- On the inflation front, the July SPIs were softer than we expected, providing meaningful downside risk to our forecast for Q3 CPI inflation (3.9%) though not necessarily to the updated forecast presented in the July Monetary Policy Review (3.3%). It wasn’t just the really volatile components that often reverse month-to-month: rents fell 0.1% m/m and food price inflation was also much weaker than expected.

- The RBNZ is worried about the potential for inflation to be stickier than they are assuming. There hasn't been a lot of data on this, but pricing intentions have reduced along with cost expectations in the ANZ Business Outlook survey, and inflation expectations have been relatively benign.
- Our suite of output gap measures suggests there is slightly less spare capacity than implied by the RBNZ's May forecast (figure 3). In particular, limiting factor data out of the QSBO was relatively hawkish, though it's important to note that labour market indicators and the core investment gap disagree. There will be some judgement required in weighing up these conflicting signals, and judgements about the output gap could not be more important when it comes to the OCR track the RBNZ's model spits out. We view this as a key source of uncertainty and potential surprise.

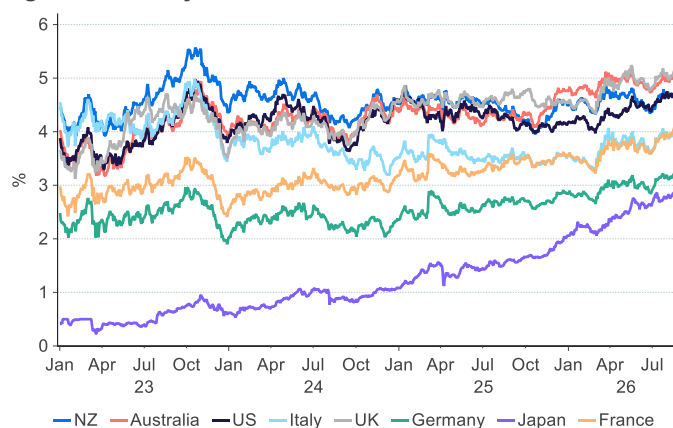
Figure 3. Labour plus capacity as limiting factors vs RBNZ output gap



Source: NZIER, RBNZ, Macrobond, ANZ Research

- Swap yields have been relatively steady in recent weeks but longer-term rates (both swaps and bond yields) continue to be dragged upward by concerns about fiscal sustainability and inflation pressures in many countries around the world (figure 4). Longer-term rates are less important for your average Kiwi borrower, but if the move were to broaden into a global credit tightening it could become very relevant to the outlook. For now, it's a watching brief.

Figure 4. Bond yields



Source: RBNZ, US Treasury, SBJ, Bloomberg, Macrobond, ANZ Research

- In the wild-card category, any change in the RBNZ's estimate of the neutral OCR would mechanically lift the RBNZ's forecast OCR end point by the same amount.

Pulling it all together

In our view, it makes sense for the RBNZ to continue along the path of getting the OCR back closer to neutral (3%) in the face of upside risks to inflation and a starting point north of the target band.

Beyond 3%, it becomes more nuanced, and market pricing reflects that uncertainty. We expect the RBNZ to get on with the job at this meeting and the next one, but in a world of such extreme uncertainty, flexibility is very valuable. An OCR track that leaves optionality regarding the October meeting seems sensible. As it happens, a very similar track to that published in May would achieve that. It would also square with the fact that data surprises have actually been fairly limited – somewhat remarkably in a period that feels so volatile and uncertain!

We do expect a higher track in the near term, simply because one hike has already been delivered and we are expecting a hike next week, whereas that was only a possibility in the May track. As for the endpoint, in May it wasn't anchored by the RBNZ's central estimate of neutral (3%), rather lifting to a peak of 3.28% with a mild upward trend by the end of the forecast. We see no particular reason for them to change the endpoint based on economic developments since May but would note that any change to the neutral OCR assumption will affect the track endpoint 1:1.

Flexibility is valuable, but it is possible that the RBNZ Committee would strategically prefer to make an October hike a virtual lock to reduce noise and simplify communications just before the general election. If they choose that route, the published track will be steeper in the near term but subsequently a bit flatter.

Markets

Presuming a hike gets delivered, the focus of markets will immediately then turn to any hints about October – which will guide how OIS markets trade, and the endpoint of the track – which will guide how short-end swap rates trade.

At the moment, markets are pricing in slightly greater odds of a December hike than an October hike. Given that December is an MPS and October is an MPR (and it is just 10 days before the election), it is perhaps not surprising that markets are distributing the odds over the two meetings in this way. However, explaining a pause after just two hikes that will still leave the OCR in stimulatory territory is arguably a tougher communications task than explaining a hike ahead of an election, especially if it is just another step in a well-signalled plan to get back to neutral. We do expect an October hike, but markets may need more convincing. The upshot is that the words are going to matter – not just the overall tone, but also specific judgements by the Committee, including what they will be watching particularly closely, given that there is quite a bit of data out between the September and October meetings.

In May, the RBNZ's OCR track peaked at 3.28% in Q2 2029 and implied an average OCR of 3.1% over the 2 years ending Q3 2028. By contrast, the 2 year swap is currently trading at around 3.65%. Technically then, we see scope for short-end swap rates to come down eventually, especially as we expect the OCR to get to only 3%, even if we do see some upside risk to that forecast. However, as we have noted in our forecast write-ups, markets tend to oversteer early on in tightening cycles, and above-target inflation will only exacerbate that tendency.

Bringing it all together, we do see scope for markets to price in greater odds of an October hike once the next one is in the bag, but we think that move will be isolated and don't expect much in the way of spillover into short-end swap rates.

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