

# CONFIDENCE SURVEY

Westpac McDermott Miller Employment  
Confidence, March quarter 2026.

25 March 2026



# CONTENTS AND AUTHOR

Summary	3
Employment Confidence Indices	4
Job opportunities	5
Earnings growth	6
Job security	7
Regional confidence	8
Technical details	9



**Michael Gordon**, Senior Economist

+64 9 336 5670 | +64 21 749 506  
michael.gordon@westpac.co.nz



# SUMMARY

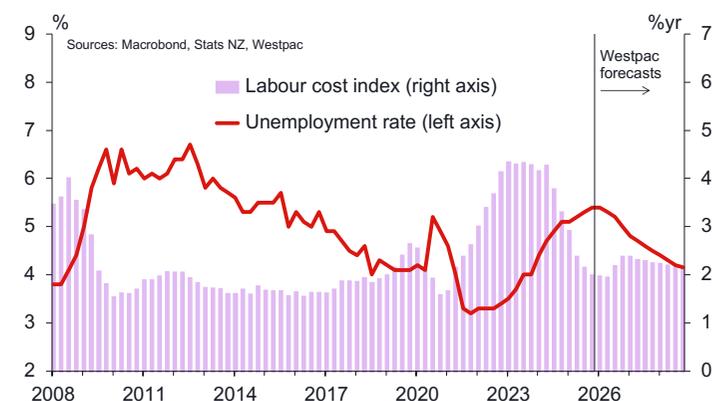
## A modest lift in labour market confidence, ahead of the Iran conflict.

- The Westpac-McDermott Miller Employment Confidence Index rose by 1.8 points to 95.6 in the March quarter, the highest reading since early 2024. A level below 100 indicates that there are more households who are pessimistic about the outlook than those who are optimistic.
- The main driver was an improvement in households' perceptions about current job availability. Job advertisements have been gradually picking up over recent months, though they remain some way below pre-Covid levels.
- Households remain more cautious about their earnings prospects and job security, with only small improvements in the last quarter.
- These results on their own would be consistent with the unemployment rate having reached its peak, and perhaps even falling, in the early part of this year.
- We note though that this survey was conducted over 1-12 March. While that encompassed the early days of the Iran conflict, it may be that households (and employers for that matter) only became aware of the consequences towards the end of this period, as fuel prices began to rise sharply. As such, it's unclear to what extent this level of confidence will be maintained in the months ahead.

### Employment Confidence Index



### Westpac labour market forecasts



# EMPLOYMENT CONFIDENCE INDICES

## Nationwide

	Mar-26	Dec-25	Change
Employment Confidence Index	95.6	93.8	1.8
Current Employment Conditions Index	83.9	78.3	5.6
Employment Expectations Index	103.4	104.1	-0.7
Current job opportunities	-45.8	-54.5	8.7
Expected job opportunities	-17.5	-13.6	-3.9
Past earnings growth	13.6	11.1	2.5
Expected earnings growth	22.2	21.7	0.5
Own job security	5.6	4.2	1.4

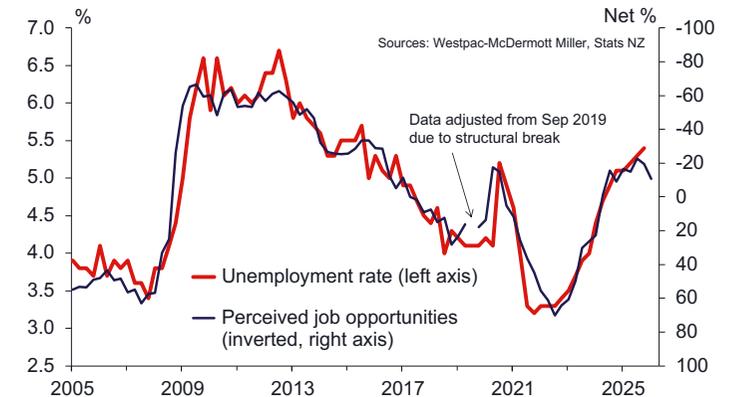
## Employment confidence by region

	Mar-26	Dec-25	Change
Northland	84.7	85.5	-0.8
Auckland	97.3	95.6	1.7
Waikato	99.0	88.9	10.1
Bay of Plenty	96.1	89.7	6.4
Gisborne/Hawke's Bay	100.1	93.5	6.6
Taranaki/Manawatu-Whanganui	88.0	89.1	-1.1
Wellington	90.8	80.5	10.3
Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast	89.4	100.8	-11.4
Canterbury	91.8	91.9	-0.1
Otago	89.1	97.2	-8.1
Southland	92.9	90.2	2.7

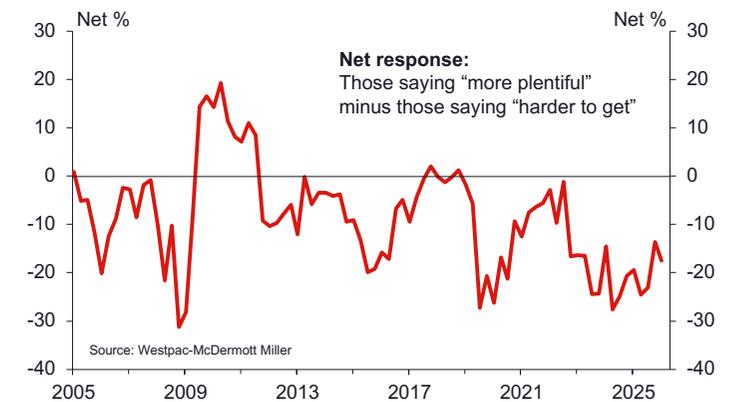
# JOB OPPORTUNITIES

- A net 46% of respondents in the March survey felt that it's hard to find a job at the moment. That was the least negative reading since December 2024.
- This measure has tended to be a good leading indicator of the unemployment rate for the quarter. The latest reading is consistent with the unemployment rate having peaked at its current level of 5.4%, and may have even started falling in the March quarter.
- A broader range of indicators also suggest that the labour market had made a solid start to the year. The Quarterly Survey of Business Opinion found that hiring intentions had turned net positive for the first time in two years, while job advertisements have been gradually tracking higher, though they remain well below pre-Covid levels. Weekly snapshots of the number of filled jobs, which are taken from tax data, are now running slightly higher than a year ago.
- Households were more circumspect about the availability of jobs a year from now. This measure fell slightly in the March quarter, and remains near the lows that it has occupied over the last couple of years.

Job opportunities vs unemployment rate



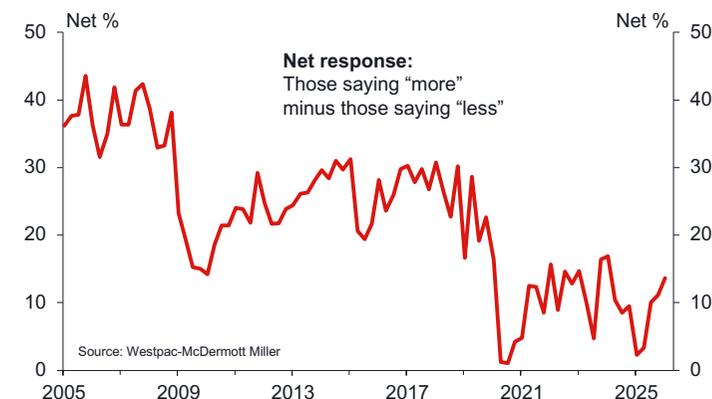
Job opportunities in a year's time



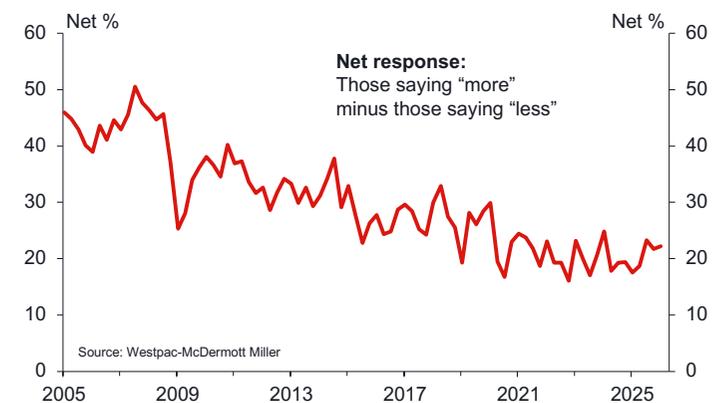
# EARNINGS GROWTH

- The earnings growth measures were only slightly higher in the March survey.
- A net 14% of households reported a rise in their earnings over the last year, while a net 22% expect a lift in their earnings in the year ahead. Both of these measures remain low relative to history.
- For those getting wage increases, they have tended to be more moderate than in previous years. Stats NZ's Labour Cost Index shows an ongoing shift towards pay rises in the 2-3% range, with far fewer roles seeing pay rises of 5% or more.
- The degree of slack in the labour market means that workers' negotiating power has decreased compared to a few years ago. This reduces the scope for the recent pickup in inflation (and the expectation of more to come in response to the Iran conflict) to be passed through into cost-of-living increases for workers.

Earnings in paid work compared to last year



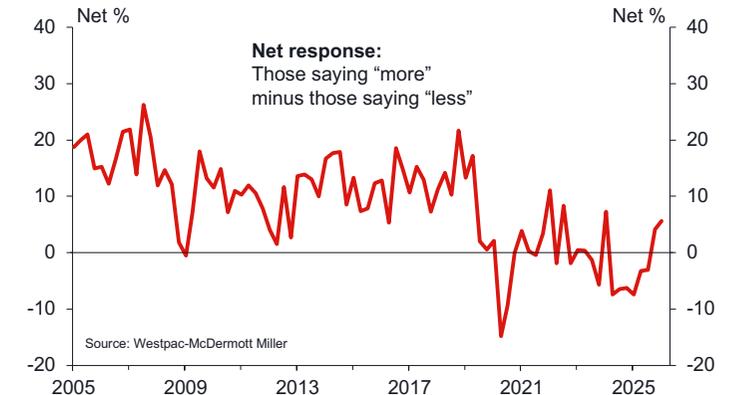
Earnings in paid work this time next year



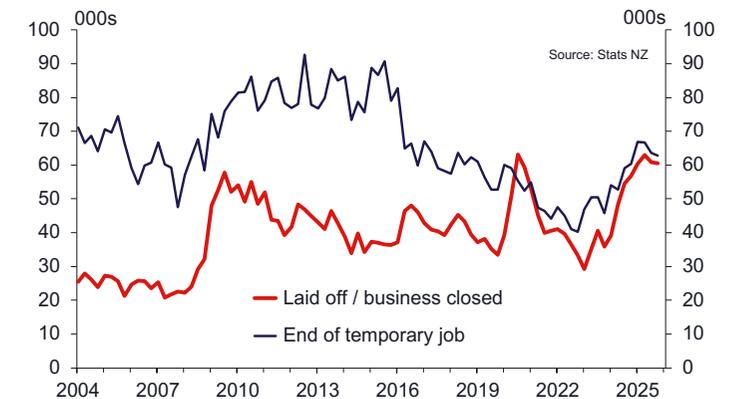
# JOB SECURITY

- On balance, New Zealanders were more optimistic about their own job security over the year ahead.
- The lift in perceived job security was seen among men and older workers. Younger workers were slightly less confident, though that followed a strong lift in the December quarter.
- The results were mixed by earnings, with middle-income workers seeing the biggest improvement, while low-income workers were less confident.
- High-income earners saw a smaller improvement in job security, although they were the most confident in the first place.
- The Household Labour Force Survey suggests that the number of people out of work due to their job disappearing may be peaking.
- That said, layoffs have only been part of the story in recent years. There has also been a rise in the duration of unemployment, as once people are out of work they've found it hard to get back in again.

Personal job security over the next year



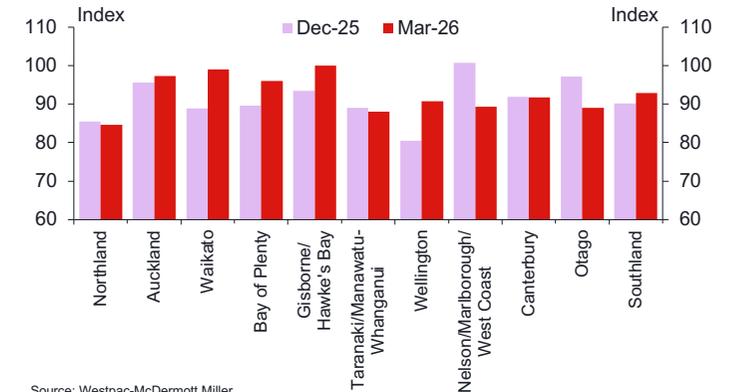
HLFS: Reason for leaving last job



# REGIONAL CONFIDENCE

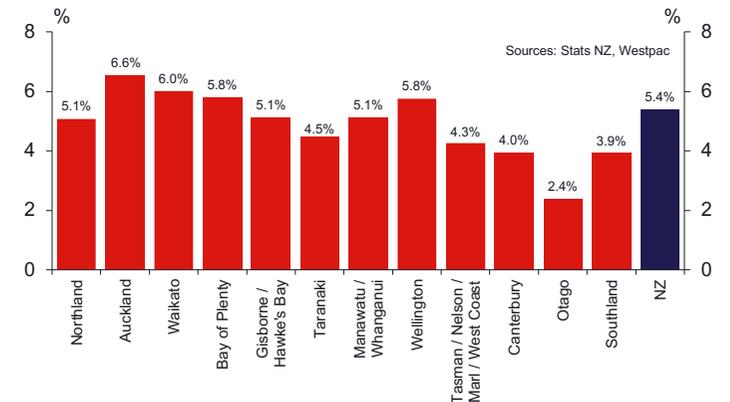
- Perceptions of the labour market were mixed across the country, with only one area reaching (just) above the 100 mark. Employment confidence rose in six regions and fell in five over the March quarter.
- The biggest gains in confidence were seen in Waikato, the East Coast, and perhaps surprisingly Wellington. In each case this was driven by an improvement in current job opportunities, and one or both of the earnings growth measures.
- Confidence fell in the Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast regions. However, this didn't fully reverse the steep rise seen in the December quarter.
- Confidence was also lower in Otago. A rise in current job prospects was outweighed by declines in the other measures.
- The March results somewhat reversed the findings of the December survey, in that the North Island was on balance more confident than the South. To date, economic data has generally pointed to stronger outcomes in the South Island, at least partly stemming from its greater exposure to the strong returns from rural exports. While it's normal for the unemployment rate to be lower in the South Island, what's notable is that it has actually fallen over the last year in Canterbury, Otago and Southland, against a rise at the national level.

Employment confidence by region



Source: Westpac-McDermott Miller

Unemployment rate by region



Sources: Stats NZ, Westpac

# TECHNICAL DETAILS

## Survey description.

The Westpac-McDermott Miller Employment Confidence Index summarises responses to five questions: households' perceptions of current and future job opportunities, their own actual and expected earnings, and expected changes in their own job security.

The questions about current job opportunities and earnings are summarised in the Current Employment Conditions Index, while the questions about the year ahead are summarised in the Employment Expectations Index.

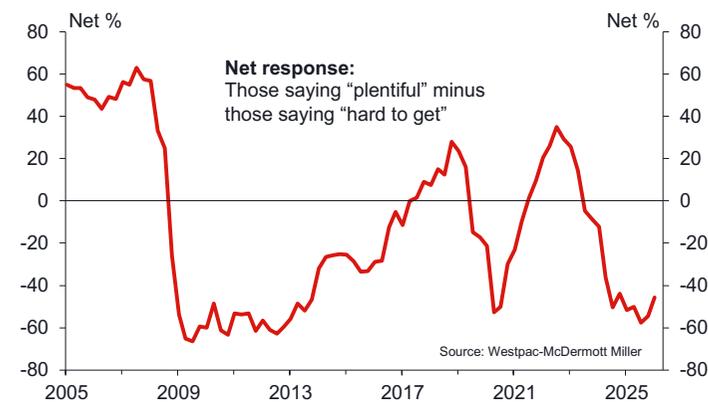
Survey interviews were conducted over the period 1-12 March. The sample size was 1,550. The margin of error of the survey is 2.5%.

## Summary charts.

### Employment Confidence Indices



### Do you think jobs are plentiful or hard to get in NZ?



# Contact

**Westpac Economics Team**  
[westpac.co.nz/economics](https://westpac.co.nz/economics)  
economics@westpac.co.nz



**Kelly Eckhold**, Chief Economist  
+64 9 348 9382 | +64 21 786 758  
kelly.eckhold@westpac.co.nz

**Satish Ranchhod**, Senior Economist  
+64 9 336 5668 | +64 21 710 852  
satish.ranchhod@westpac.co.nz

Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. The forecasts given in this document are predictive in character. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure that the assumptions on which the forecasts are based are reasonable, the forecasts may be affected by incorrect assumptions or by known or unknown risks and uncertainties. The ultimate outcomes may differ substantially from these forecasts.

## Disclaimer

©2026 Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141 (including where acting under any of its Westpac, St George, Bank of Melbourne or BankSA brands, collectively, “Westpac”). References to the “Westpac Group” are to Westpac and its subsidiaries and includes the directors, employees and representatives of Westpac and its subsidiaries.

### Things you should know.

We respect your privacy: You can view the [New Zealand Privacy Policy](#) here, or the Australian [Group Privacy Statement](#) here. Each time someone visits our site, data is captured so that we can accurately evaluate the quality of our content and make improvements for you. We may at

times use technology to capture data about you to help us to better understand you and your needs, including potentially for the purposes of assessing your individual reading habits and interests to allow us to provide suggestions regarding other reading material which may be suitable for you.

This information, unless specifically indicated otherwise, is under copyright of the Westpac Group. None of the material, nor its contents, nor any copy of it, may be altered in any way, transmitted to, copied or distributed to any other party without the prior written permission of the Westpac Group.

### Disclaimer.

This information has been prepared by Westpac and is intended for information purposes only. It is not intended to reflect any recommendation or financial advice and investment decisions should not be based on it. This information does not constitute an offer, a solicitation of an offer, or an inducement to subscribe for, purchase or sell any financial instrument or to enter into a legally binding contract. To the extent that this information contains any general advice, it has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs and before acting on it you should consider the appropriateness of the advice. Certain types of transactions, including those involving futures, options and high yield securities give rise to substantial risk and are not suitable for all investors. We recommend that you seek your own independent legal or financial advice before proceeding with any investment decision.

This information may contain material provided by third parties. While such material is published with the necessary permission none of Westpac or its related entities accepts any responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any such material. Although we have made every effort to ensure this information is free from error, none of Westpac or its related entities warrants the accuracy, adequacy or completeness of this information, or otherwise endorses it in any way. Except where contrary to law, Westpac Group intend by this notice to exclude liability for this information. This information is subject to change without notice and none of Westpac or its related entities is under any obligation to update this information or correct any inaccuracy which may become apparent at a later date. This information may contain or incorporate by reference forward looking statements. The words “believe”, “anticipate”, “expect”, “intend”, “plan”, “predict”, “continue”, “assume”, “positioned”, “may”, “will”, “should”, “shall”, “risk” and other similar expressions that are predictions of or indicate future events and future trends identify forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements include all matters that are not historical facts. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance, nor are forecasts of future performance. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure that the assumptions on which any forecasts are based are reasonable, the forecasts may be affected by incorrect assumptions or by known or unknown risks and uncertainties. The ultimate outcomes may differ substantially from any forecasts.

**Conflicts of Interest:** In the normal course of offering banking products and services to its clients, the Westpac Group may act in several capacities (including issuer, market maker,

underwriter, distributor, swap counterparty and calculation agent) simultaneously with respect to a financial instrument, giving rise to potential conflicts of interest which may impact the performance of a financial instrument. The Westpac Group may at any time transact or hold a position (including hedging and trading positions) for its own account or the account of a client in any financial instrument which may impact the performance of that financial instrument.

**Author(s) disclaimer and declaration:** The author(s) confirms that (a) no part of his/her compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to any views or (if applicable) recommendations expressed in this material; (b) this material accurately reflects his/her personal views about the financial products, companies or issuers (if applicable) and is based on sources reasonably believed to be reliable and accurate; (c) to the best of the author's knowledge, they are not in receipt of inside information and this material does not contain inside information; and (d) no other part of the Westpac Group has made any attempt to influence this material.

**Further important information regarding sustainability-related content:** This material may contain statements relating to environmental, social and governance (ESG) topics. These are subject to known and unknown risks, and there are significant uncertainties, limitations, risks and assumptions in the metrics, modelling, data, scenarios, reporting and analysis on which the statements rely. In particular, these areas are rapidly evolving and maturing, and there are variations in approaches and common standards and practice, as well as uncertainty around future related policy and legislation. Some material may include information derived from publicly available sources that have not been independently verified. No representation or warranty is made as to the accuracy, completeness or reliability of the information. There is a risk that the analysis, estimates, judgements, assumptions, views, models, scenarios or projections used may turn out to be incorrect. These risks may cause actual outcomes to differ materially from those expressed or implied. The ESG-related statements in this material do not constitute advice, nor are they guarantees or predictions of future performance, and Westpac gives no representation, warranty or assurance (including as to the quality, accuracy or completeness of the statements). You should seek your own independent advice.

#### **Additional country disclosures:**

**Australia:** Westpac holds an Australian Financial Services Licence (No. 233714). You can access [Westpac's Financial Services Guide](#) here or request a copy from your Westpac point of contact. To the extent that this information contains any general advice, it has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs and before acting on it you should consider the appropriateness of the advice.

**New Zealand:** In New Zealand, Westpac Institutional Bank refers to the brand under which products and services are provided by either Westpac (NZ division) or Westpac New Zealand Limited (company number 1763882), the New Zealand incorporated subsidiary of Westpac ("WNZL"). Any product or service made available by WNZL does not represent an offer from Westpac or any of its subsidiaries (other than WNZL). Neither Westpac nor its other subsidiaries

guarantee or otherwise support the performance of WNZL in respect of any such product. WNZL is not an authorised deposit-taking institution for the purposes of Australian prudential standards. The current disclosure statements for the New Zealand branch of Westpac and WNZL can be obtained at [www.westpac.co.nz](http://www.westpac.co.nz).

**Singapore:** This material has been prepared and issued for distribution in Singapore to institutional investors, accredited investors and expert investors (as defined in the applicable Singapore laws and regulations) only. Recipients of this material in Singapore should contact Westpac Singapore Branch in respect of any matters arising from, or in connection with, this material. Westpac Singapore Branch holds a wholesale banking licence and is subject to supervision by the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

**Fiji:** Unless otherwise specified, the products and services for Westpac Fiji are available from [www.westpac.com.fj](http://www.westpac.com.fj) © Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141. This information does not take your personal circumstances into account and before acting on it you should consider the appropriateness of the information for your financial situation. Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141 is incorporated in NSW Australia and registered as a branch in Fiji. The liability of its members is limited.

**Papua New Guinea:** Unless otherwise specified, the products and services for Westpac PNG are available from [www.westpac.com.pg](http://www.westpac.com.pg) © Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141. This information does not take your personal circumstances into account and before acting on it you should consider the appropriateness of the information for your financial situation. Westpac Banking Corporation ABN 33 007 457 141 is incorporated in NSW Australia. Westpac is represented in Papua New Guinea by Westpac Bank - PNG - Limited. The liability of its members is limited.

**U.S.:** Westpac operates in the United States of America as a federally licensed branch, regulated by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency. Westpac is also registered with the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission ("CFTC") as a Swap Dealer, but is neither registered as, or affiliated with, a Futures Commission Merchant registered with the US CFTC. The services and products referenced above are not insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation ("FDIC"). Westpac Capital Markets, LLC ("WCM"), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Westpac, is a broker-dealer registered under the U.S. Securities Exchange Act of 1934 ('the Exchange Act') and member of the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority ("FINRA"). In accordance with APRA's Prudential Standard 222 'Association with Related Entities', Westpac does not stand behind WCM other than as provided for in certain legal agreements between Westpac and WCM and obligations of WCM do not represent liabilities of Westpac.

This communication is provided for distribution to U.S. institutional investors in reliance on the exemption from registration provided by Rule 15a-6 under the Exchange Act and is not subject to all of the independence and disclosure standards applicable to debt research reports prepared for retail investors in the United States. WCM is the U.S. distributor of

this communication and accepts responsibility for the contents of this communication. Transactions by U.S. customers of any securities referenced herein should be effected through WCM. All disclaimers set out with respect to Westpac apply equally to WCM. If you would like to speak to someone regarding any security mentioned herein, please contact WCM on +1 212 389 1269. Investing in any non-U.S. securities or related financial instruments mentioned in this communication may present certain risks. The securities of non-U.S. issuers may not be registered with, or be subject to the regulations of, the SEC in the United States. Information on such non-U.S. securities or related financial instruments may be limited. Non-U.S. companies may not be subject to audit and reporting standards and regulatory requirements comparable to those in effect in the United States. The value of any investment or income from any securities or related derivative instruments denominated in a currency other than U.S. dollars is subject to exchange rate fluctuations that may have a positive or adverse effect on the value of or income from such securities or related derivative instruments.

The author of this communication is employed by Westpac and is not registered or qualified as a research analyst, representative, or associated person of WCM or any other U.S. broker-dealer under the rules of FINRA, any other U.S. self-regulatory organisation, or the laws, rules or regulations of any State. Unless otherwise specifically stated, the views expressed herein are solely those of the author and may differ from the information, views or analysis expressed by Westpac and/or its affiliates.

**UK:** The London branch of Westpac is authorised in the United Kingdom by the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and is subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and limited regulation by the PRA (Financial Services Register number: 124586). The London branch of Westpac is registered at Companies House as a branch established in the United Kingdom (Branch No. BR000106). Details about the extent of the regulation of Westpac's London branch by the PRA are available from us on request.

This communication is not being made to or distributed to, and must not be passed on to, the general public in the United Kingdom. Rather, this communication is being made only to and is directed at (a) those persons falling within the definition of Investment Professionals (set out in Article 19(5) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) Order 2005 (the "Order")); (b) those persons falling within the definition of high net worth companies, unincorporated associations etc. (set out in Article 49(2) of the Order); (c) other persons to whom it may lawfully be communicated in accordance with the Order or (d) any persons to whom it may otherwise lawfully be made (all such persons together being referred to as "relevant persons"). Any person who is not a relevant person should not act or rely on this communication or any of its contents. In the same way, the information contained in this communication is intended for "eligible counterparties" and "professional clients" as defined by the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority and is not intended for "retail clients". Westpac expressly prohibits you from passing on the information in this communication to any third party.

**European Economic Area ("EEA"):** This material may be distributed to you by either: (i) Westpac directly, or (ii) Westpac Europe GmbH ("WEG") under a sub-licensing arrangement. WEG has not edited or otherwise modified the content of this material. WEG is authorised in Germany by the Federal Financial Supervision Authority ("BaFin") and subject to its regulation. WEG's supervisory authorities are BaFin and the German Federal Bank ("Deutsche Bundesbank"). WEG is registered with the commercial register ("Handelsregister") of the local court of Frankfurt am Main under registration number HRB 118483. In accordance with APRA's Prudential Standard 222 'Association with Related Entities', Westpac does not stand behind WEG other than as provided for in certain legal agreements (a risk transfer, sub-participation and collateral agreement) between Westpac and WEG and obligations of WEG do not represent liabilities of Westpac. Any product or service made available by WEG does not represent an offer from Westpac or any of its subsidiaries (other than WEG). All disclaimers set out with respect to Westpac apply equally to WEG.

This communication is not intended for distribution to, or use by any person or entity in any jurisdiction or country where such distribution or use would be contrary to local law or regulation.

This communication contains general commentary, research, and market colour. The communication does not constitute investment advice. The material may contain an 'investment recommendation' and/or 'information recommending or suggesting an investment', both as defined in Regulation (EU) No 596/2014 (including as applicable in the United Kingdom) ("MAR"). In accordance with the relevant provisions of MAR, reasonable care has been taken to ensure that the material has been objectively presented and that interests or conflicts of interest of the sender concerning the financial instruments to which that information relates have been disclosed.

Investment recommendations must be read alongside the specific disclosure which accompanies them and the **general disclosure** which can be found here. Such disclosure fulfils certain additional information requirements of MAR and associated delegated legislation and by accepting this communication you acknowledge that you are aware of the existence of such additional disclosure and its contents.

To the extent this communication comprises an investment recommendation it is classified as non-independent research. It has not been prepared in accordance with legal requirements designed to promote the independence of investment research and therefore constitutes a marketing communication. Further, this communication is not subject to any prohibition on dealing ahead of the dissemination of investment research.



Westpac Banking Corporation.