



THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK

18TH FEBRUARY 2022

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CORINNA ECONOMIC ADVISORY
INDEPENDENT ECONOMICS

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What's new?

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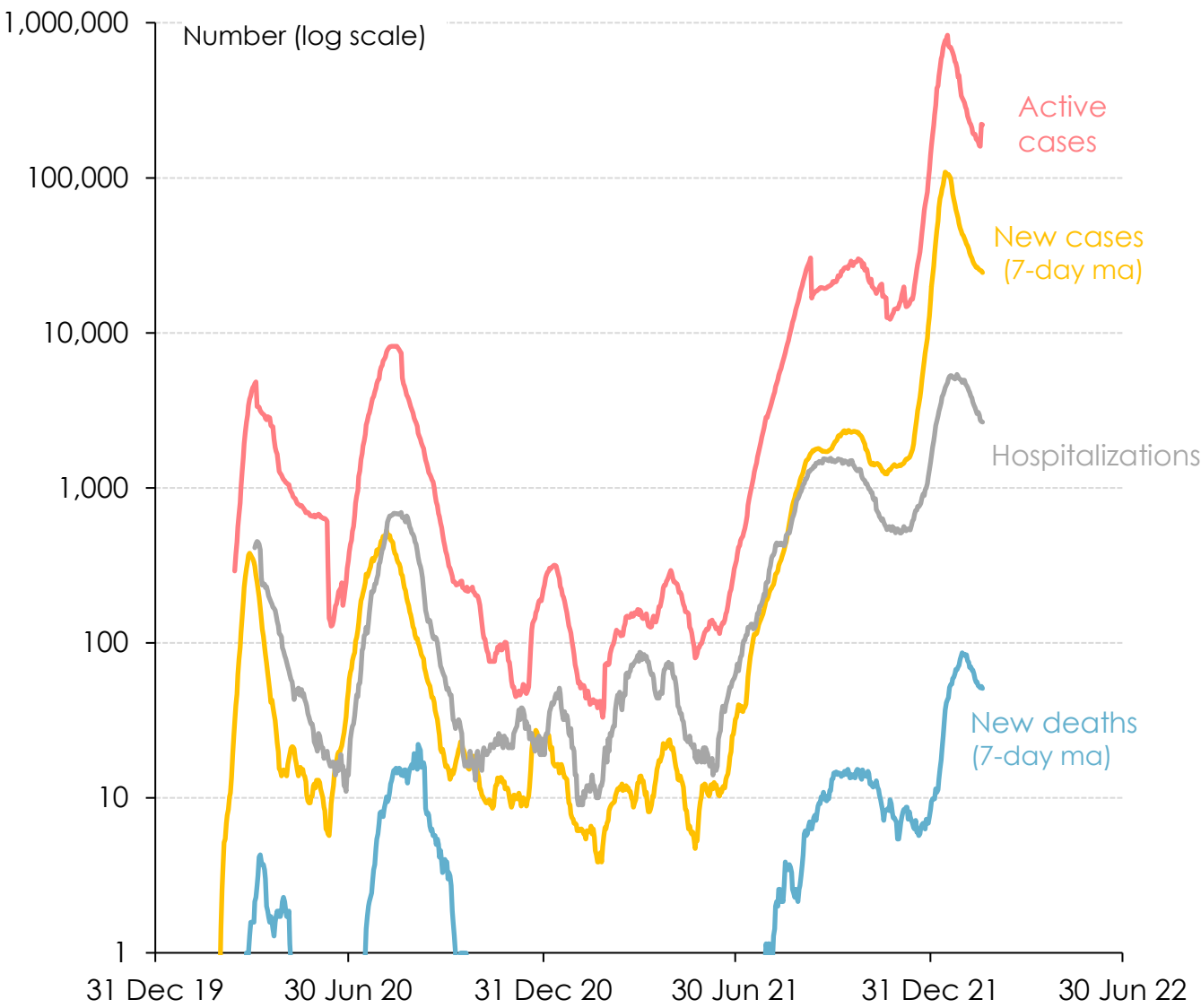
- ❑ The numbers of new and active cases are now down more than 70% from their peaks in the second week of January, and the numbers of hospitalizations and deaths are down 50% and 40% respectively from their peaks in the last week of January, providing further evidence that Australia's 'omicron' wave is now receding ([slide 5](#)) – and mobility data continue to suggest that the so-called 'shadow lockdown' is easing ([slide 10](#))
- ❑ The spread of the 'omicron' variant during January meant that a large number of people were unable to go to work, while some businesses experiencing shortfalls in demand due to hesitancy on the part of customers sent staff home (without laying them off) – resulting in an 8.8% decline in hours worked last month, the second-largest ever recorded (after the 9.6% drop in April 2020) – but employment nonetheless rose another 12.9K (0.1%), and the unemployment rate remained unchanged at 4.2%, the lowest since August 2008 – and apart from that and two other months during 2008, the lowest since November 1974 ([slide 43](#))
- ❑ Adding those counted as 'employed' despite working zero hours for 'economic' or other reasons (apart from being on leave), and those who've dropped out of the workforce since the beginning of last year's lockdowns, to the 'official' count of 'unemployed' people, the 'effective' unemployment rate rose from 5.0% in December to 5.9% in January – though that's still substantially lower than the 10.3-10.5% rates recorded between August and October last year, and should fall back again in February ([slide 45](#))
- ❑ 54,200 international visitors arrived in Australia during December, and 67,800 Australian residents returned, in each case the highest numbers since March 2020: these numbers should begin to rise more noticeably after the re-opening of Australia's international borders to foreign tourists, business and other visitors this coming Tuesday, 21st February ([slide 62](#))
- ❑ Given the tightness of the labour market, as perhaps best illustrated by the record low number of unemployed people for each job vacancy ([slide 53](#)), much significance attaches to the Q4 wage price index data to be released this coming Tuesday ([slide 68](#)) particularly given the RBA's oft-stated emphasis on the importance of a pick-up in wages growth to its assessment as to whether inflation is 'sustainably' within its 2-3% target band ([slide 79](#))
- ❑ Financial markets continue to assume that inflation is 'sustainably' within the RBA's target band, and this week further increased the probabilities attaching to the RBA raising the cash rate twice during the second half of this year ([slides 84-85](#))
- ❑ The iron ore price fell more than 10% this week, following renewed intervention by Chinese regulatory authorities ([slide 56](#)), despite which the A\$ climbed back over US72¢ ([slide 86](#))

The virus

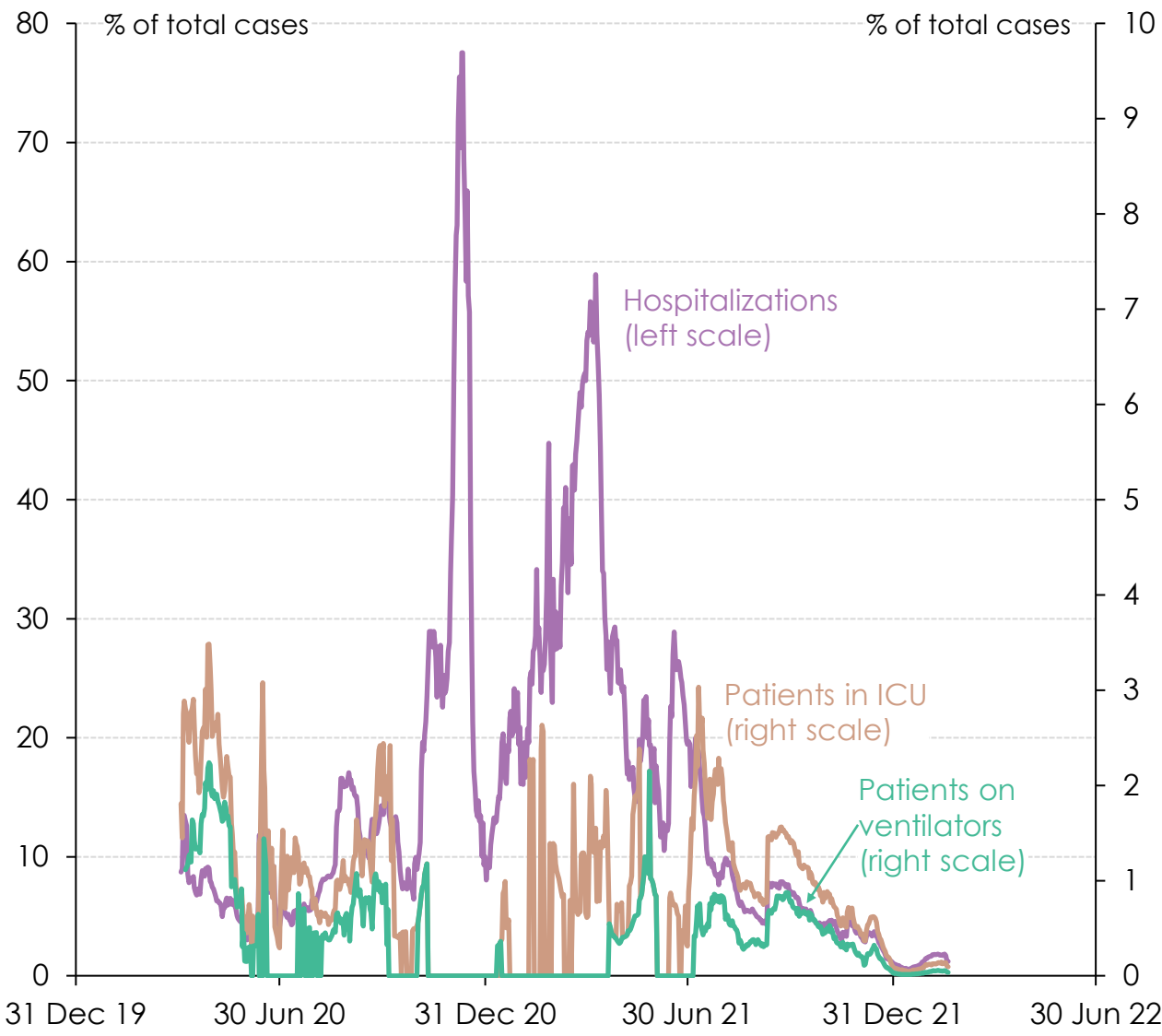
Australia's 'omicron wave' has continued to subside, although the numbers of new and active cases, hospitalizations and deaths remain high

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Cases, hospitalizations and deaths



Severity of cases

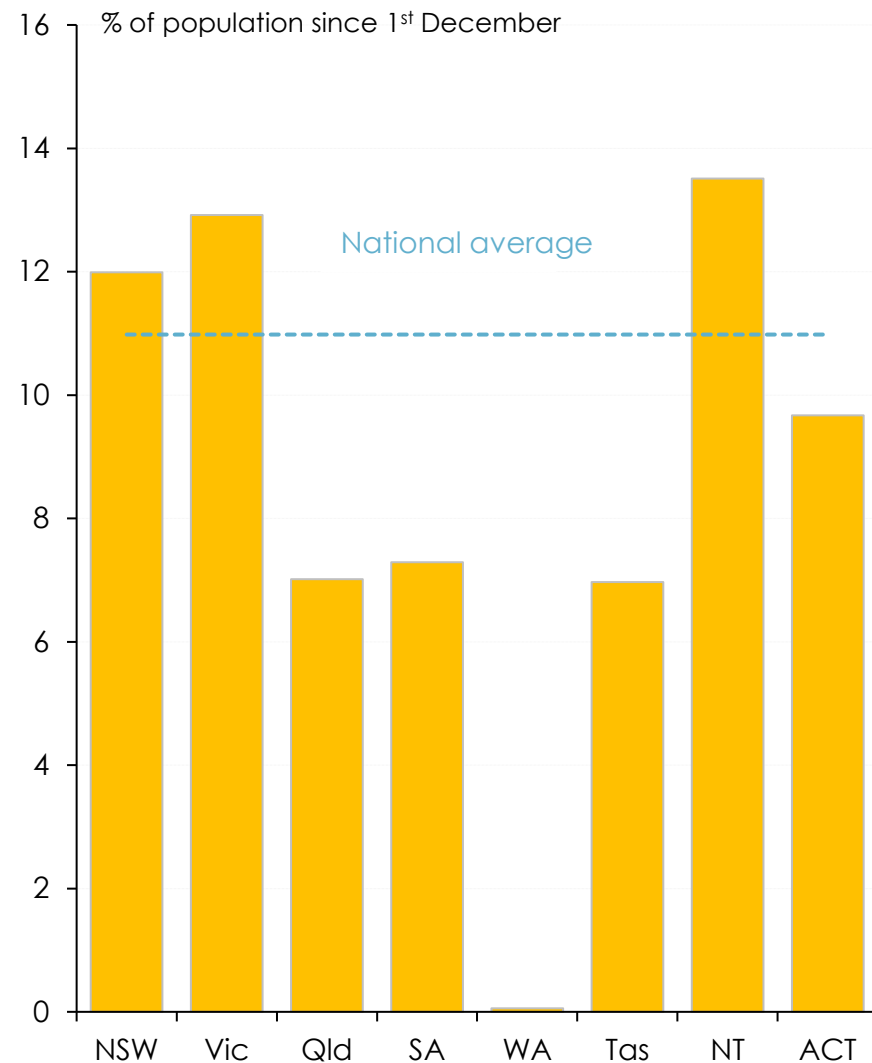


Note: Data up to 18th February. Source: covid19data.com.au. [Return to "What's New"](#).

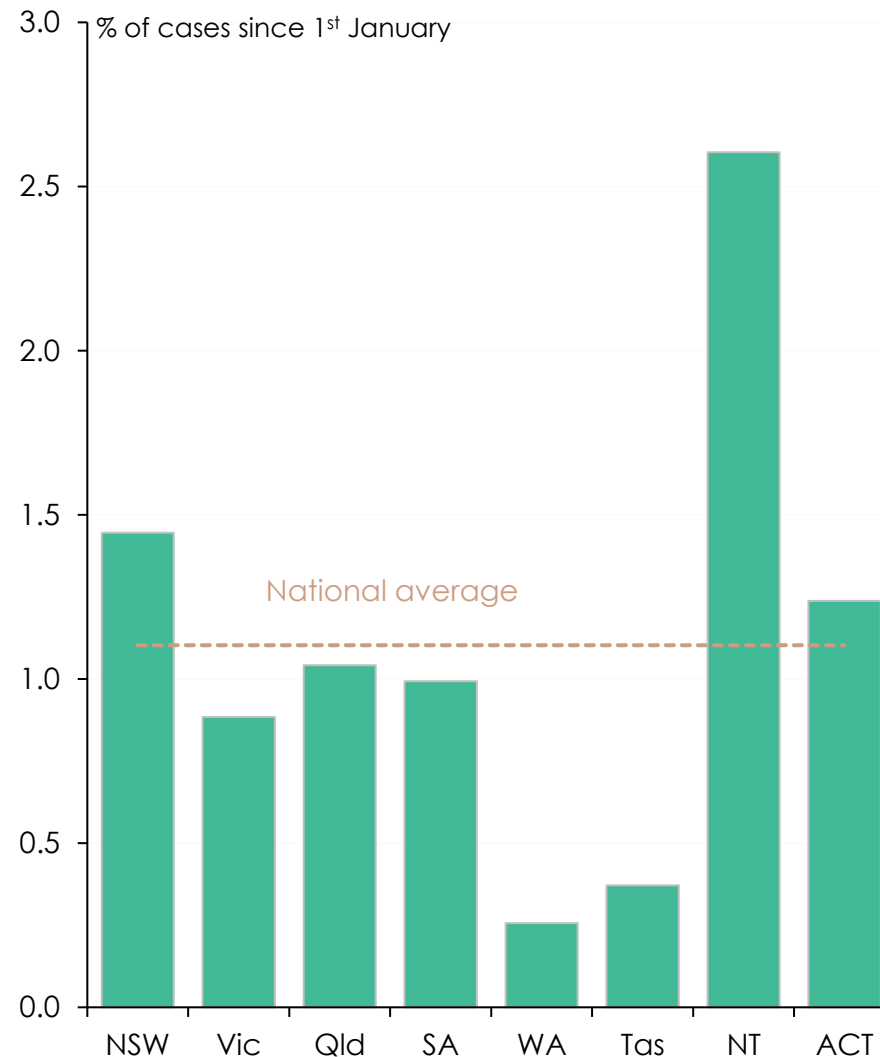
The omicron outbreak has been more widespread in NSW, Victoria & the NT than in the rest of Australia, and WA has kept it out through border closures

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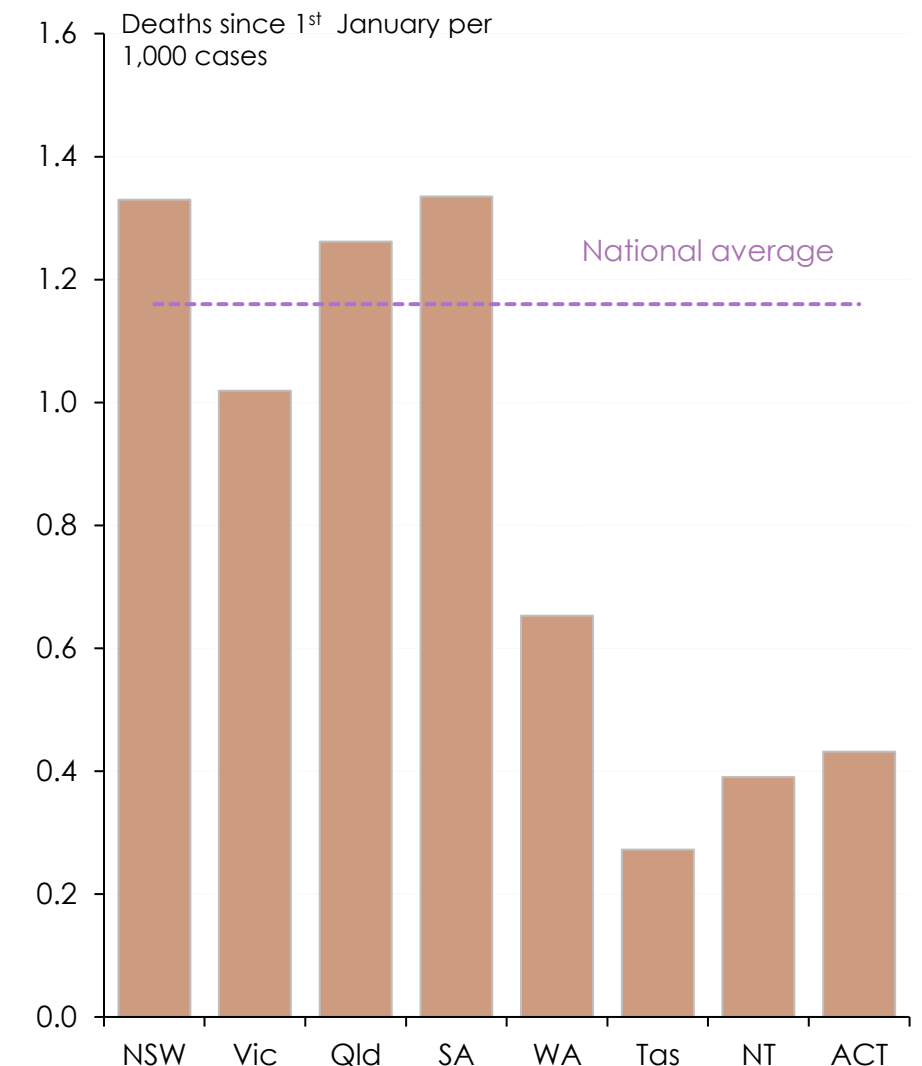
New cases since 1st December 2021



Hospitalization rate since 1st January 2022



Fatality rate since 1st January 2022



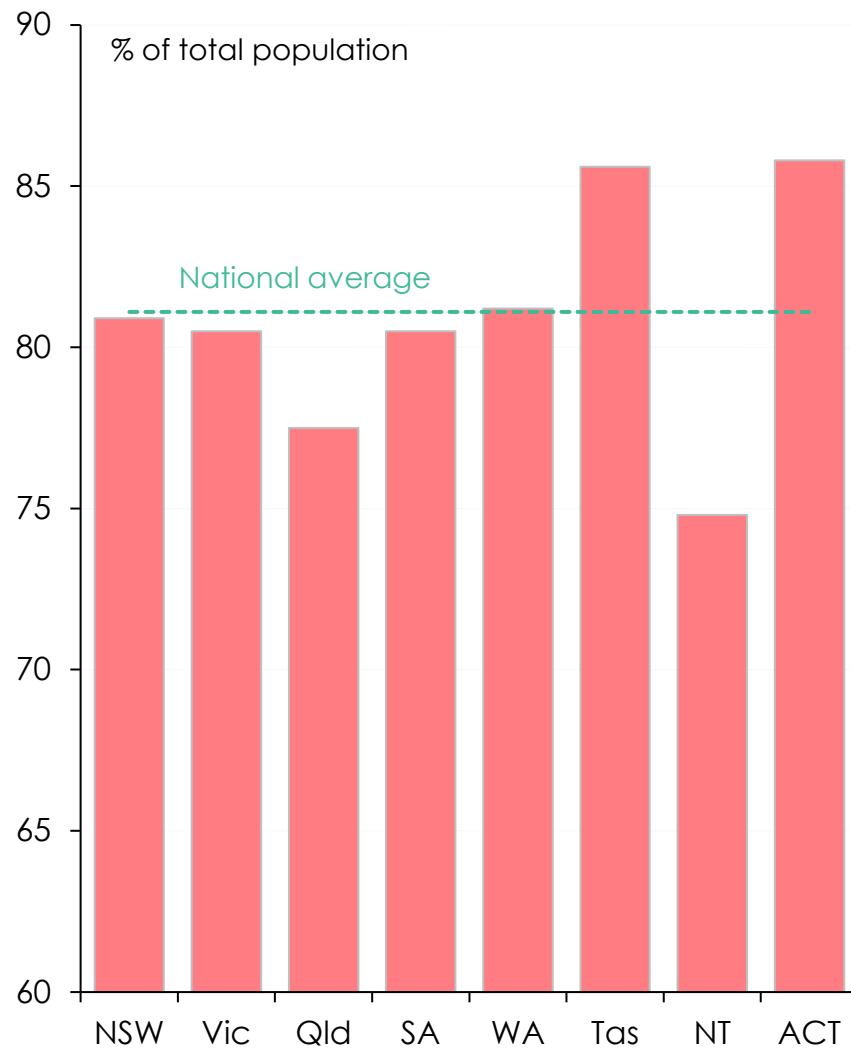
Note: Data are up to 18th February. 1st December was two days after the first omicron case was detected in Australia. The Northern Territory has a policy of hospitalizing all active cases (as did Queensland until the end of December 2021), which biases its hospitalization rate upwards compared with other jurisdictions.

Source: covid19data.com.au. [Return to "What's New"](#).

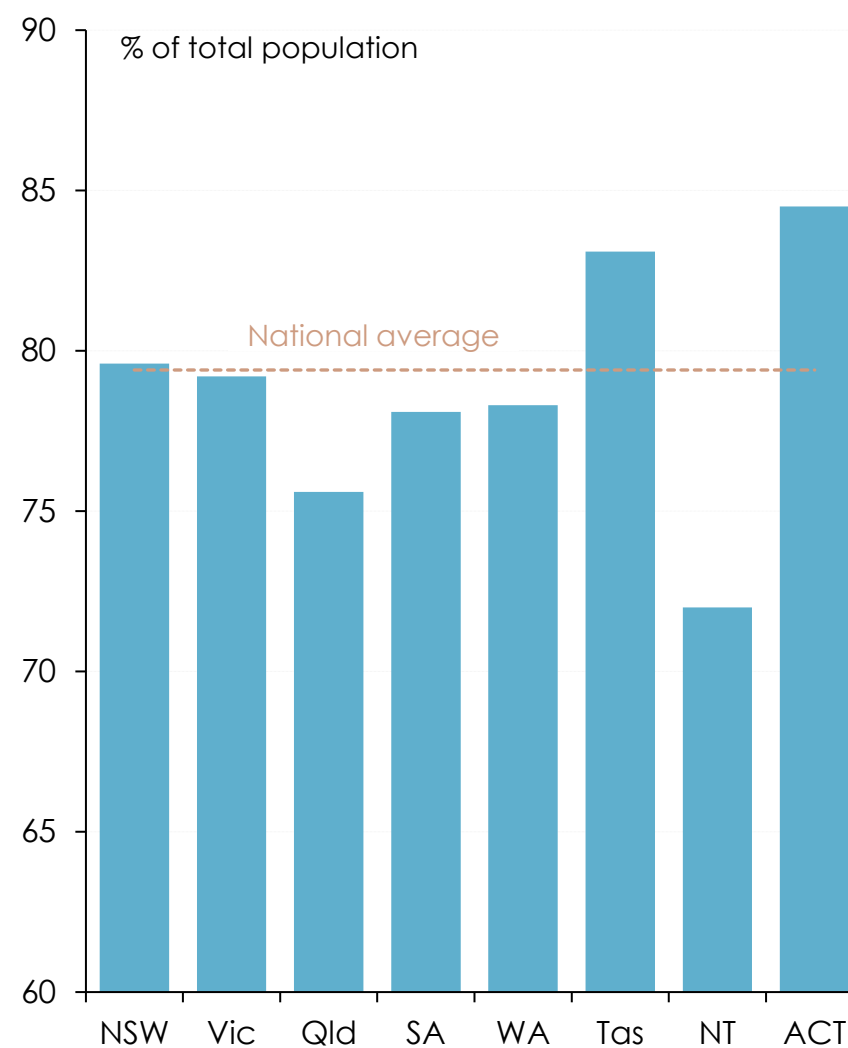
Tasmania and the ACT have had the most comprehensive vaccine rollouts while Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory lag

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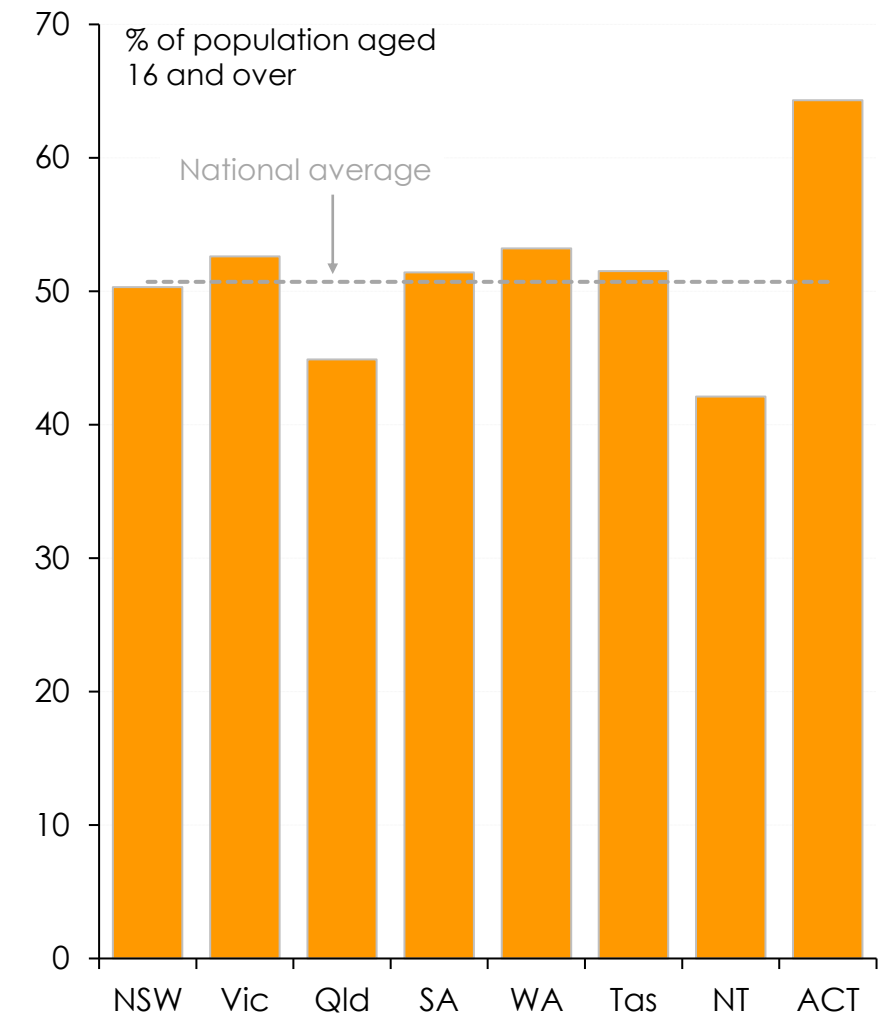
Pc of population who have had at least one vaccination



Pc of population who have had two vaccinations



Pc of population who have had a third ('booster') vaccination

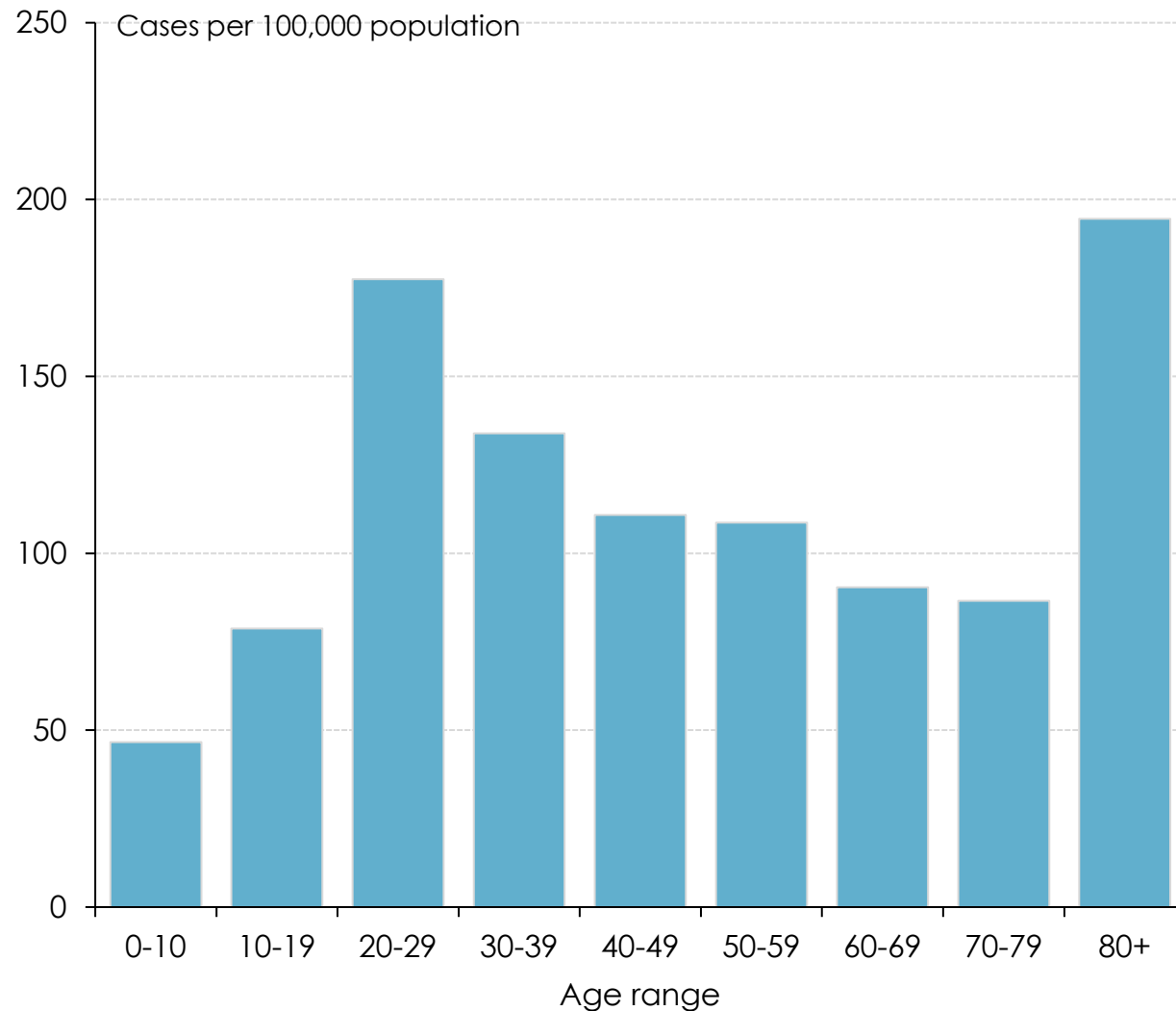


Note: Data are up to 17th February. Source: covid19data.com.au. [Return to "What's New"](#).

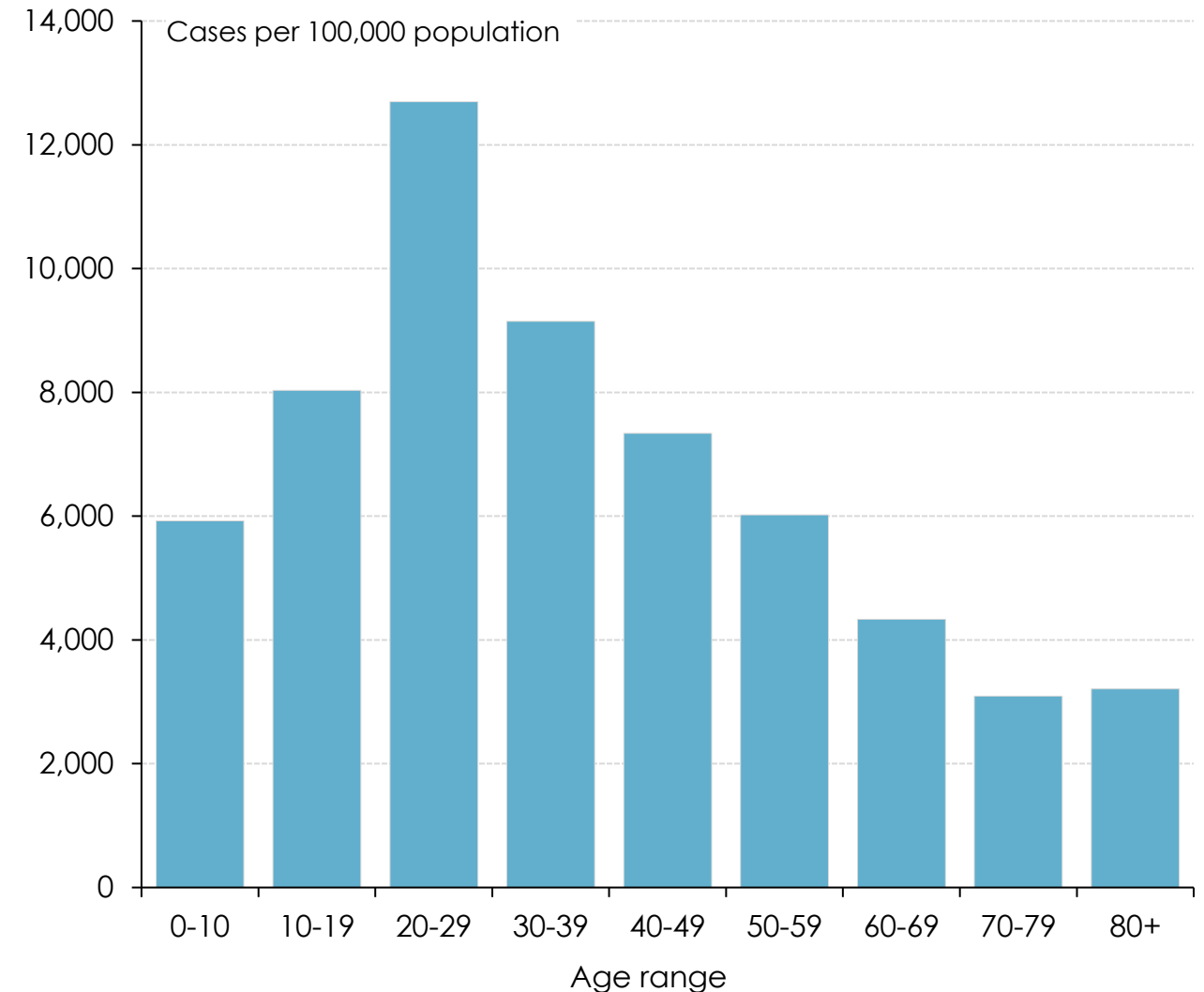
People in their 20s have been more likely to become infected than other age groups – because they ‘mix’ more and are relatively less vaccinated

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Cumulative confirmed cases per 100,000 population, by age group – 2020



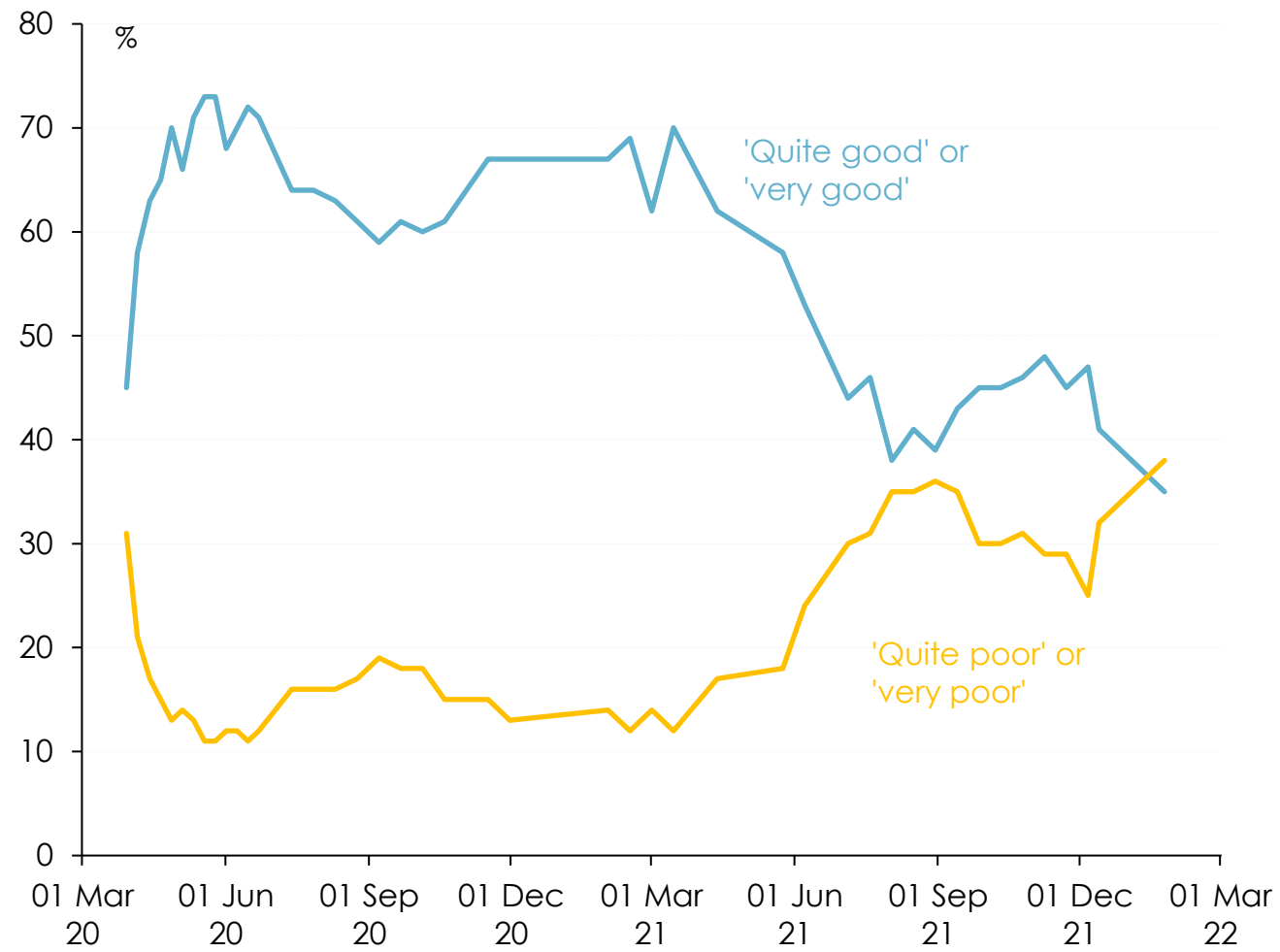
Cumulative confirmed cases per 100,000 population, by age group – since 1st January 2021



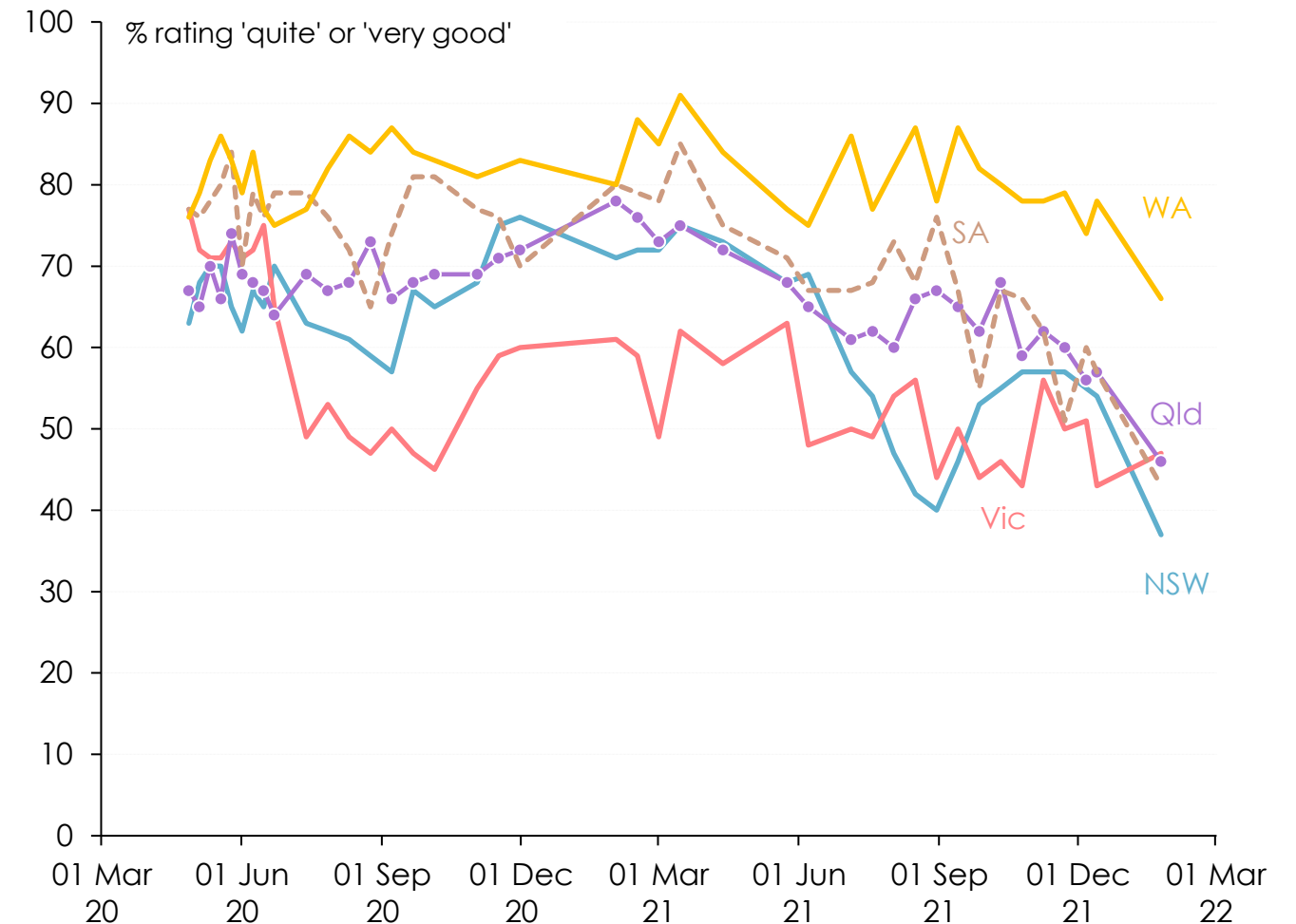
Opinion polls suggest that support for governments' handling of Covid-19 is declining

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Approval of Federal Government response to Covid-19



Approval of State Government responses to Covid-19



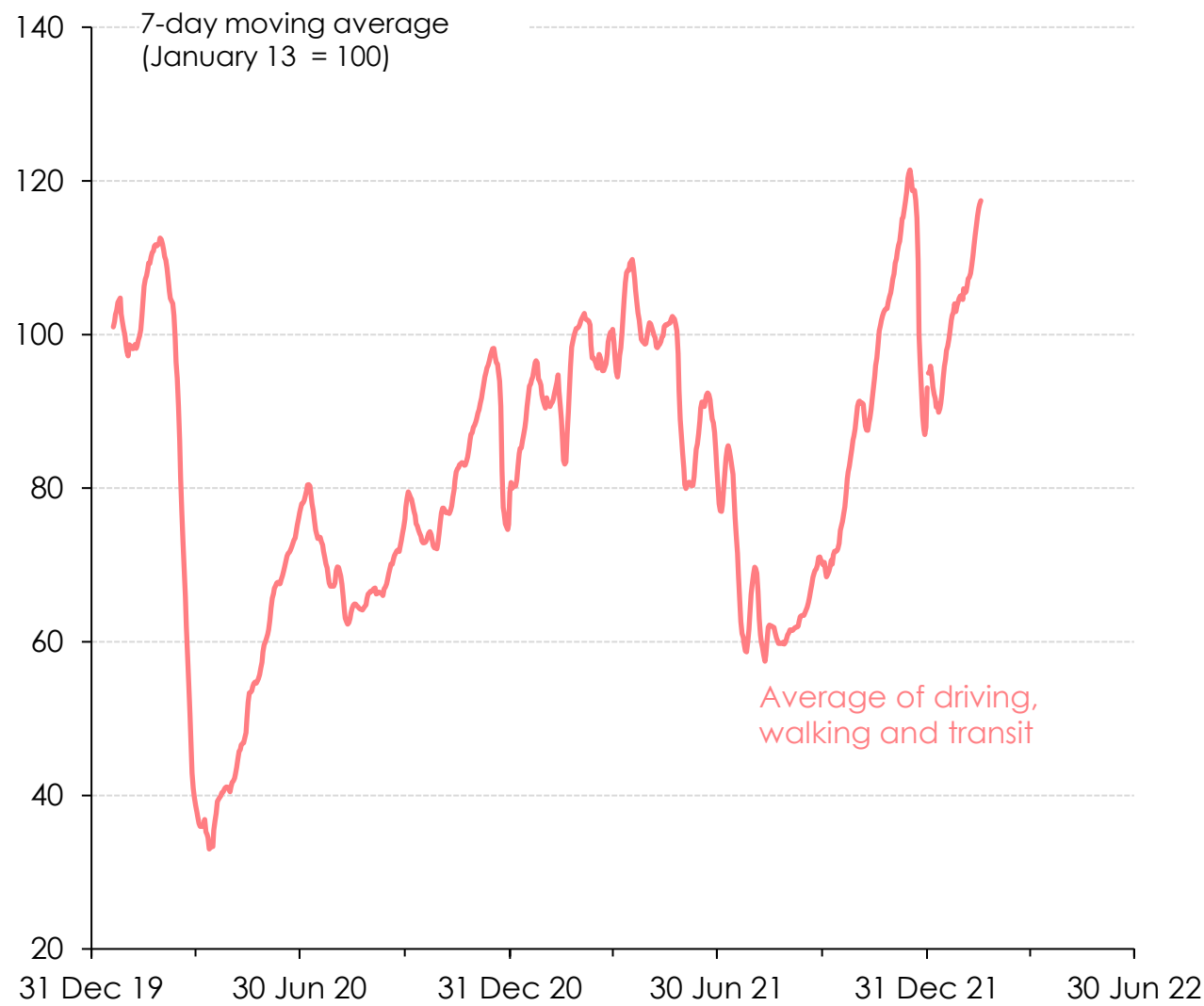
Note: Despite claiming to "track the mood of the nation", Essential does not conduct polls in every state, nor in either of the two territories.

Sources: Essential Research, [The Essential Report](#), 25th January 2022.

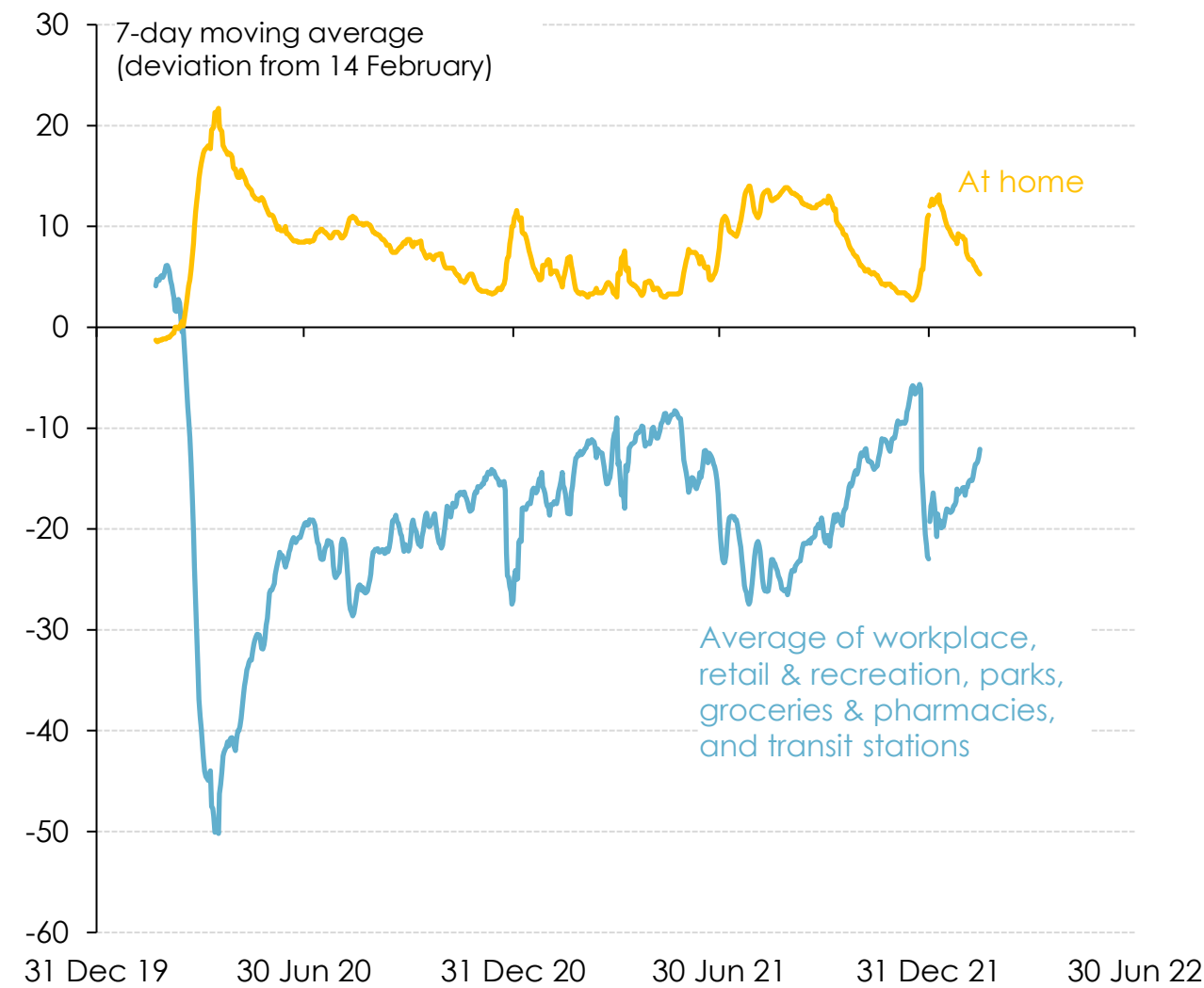
Mobility has picked up since the end of the first week of January, after a steeper fall over Christmas-New Year than occurred this time last year

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Apple mobility indicators



Google mobility indicators



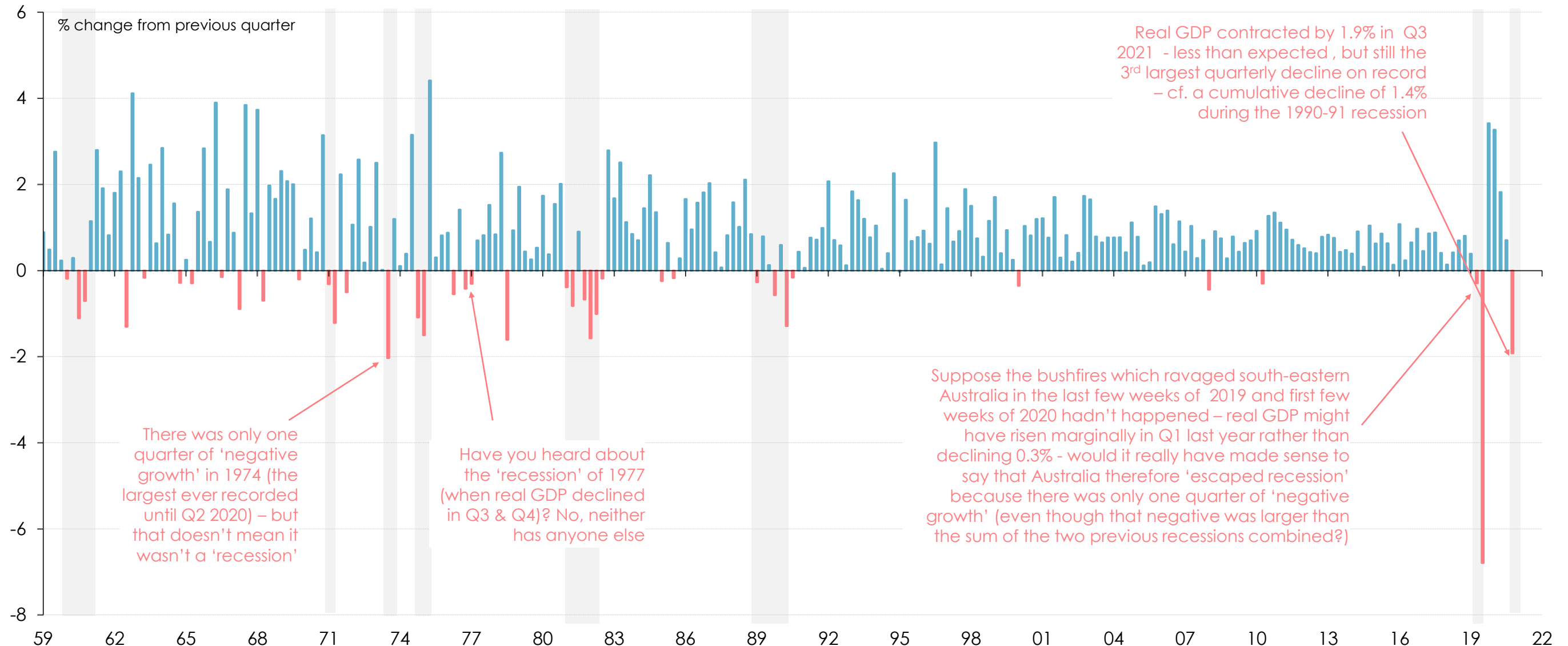
Note: 'Apple mobility indicator' is the average of three separate indicators for driving, use of transit and walking (data up to 16th February). Google 'non-residential activities' indicator is the average of separate indicators for workplaces, retail and recreation, groceries and pharmaceuticals, transit and parks (data up to 14th February).
Sources: Apple, [Mobility Trends Reports](#); Google, [Covid-19 Community Mobility Reports](#); Corinna Economic Advisory. [Return to "What's New"](#).

Broad trends in the Australian economy

Australia's real GDP contracted by 1.9% in Q3 – less than expected, but still more than it did in the 1990-91 recession – but should rebound in Q4

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Quarterly growth in Australian real GDP, 1959-2021

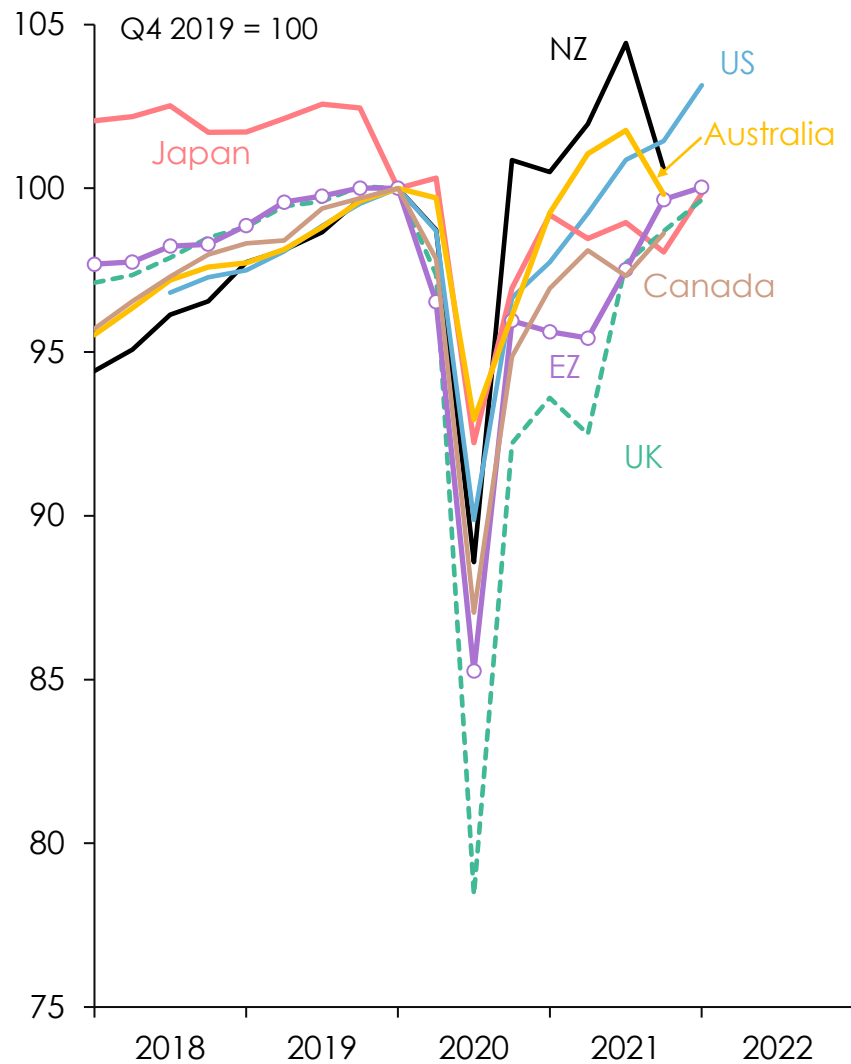


Note: Shaded areas denote recessions. Source: ABS, [Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product](#), September quarter 2021. December quarter GDP will be released on 2nd March 2022. [Return to "What's New"](#).

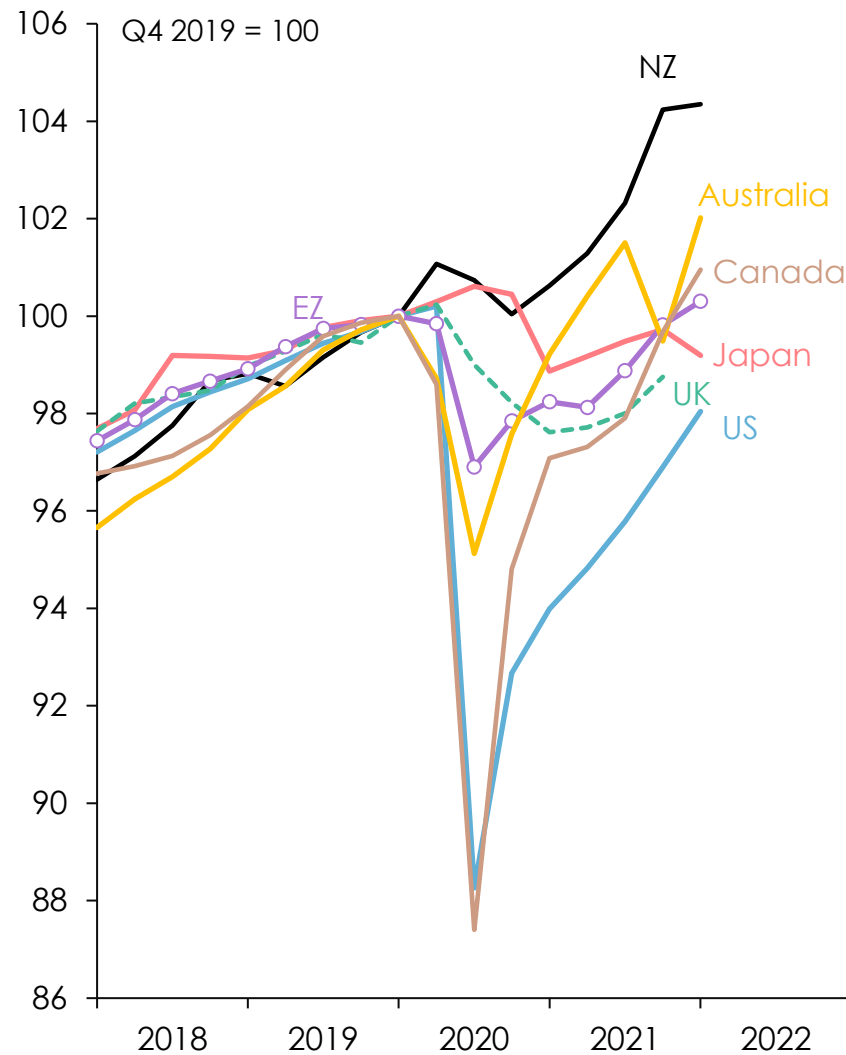
Australia's 'Covid' recession wasn't as severe as, and its recovery has been stronger than, most other 'advanced' economies

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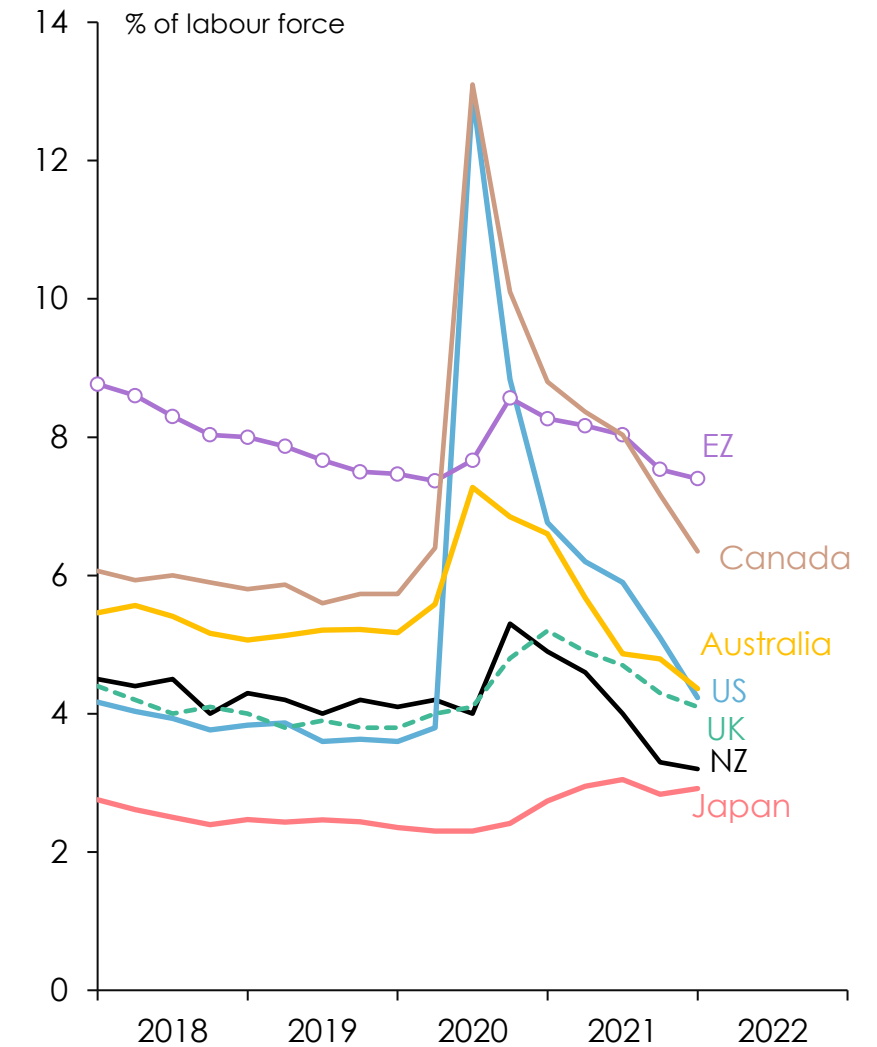
Level of real GDP



Employment



Unemployment

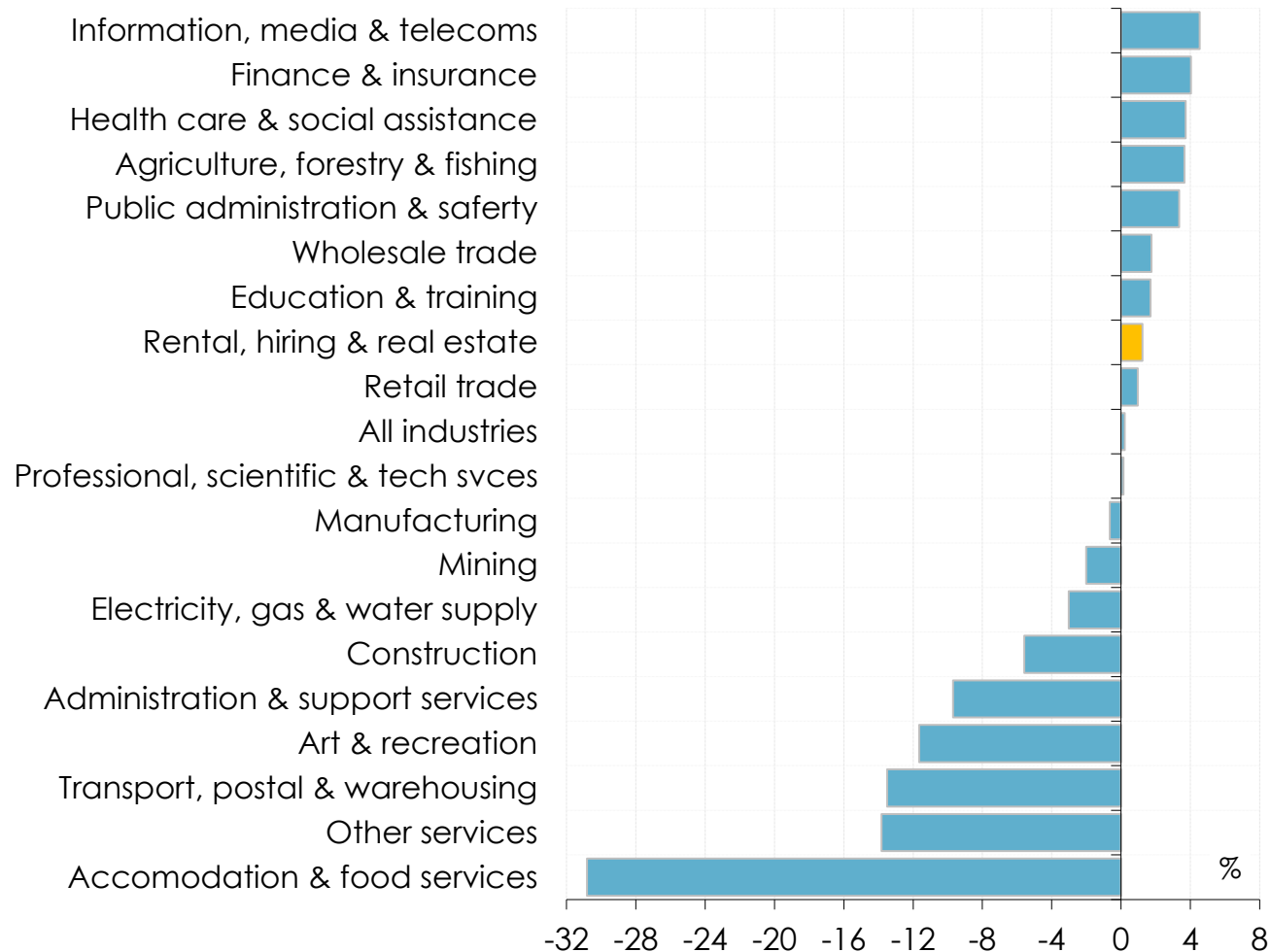


Note: Q4 2021 employment and unemployment data for Japan, the Euro zone and the UK are averages for October and November data. Sources: [ABS](#); [Statistics NZ](#); [US Bureau of Economic Analysis](#) and [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#); [Japan Cabinet Office](#) and [Statistics Bureau of Japan](#); [Eurostat](#); [UK Office for National Statistics](#); and [Statistics Canada](#); Corinna.

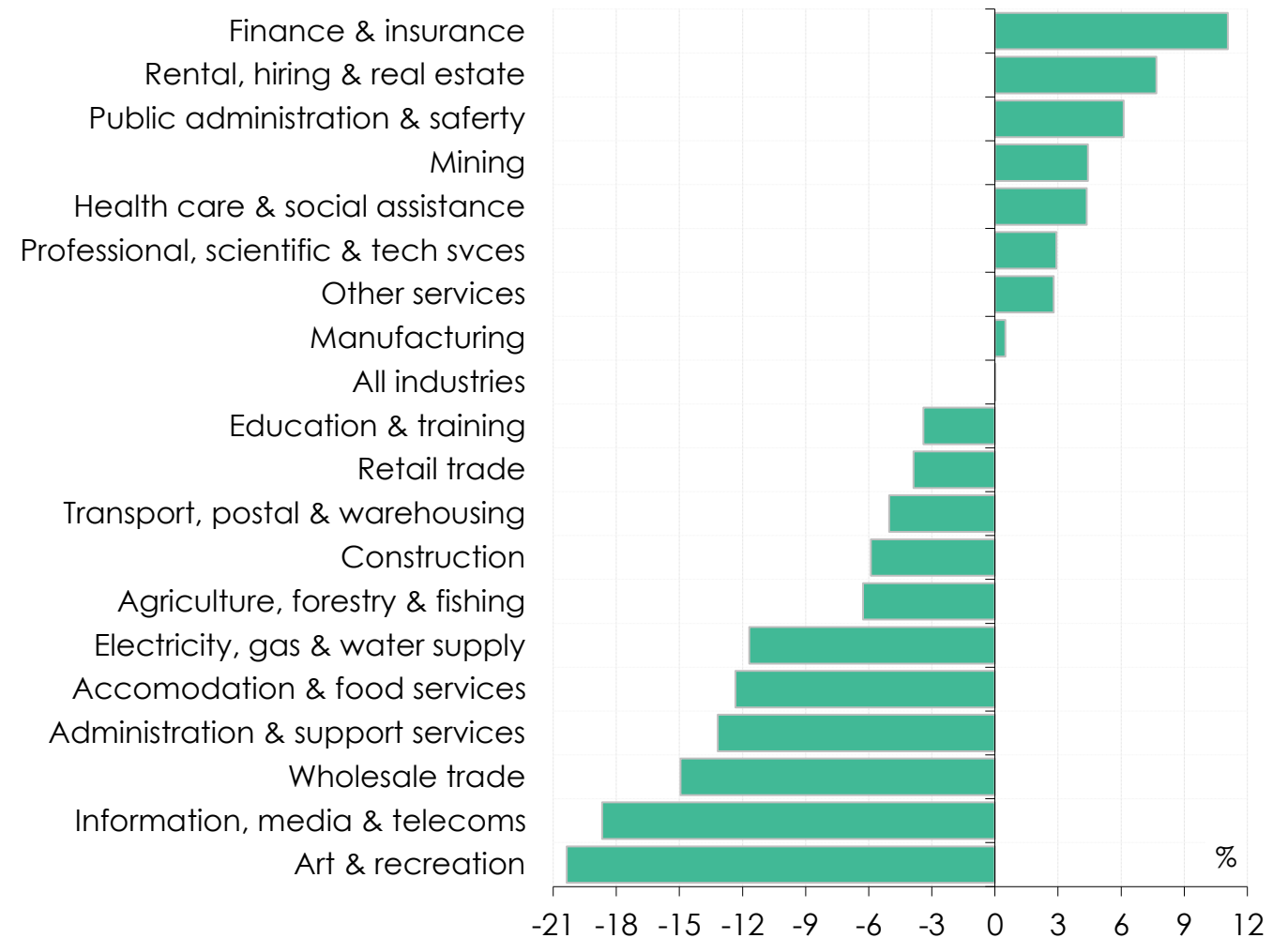
Some sectors of the economy have been much more severely affected by public health restrictions and border closures than others

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Q3 2021 real gross value added by industry – change from pre-pandemic peak



Q3 2021 employment by industry – change from pre-pandemic peak

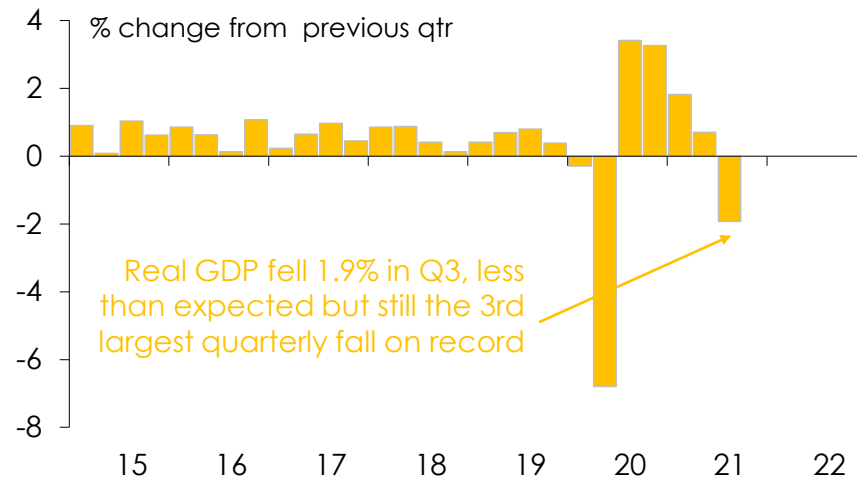


Sources: ABS, [Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product](#), September quarter 2021; and [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed](#), August 2021.

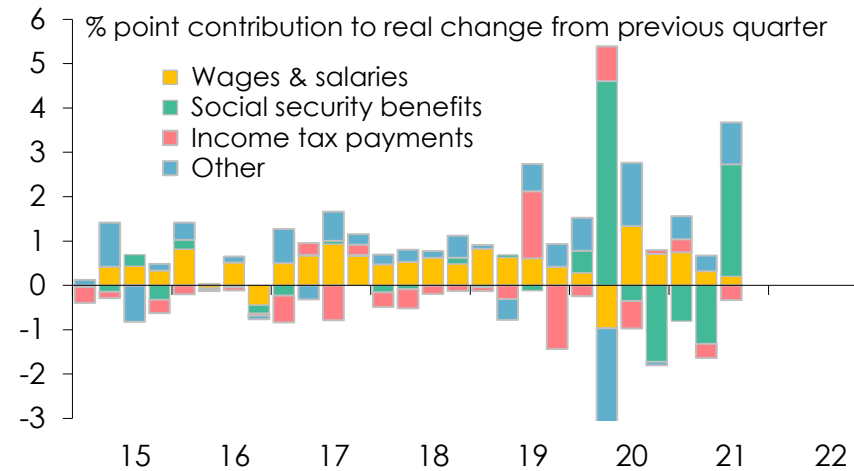
Household spending fell 4.8% in Q3 due to lockdowns, but a 3.3% rise in public spending limited the fall in real GDP to 1.9%

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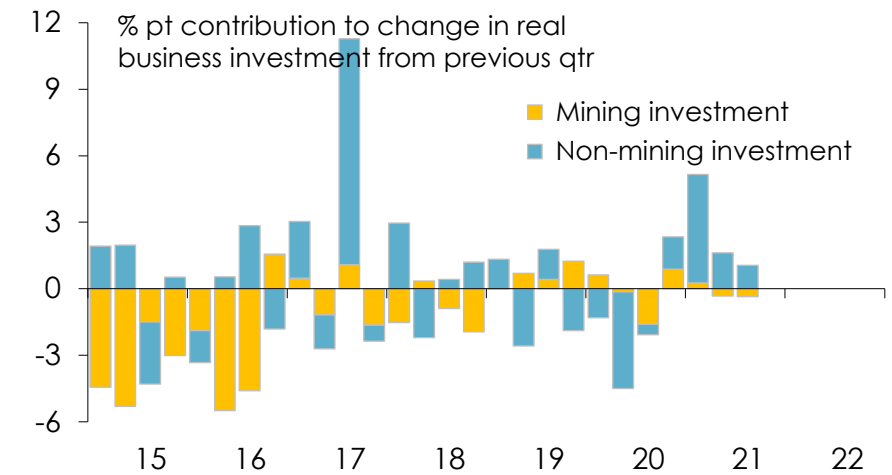
Quarterly change in real GDP



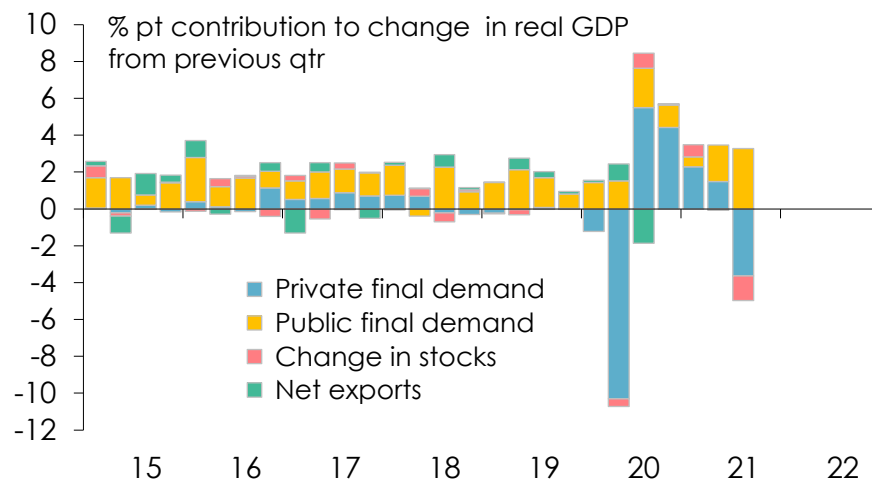
Household disposable income



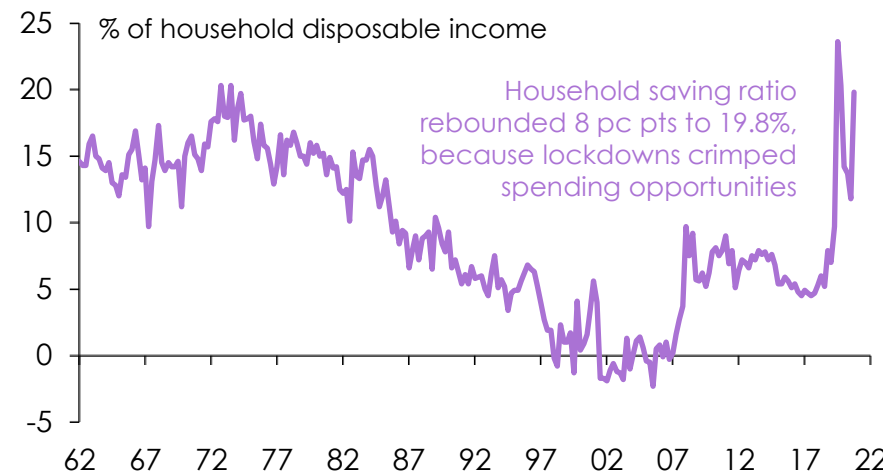
Business investment expenditure



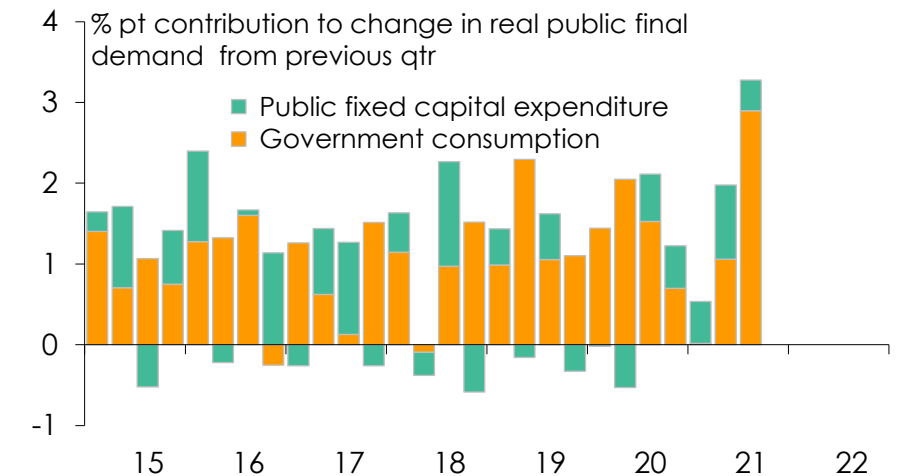
Contributions to quarterly GDP growth



Household saving rate



Public expenditure



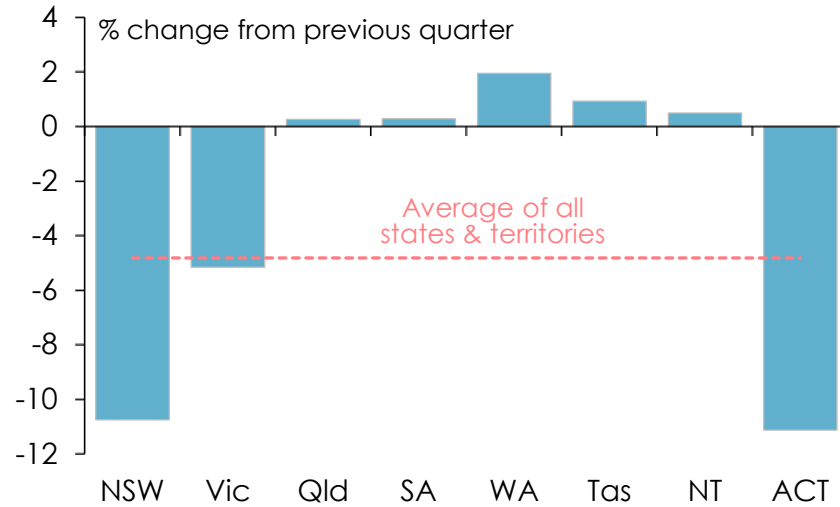
Note: Components of household disposable income are deflated by the implicit price deflator of household final consumption expenditure.

Source: ABS, [Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product](#), September quarter 2021. December quarter national accounts will be released on 2nd March 2022. [Return to "What's New"](#).

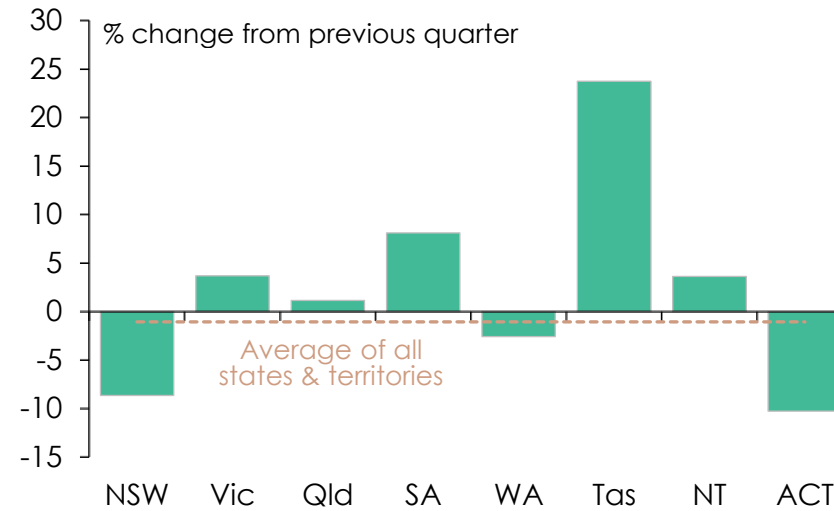
The contraction in Q3 was due to sharp downturns in private sector spending in NSW, the ACT and Victoria during their lockdowns

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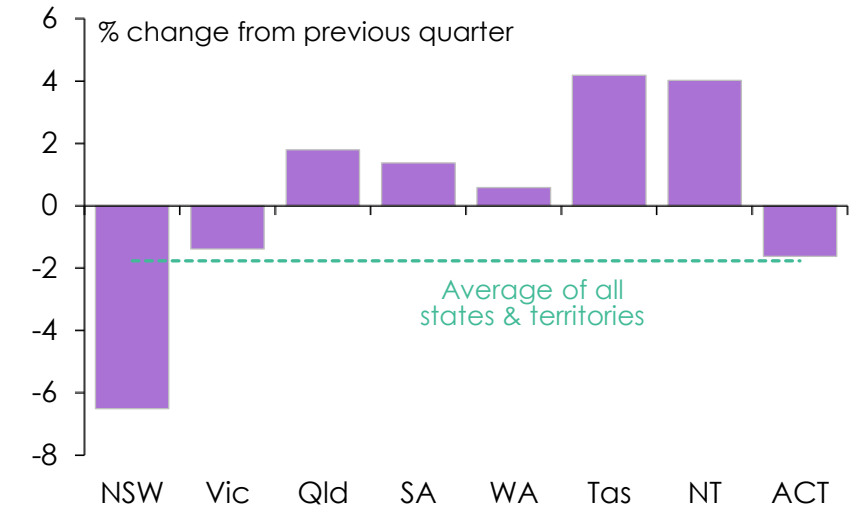
Household consumption



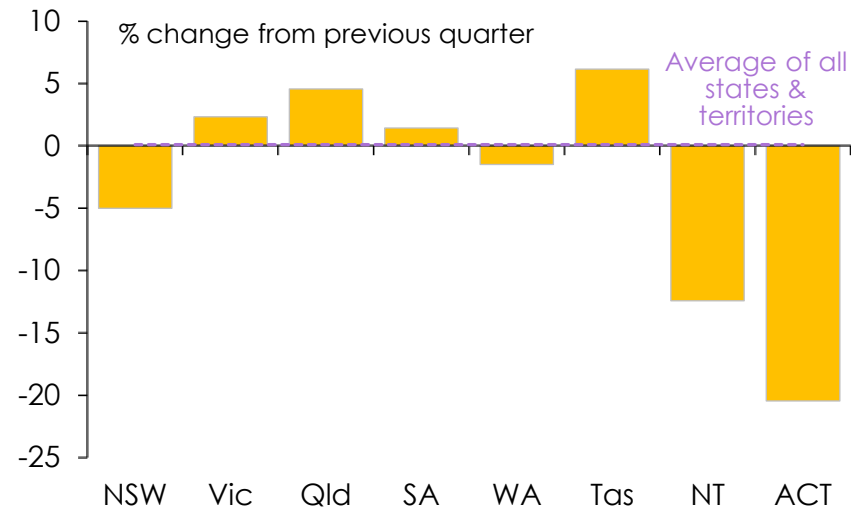
Business investment



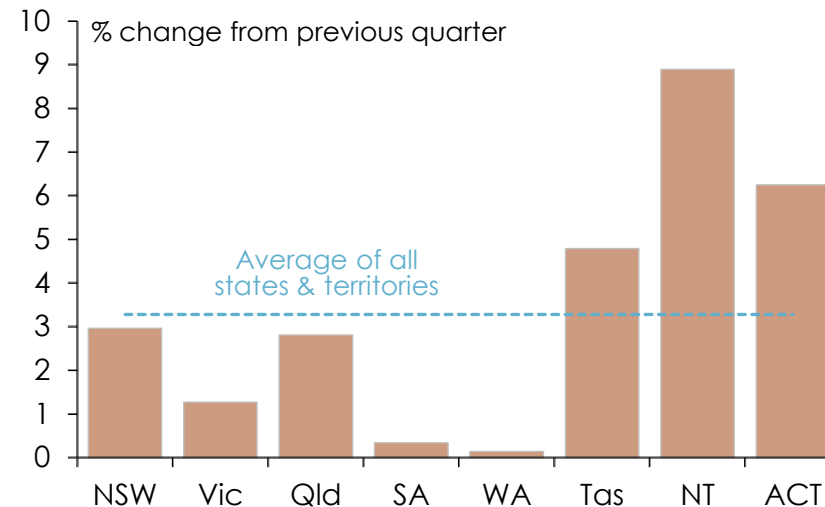
State final demand



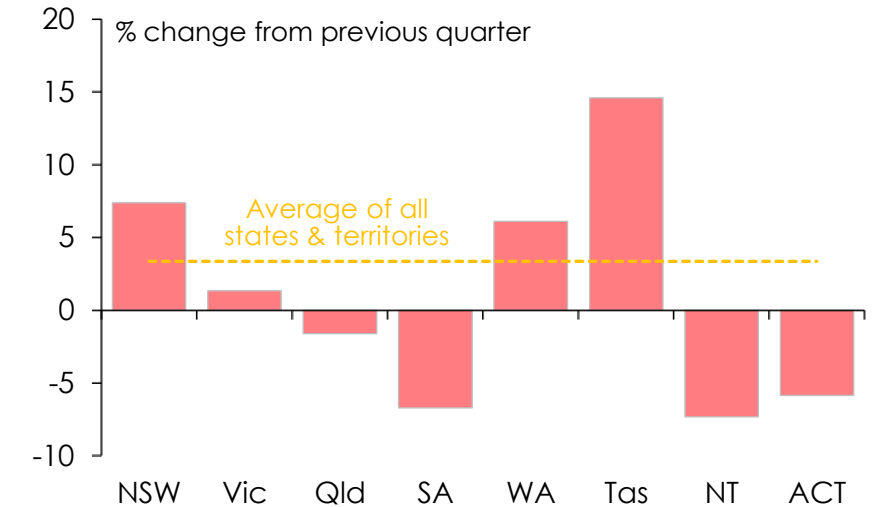
Dwelling investment



Public spending



International exports

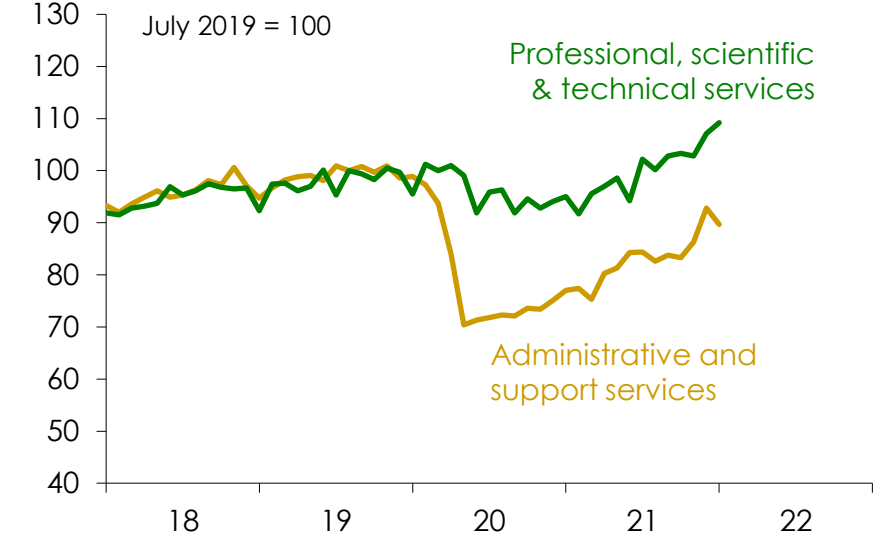
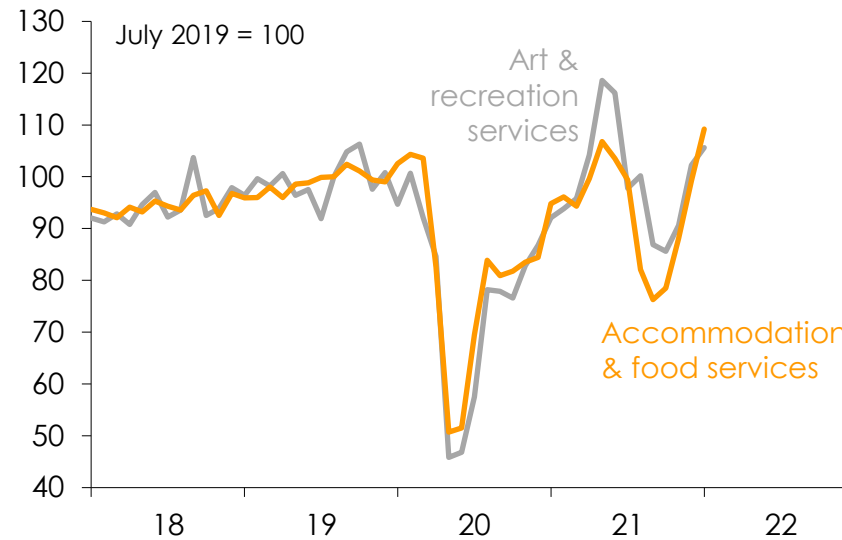
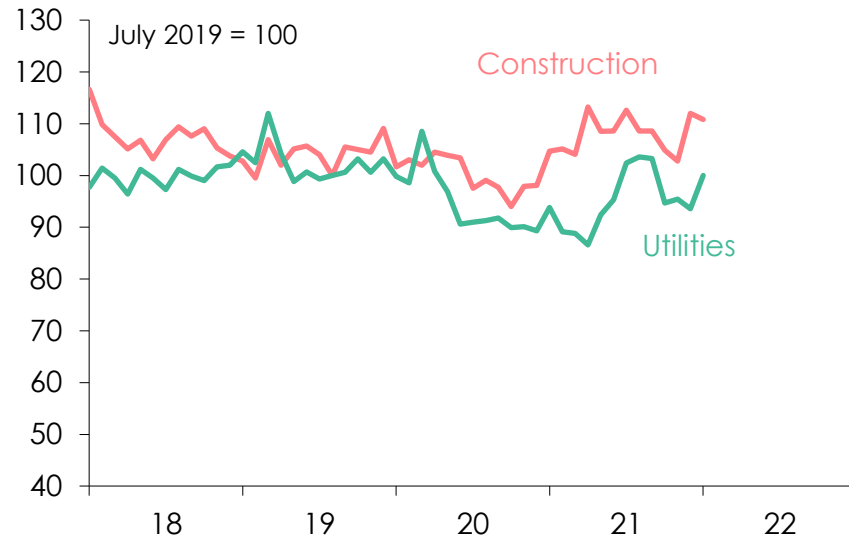
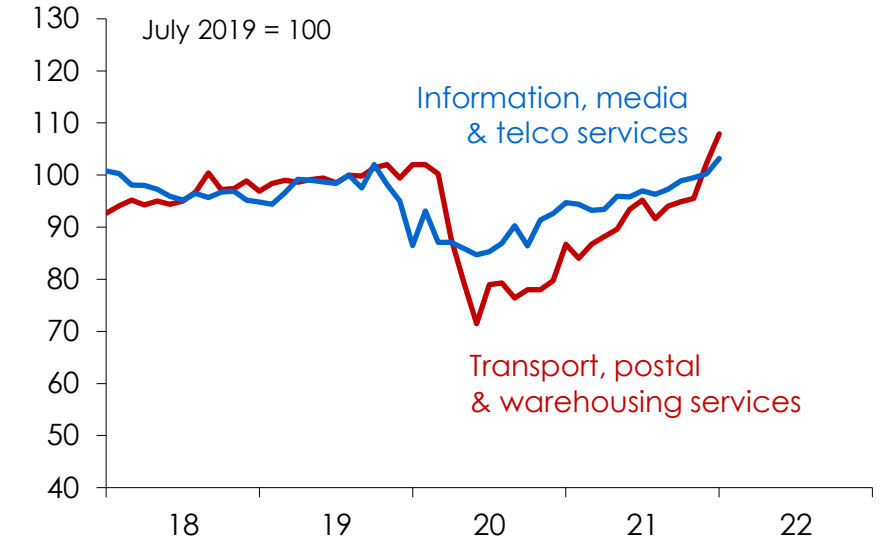
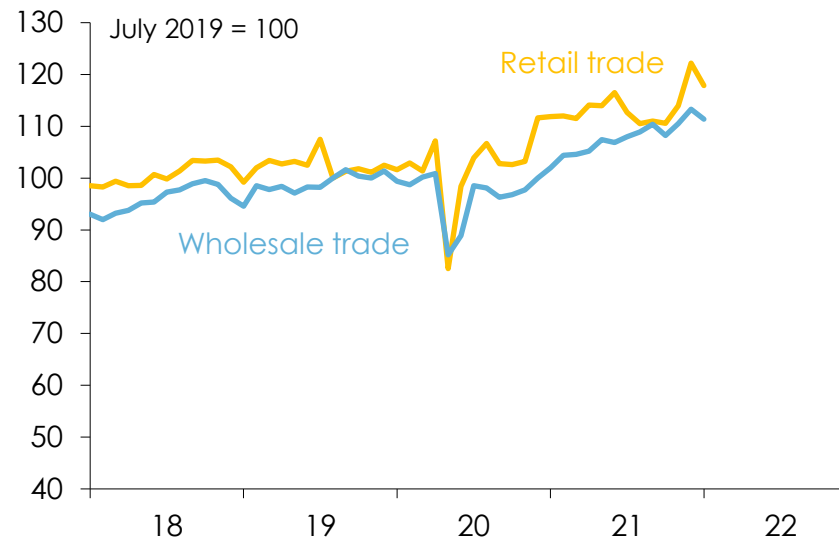
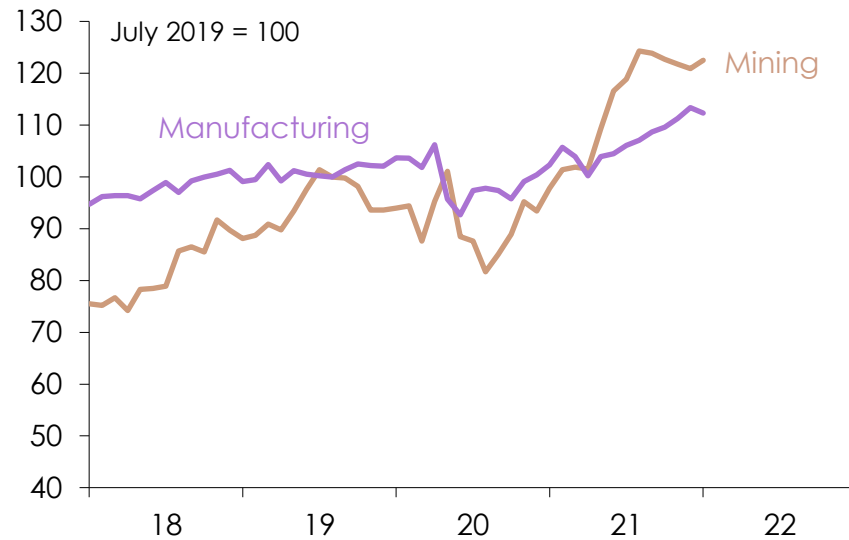


Note: all data in chain-volume terms. Business investment and public spending exclude transactions in second-hand public sector assets. Sources: ABS, [Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product](#), September quarter 2021; [Balance of Payments and International Investment Position, Australia](#), September quarter 2021.

7 out of 13 sectors experienced a rise in turnover in December, with the largest gain in accommodation & food services, utilities and transport

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Indicators of business turnover, by industry

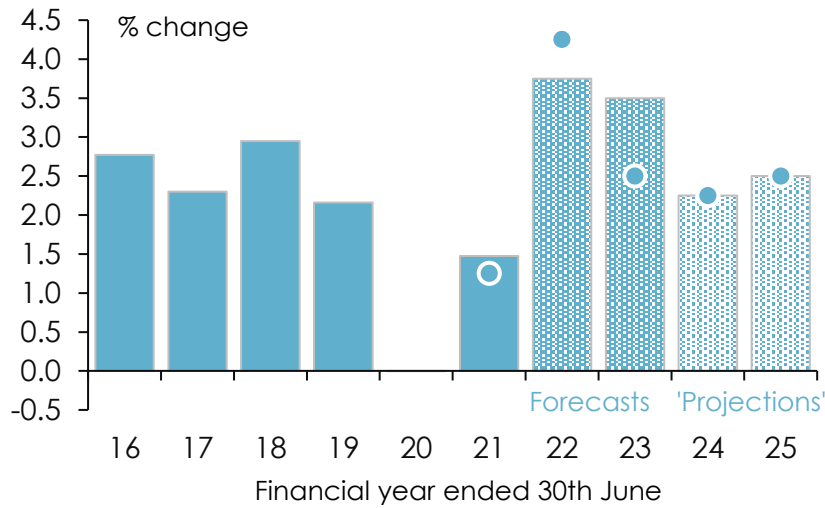


Note: The turnover indicators are derived from the Business Activity Statements submitted to the Australian Taxation Office by all businesses with an annual GST turnover of \$20mn or more (together with a proportion of smaller businesses which voluntarily report monthly). Source: ABS, [Monthly Business Turnover Indicator](#), December 2021. January data will be released on 15th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

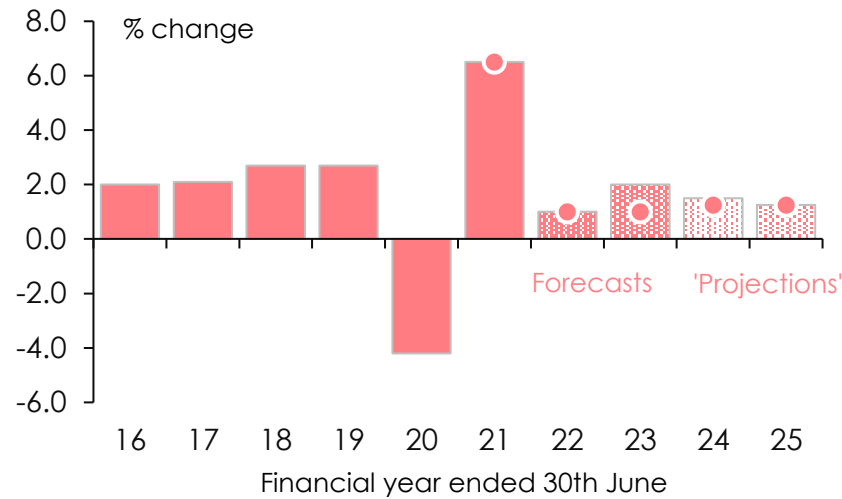
Treasury revised up its forecasts for economic and employment growth in 2022-23, and for wages growth through 2024-25, in December's MYEFO

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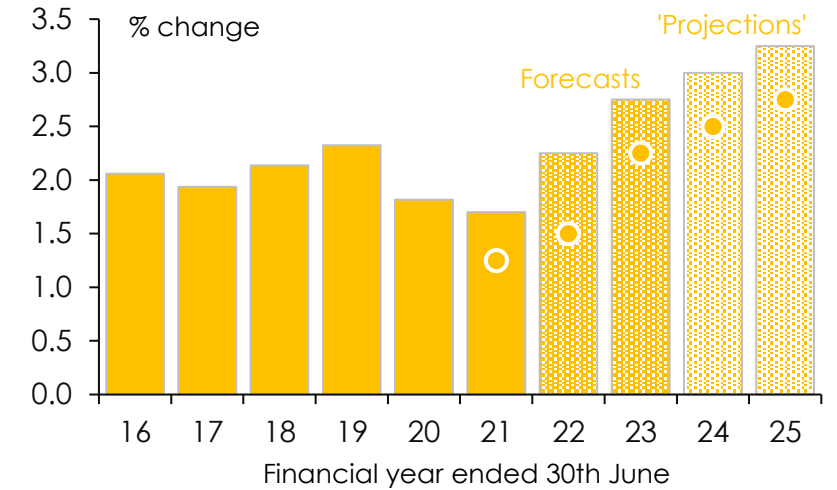
Real GDP



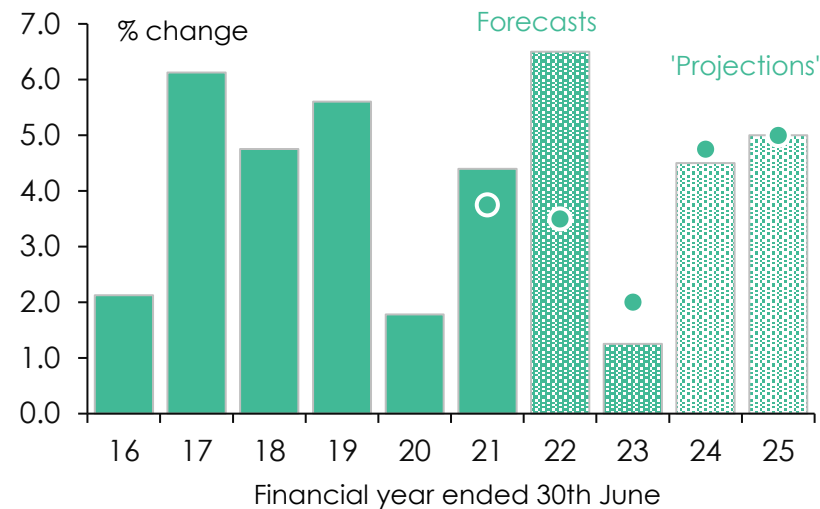
Employment



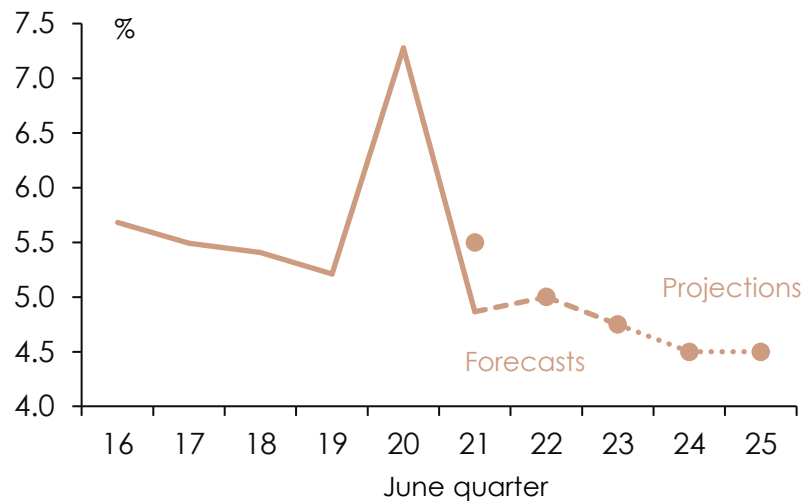
Wages



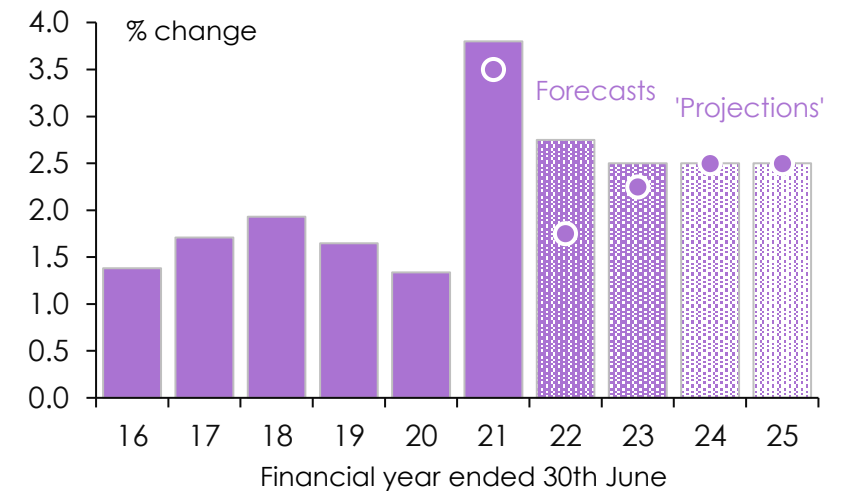
Nominal GDP



Unemployment rate



Consumer prices

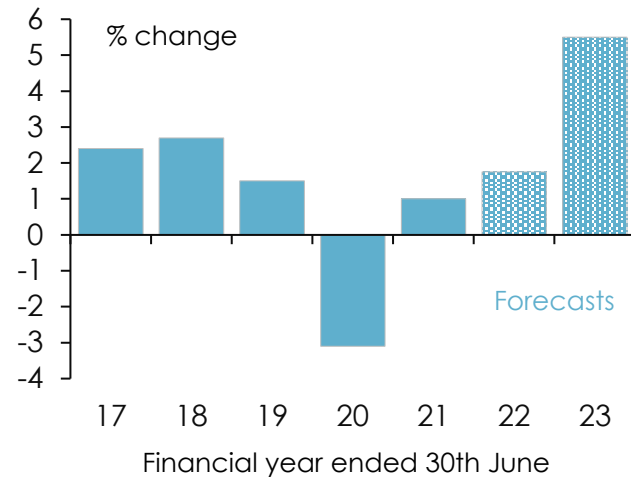


Note: Dots represent forecasts/projections in the 2021-22 Budget presented in May. Employment growth is June quarter on June quarter; unemployment rate is June quarter; all other figures are for financial years. Net overseas migration assumed to be -41K in 2021-22, +180K in 2022-23, +213K in 2023-24 and +235K in 2024-25; iron ore price falling to US\$55/t FoB by Q2 2022; metallurgical and thermal coal prices falling to US\$130/t and \$60/t respectively by Q2 2022; Tapis oil prices remaining at around US\$83/bbl; and the A\$ remaining at around US75¢. Sources: ABS; Australian Government, 2021-22 [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#), 16th December 2021. These forecasts will be up-dated in the 2022-23 Budget to be presented on 29th March. For the RBA's forecasts see [slide 80](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

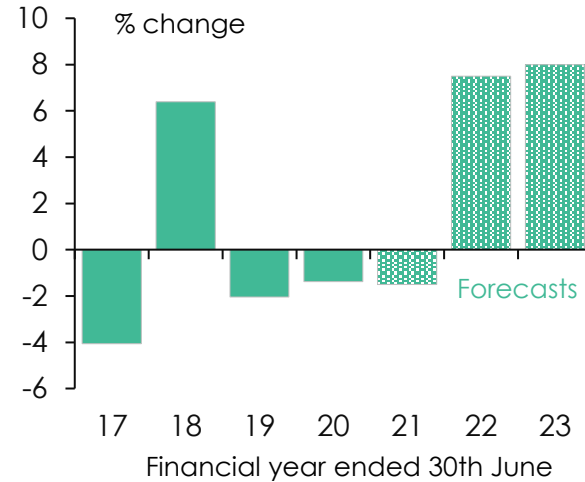
Treasury expects economic growth to be driven by private consumption and business investment offsetting weaker net exports

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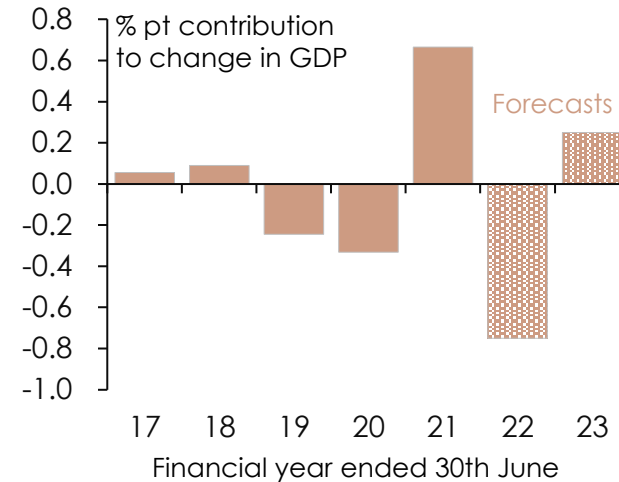
Household consumption



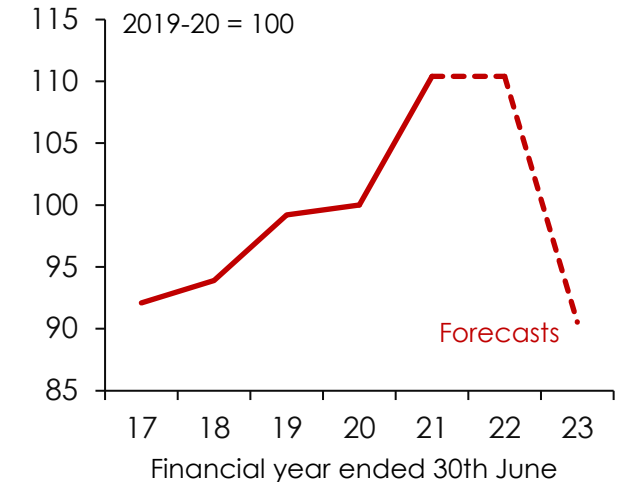
Business investment



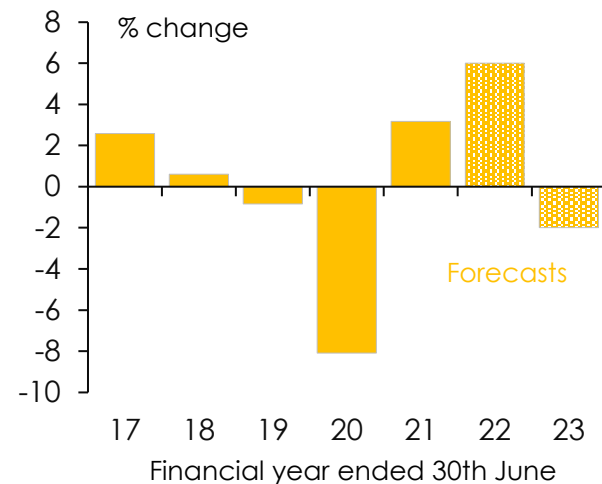
Change in inventories



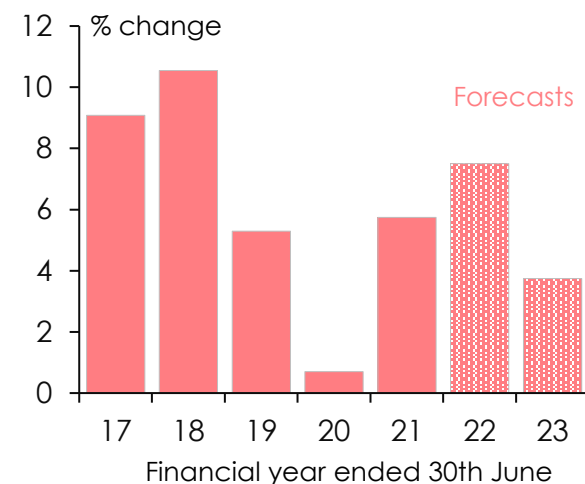
Terms of trade



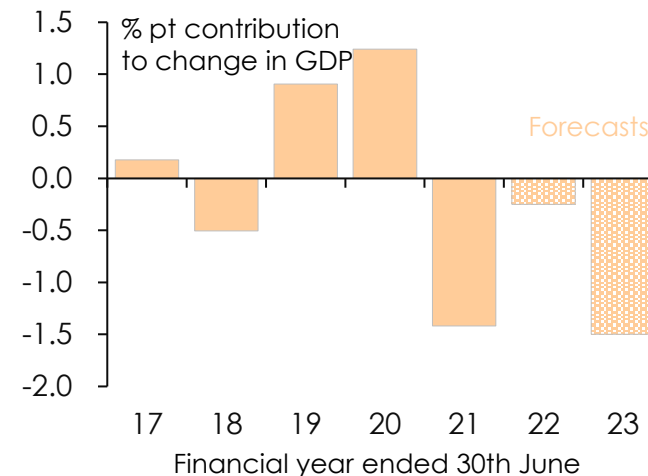
Dwelling investment



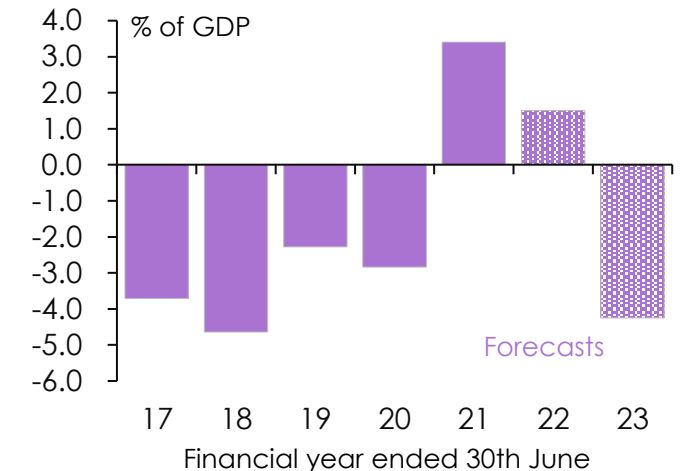
Public spending



Net exports



Current account balance

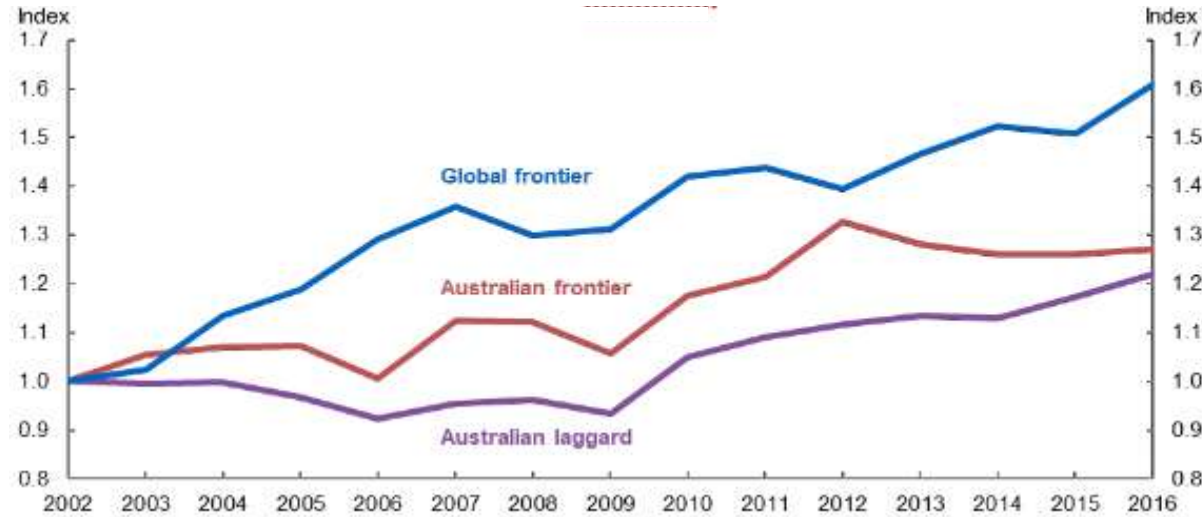


Note: Business investment and public spending exclude transactions in second-hand assets. Net overseas migration assumed to be -41K in 2021-22, and +180K in 2022-23; iron ore price falling to US\$55/t FoB by Q2 2022; metallurgical and thermal coal prices falling to US\$130/t and \$60/t respectively by Q2 2022; Tapis oil prices remaining at around US\$83/bbl; and the A\$ remaining at around US75¢. Sources: ABS; Australian Government, 2021-22 [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#), 16th December 2021. These forecasts will be updated in the 2022-23 Budget to be presented on 29th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

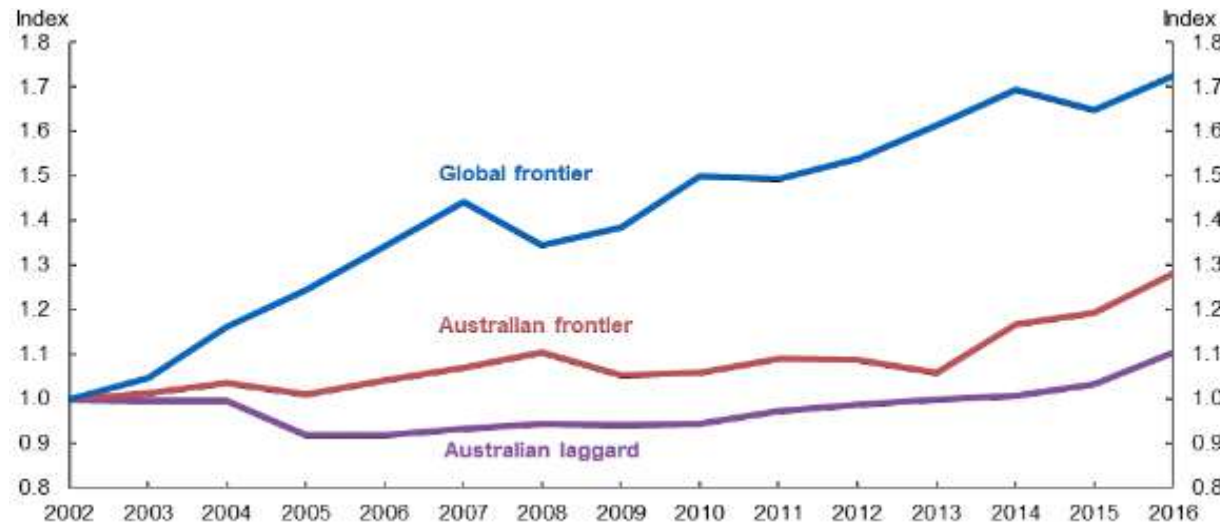
A new Australian Treasury paper suggests Australia's productivity slowdown is due to a loss of 'business dynamism' and competitive pressures

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Labour productivity dispersion - manufacturing



Labour productivity dispersion - services



- ❑ Four Treasury economists last week published a [Working Paper](#) showing that the 'gap' between the productivity performance of Australian firms and global 'frontier firms' has widened – especially in non-financial services sectors – with Australian firms 'catching up' more slowly than previously, suggesting slower adoption of 'cutting-edge' technologies and processes by Australian firms
- ❑ They show that this slower catch-up and diffusion at least partly reflects declining 'business dynamism' – as evidenced by declining rates of business entry and exit from industries – and reduced competitive pressures – as evidenced by increasing mark-ups (of prices over costs)
- ❑ They produce evidence showing that 'young firms' converge more quickly to the 'global frontier' (of labour productivity) than mature firms
- ❑ The authors suggest that "policies to address business dynamism and competitive pressures can improve Australia's productivity performance"
- ❑ These findings are consistent with my [long-held view](#) that tax preferences and other forms of support for small businesses, simply because they are small and for no other reason, should be scrapped and replaced with incentives for new businesses

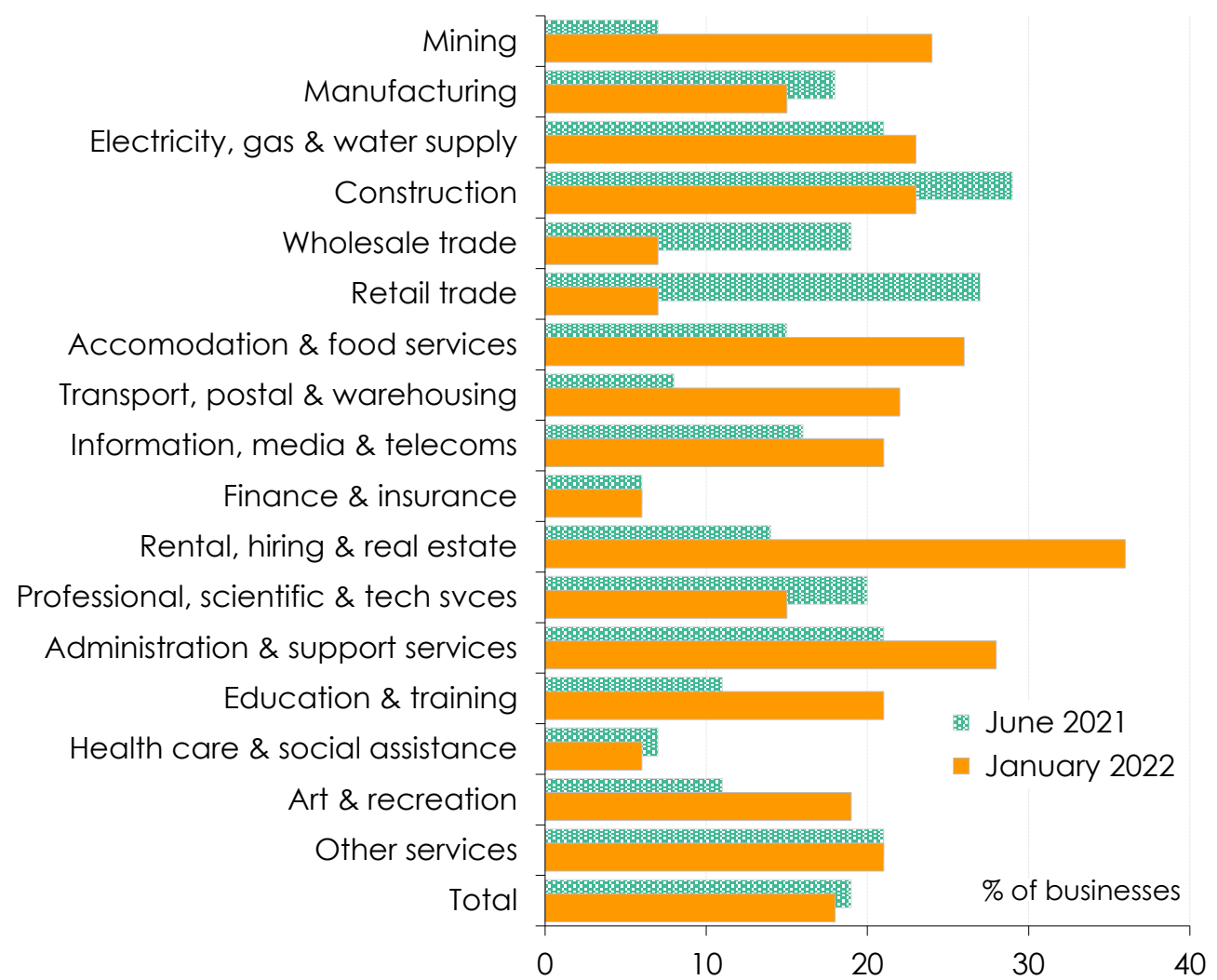
Source: Dan Andrews, Jonathan Hambur, David Hansell & Angus Wheeler, [Reaching for the Stars: Australian Firms and the Global Productivity Frontier](#), Treasury Working Paper 2022-01, January 2022. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The business sector

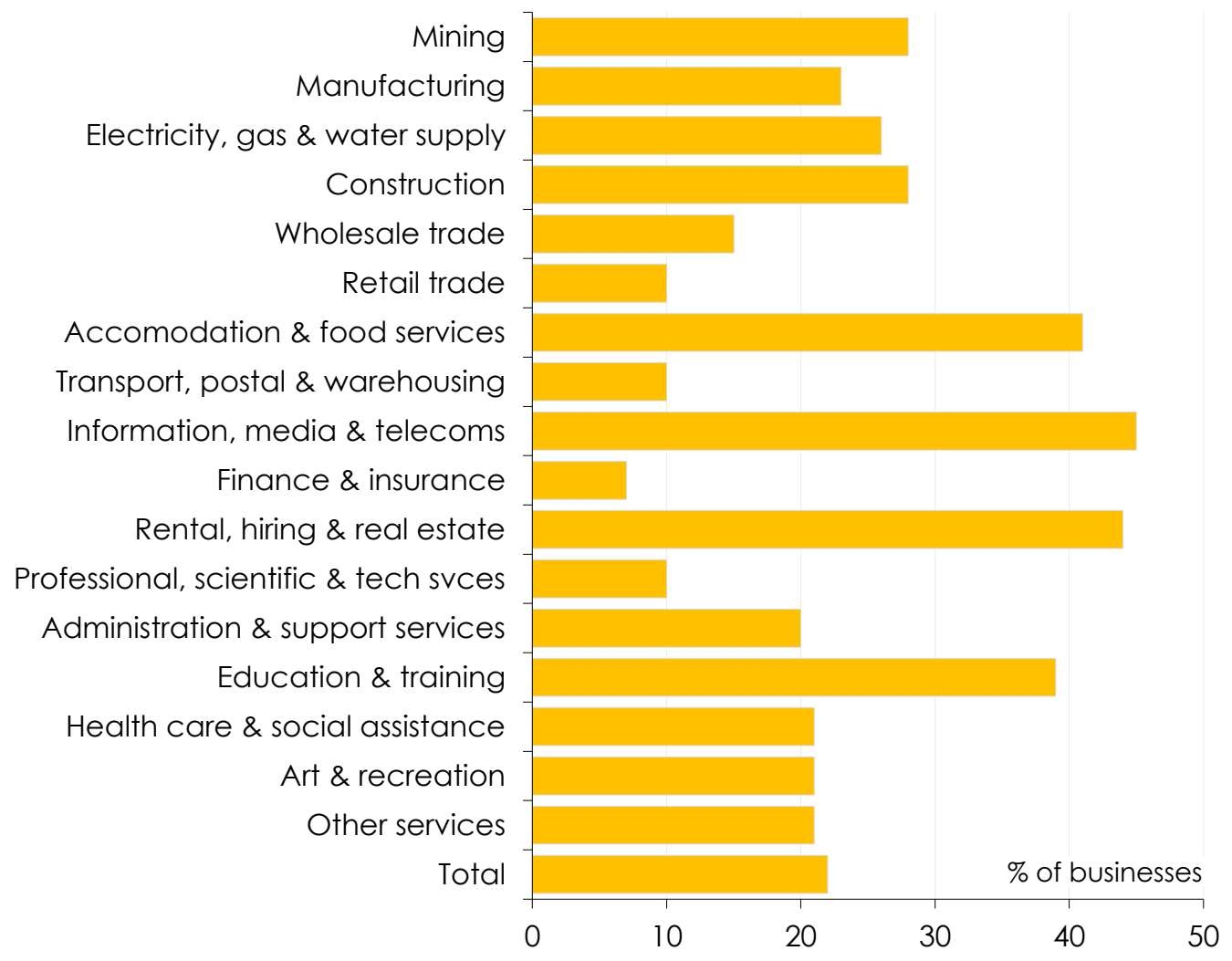
22% of employers experienced Covid-related staff absences in January – but overall staff shortages aren't significantly different from June last year

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Businesses with insufficient staff for current operations, June 2021 and January 2022



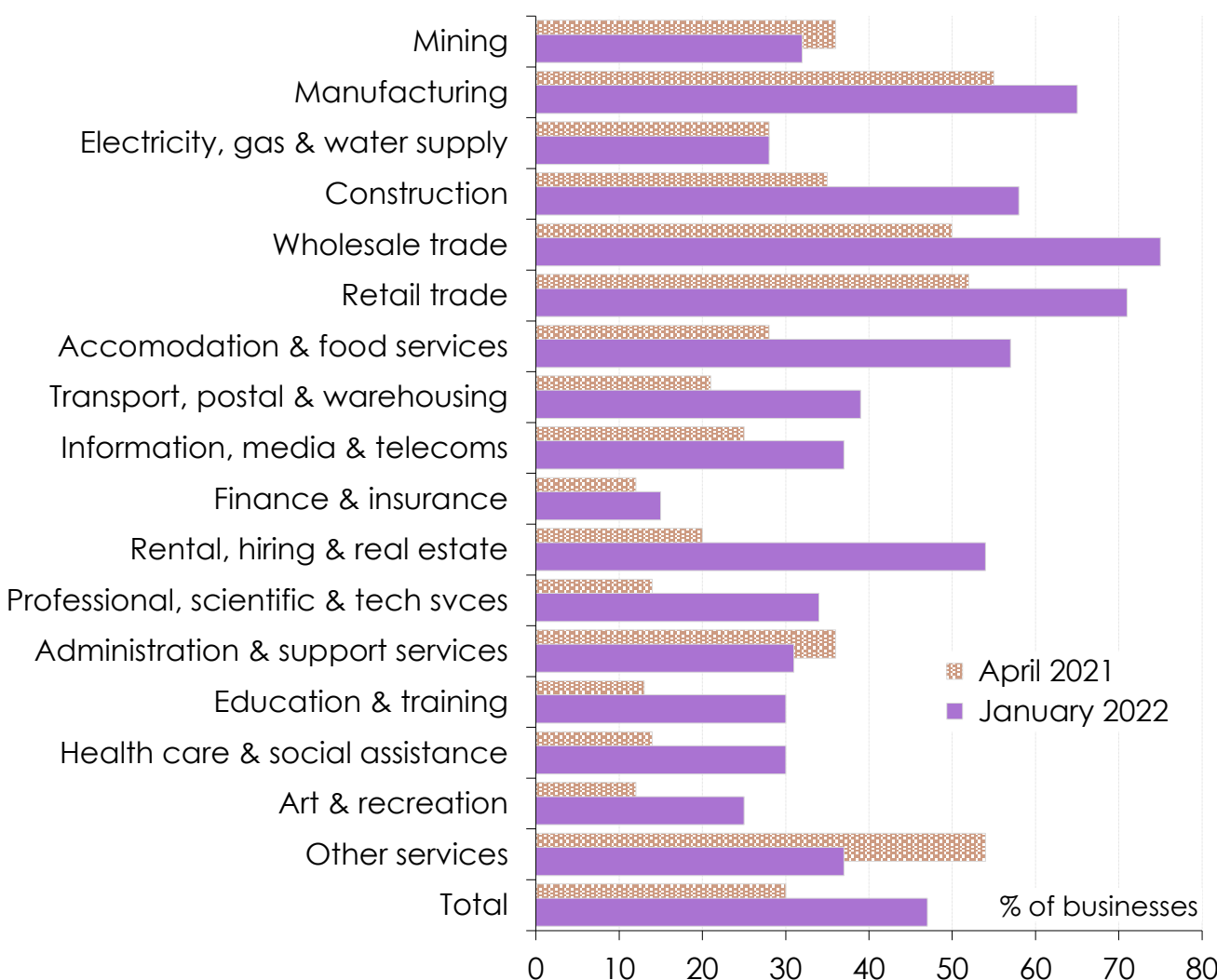
Businesses with employees unavailable due to Covid-related factors, January 2022



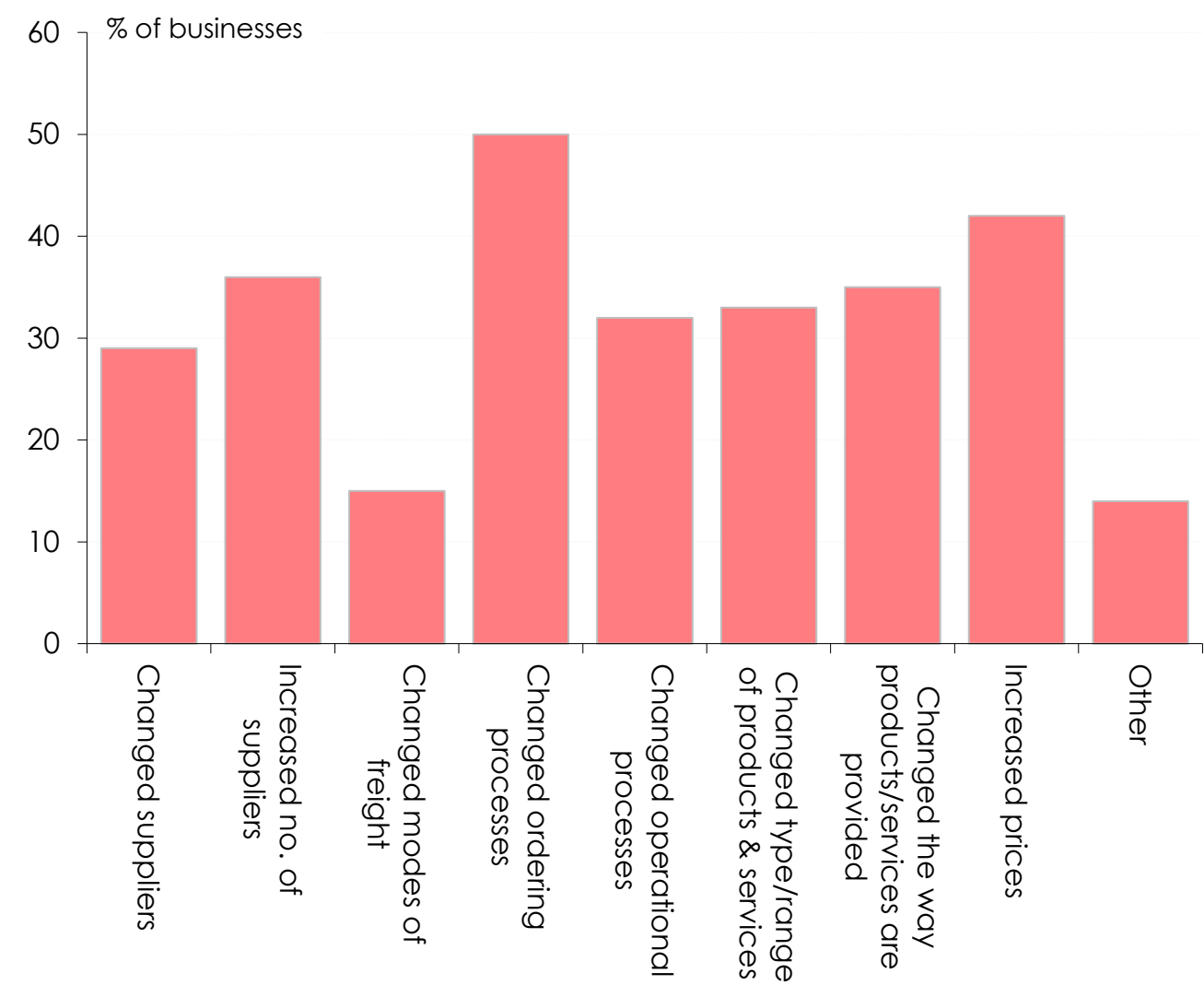
47% of businesses (over 70% of retailers and wholesalers) experienced supply chain disruptions in January – and 42% responded by raising prices

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Businesses affected ‘to a great extent’ by supply chain disruptions, by industry, April 2021 and January 2022



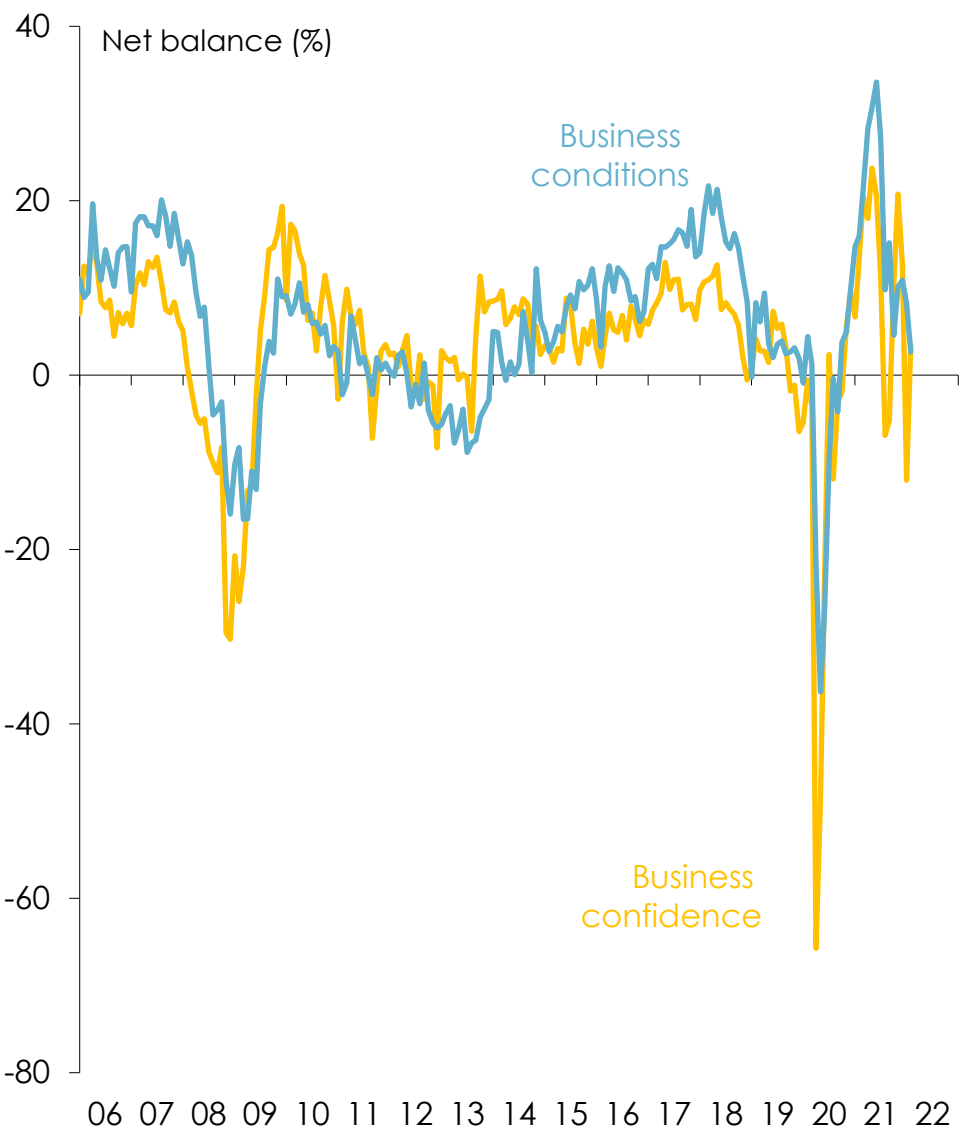
Actions taken by businesses in response to supply chain disruptions, January 2022



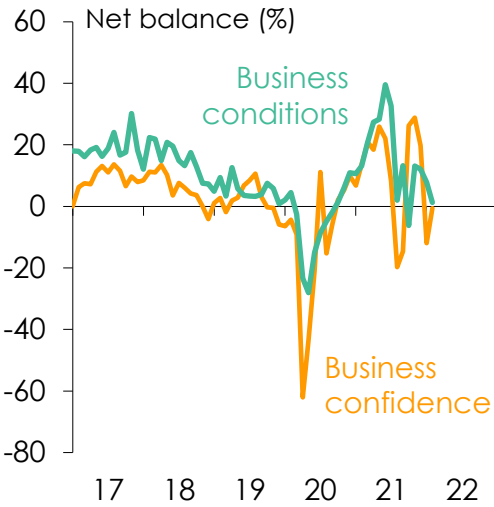
Business confidence turned around in January, reversing almost two-thirds of December's sharp fall, even though business conditions softened

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

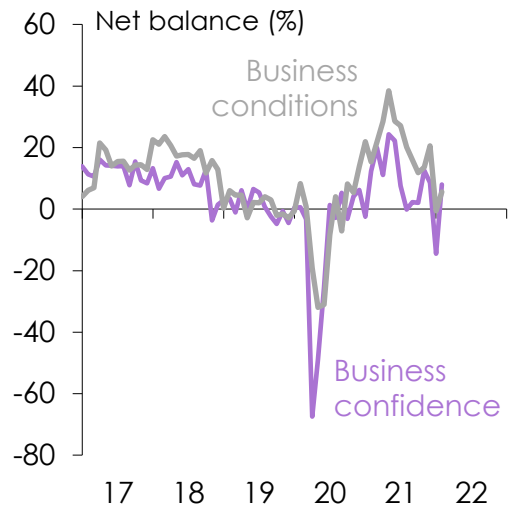
National business confidence & conditions



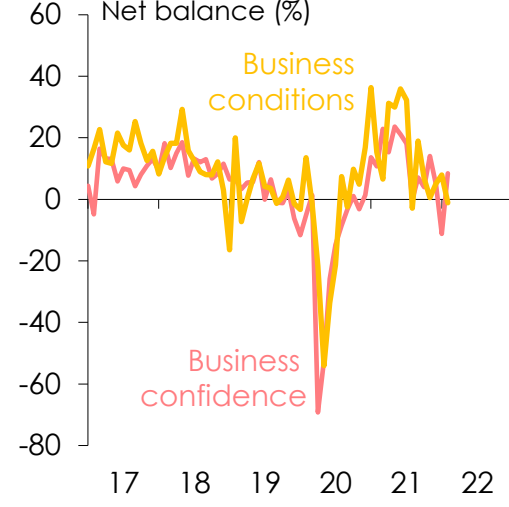
New South Wales



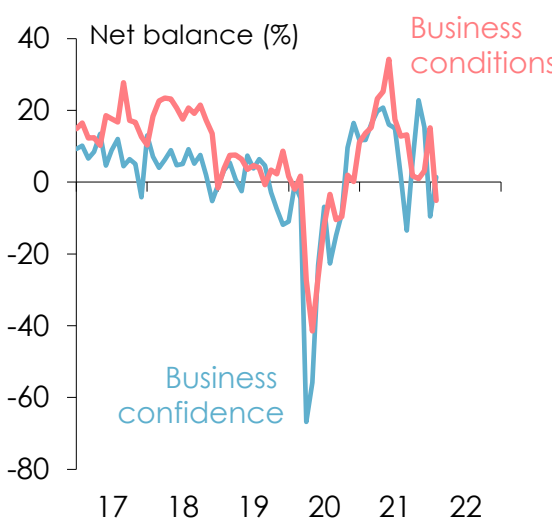
Queensland



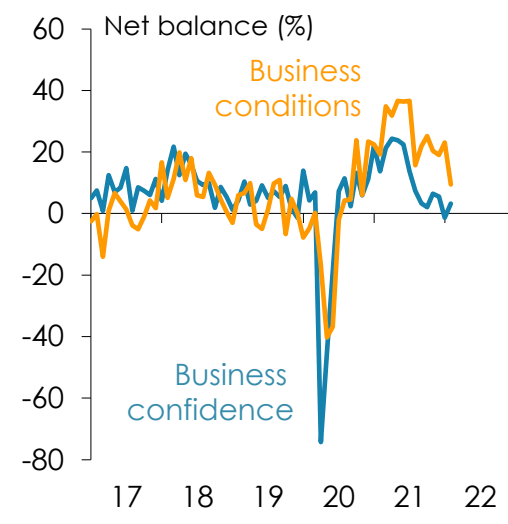
South Australia



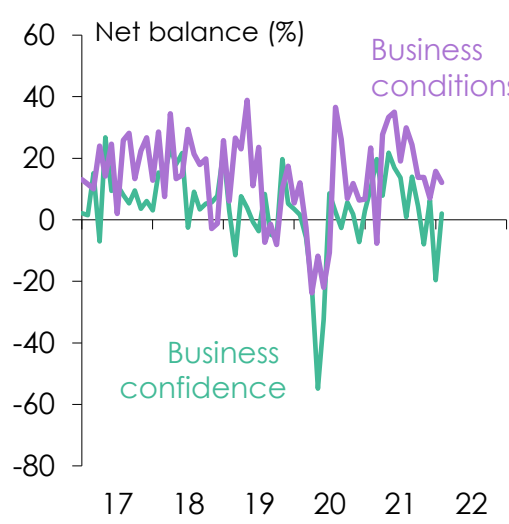
Victoria



Western Australia



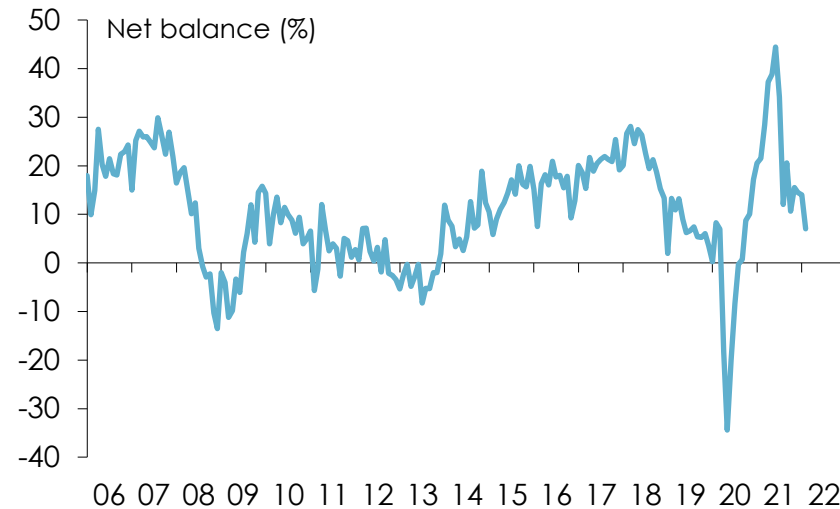
Tasmania



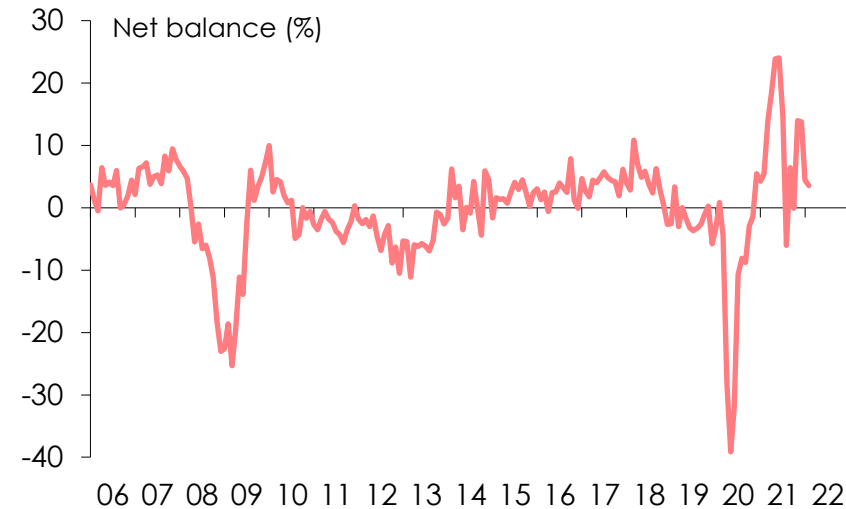
Business conditions softened further in January due to consumer caution and staff shortages, but not as much as in the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

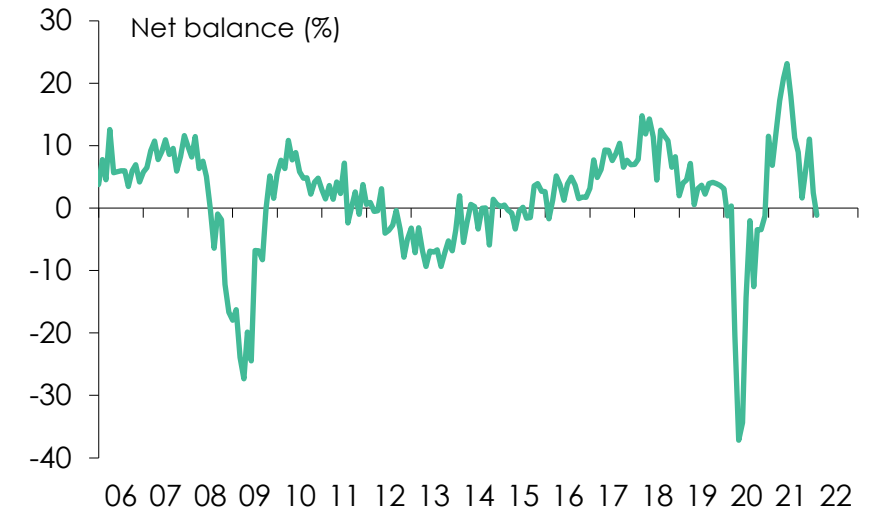
Trading conditions



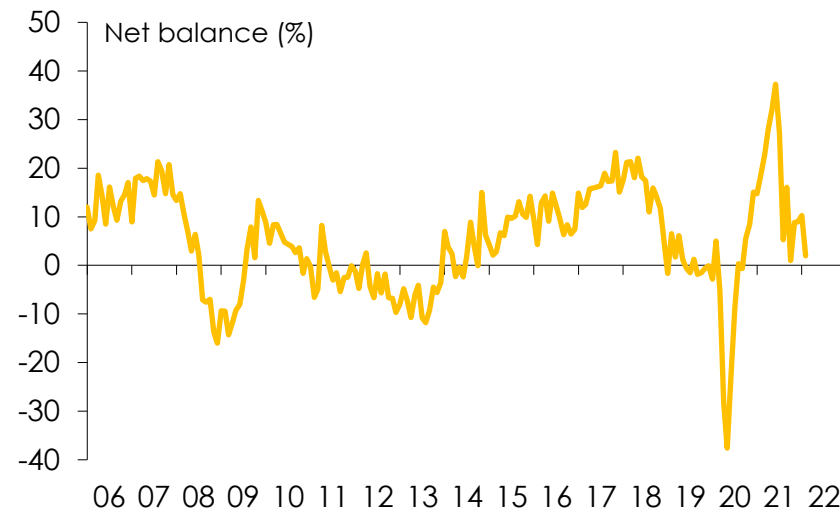
Forward orders



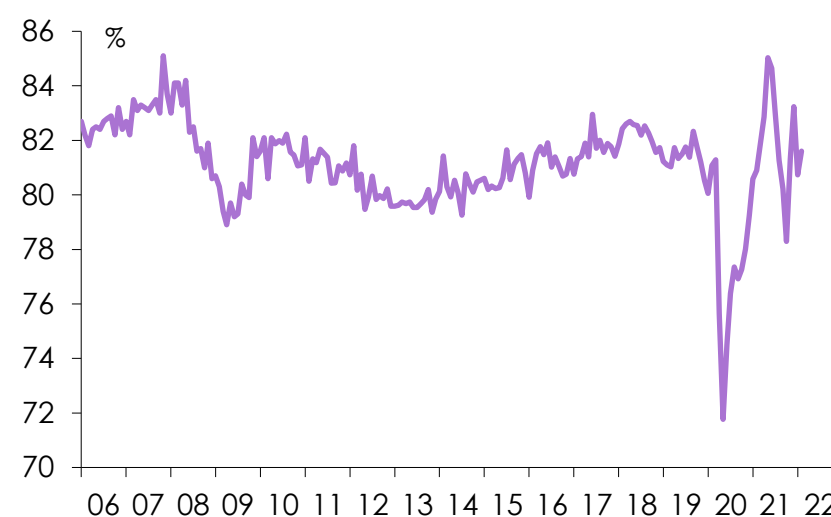
Employee hiring intentions



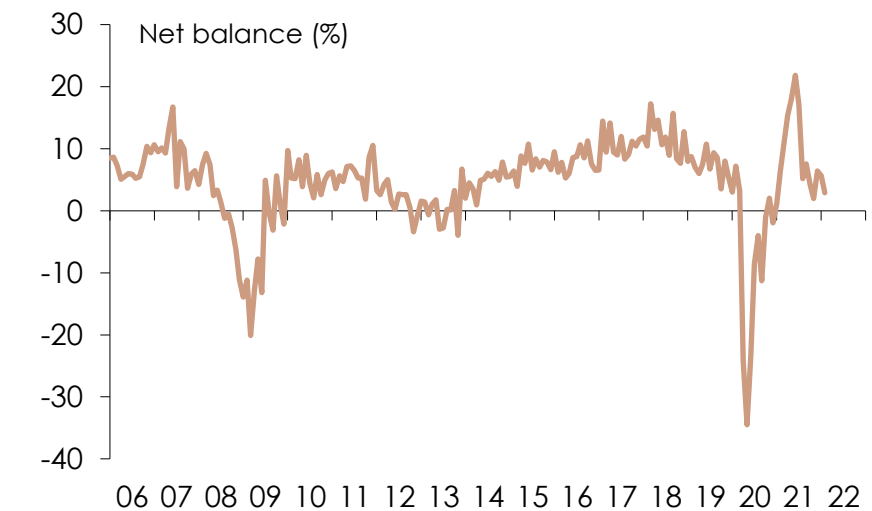
Profitability



Capacity utilization



Capital expenditure intentions

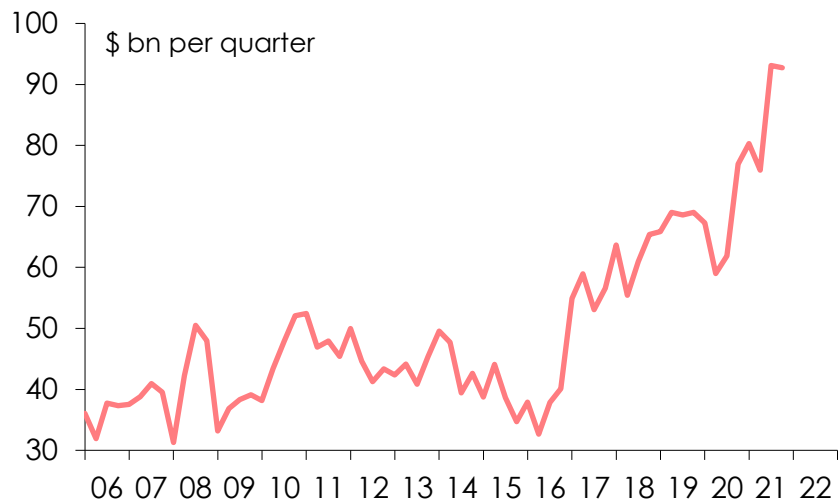


Source: National Australia Bank [Monthly Business Survey](#), January 2021; February survey results will be released on 8th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

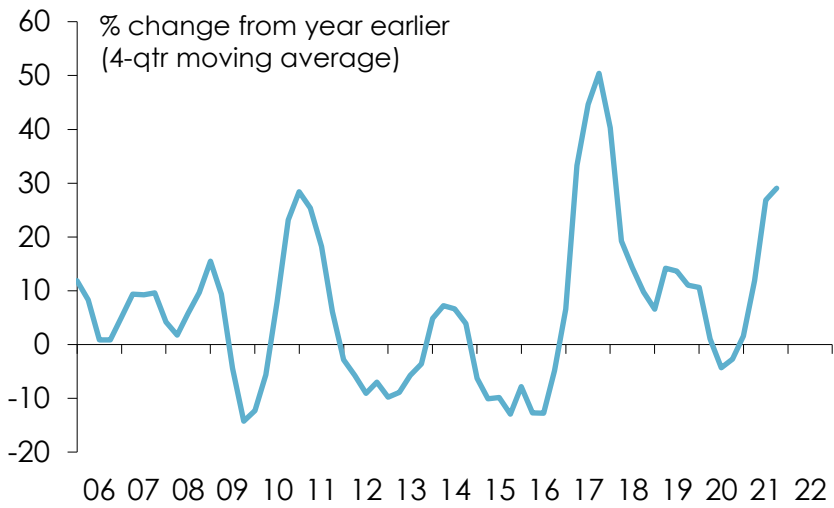
Company profits have grown strongly over the past five years, largely driven by the mining sector

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

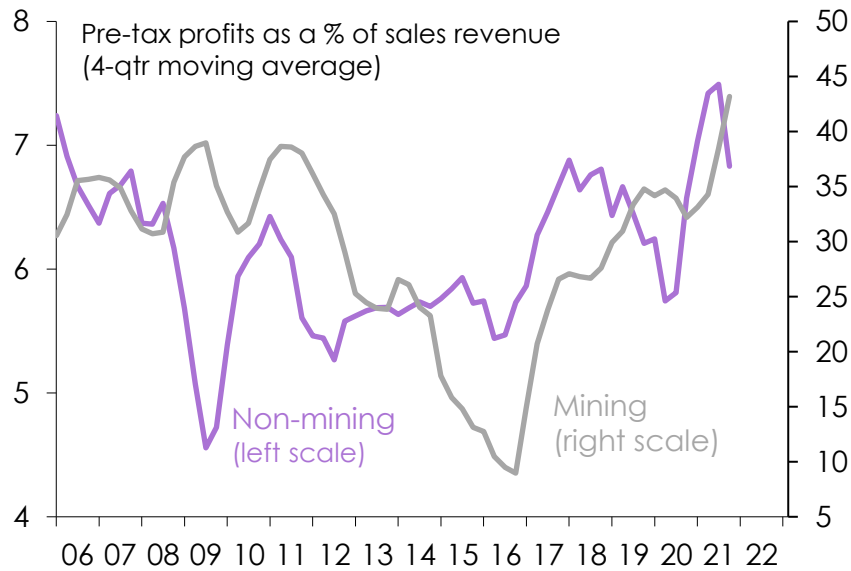
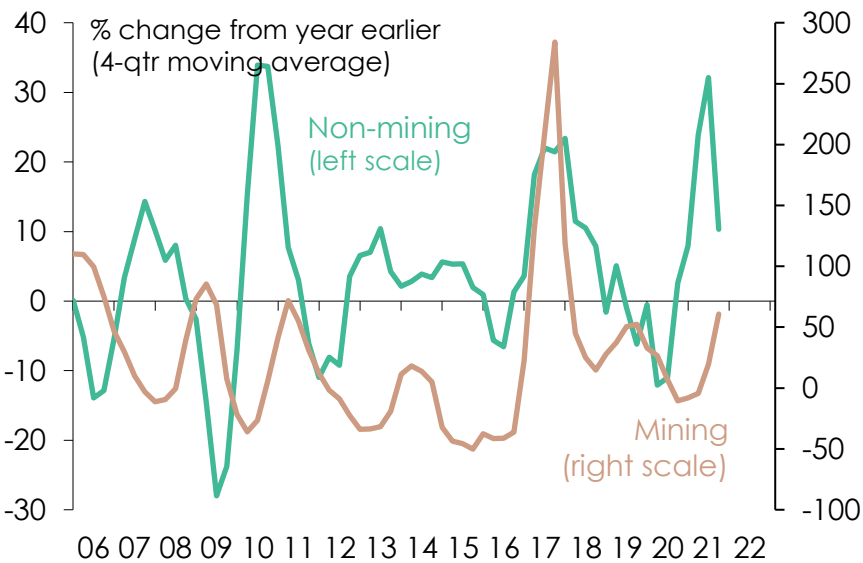
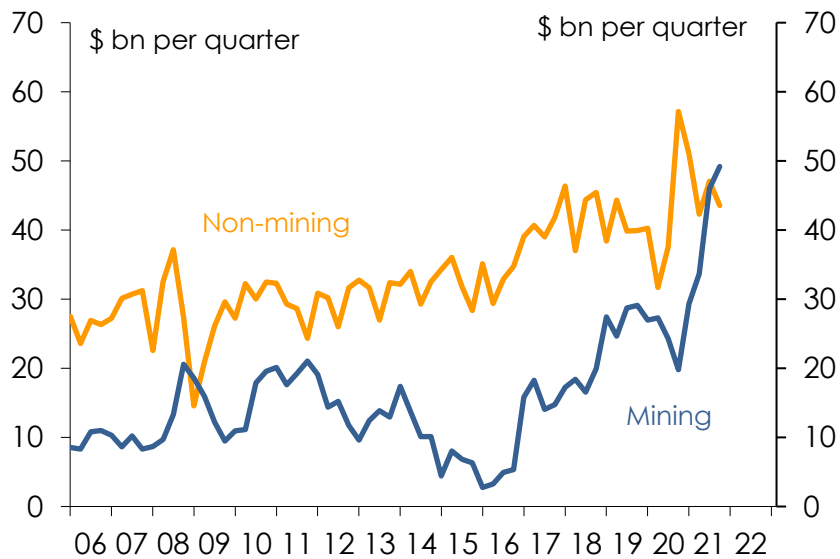
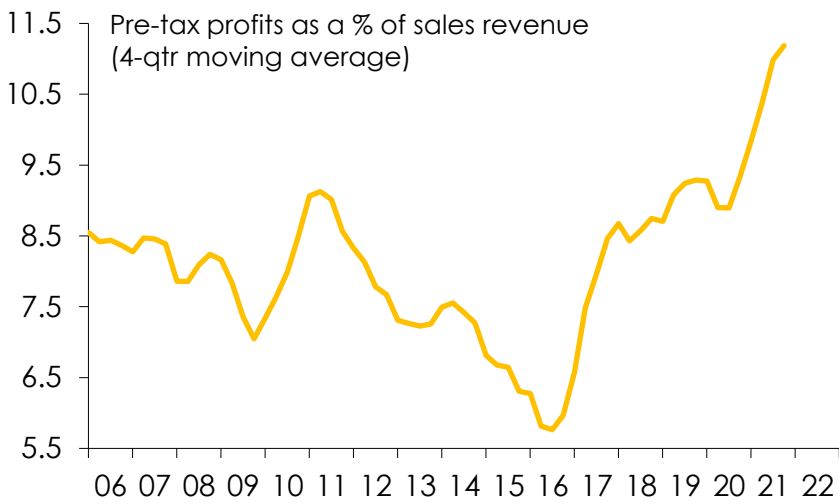
Pre-tax company profits



Pre-tax company profits growth



Pre-tax profit margins

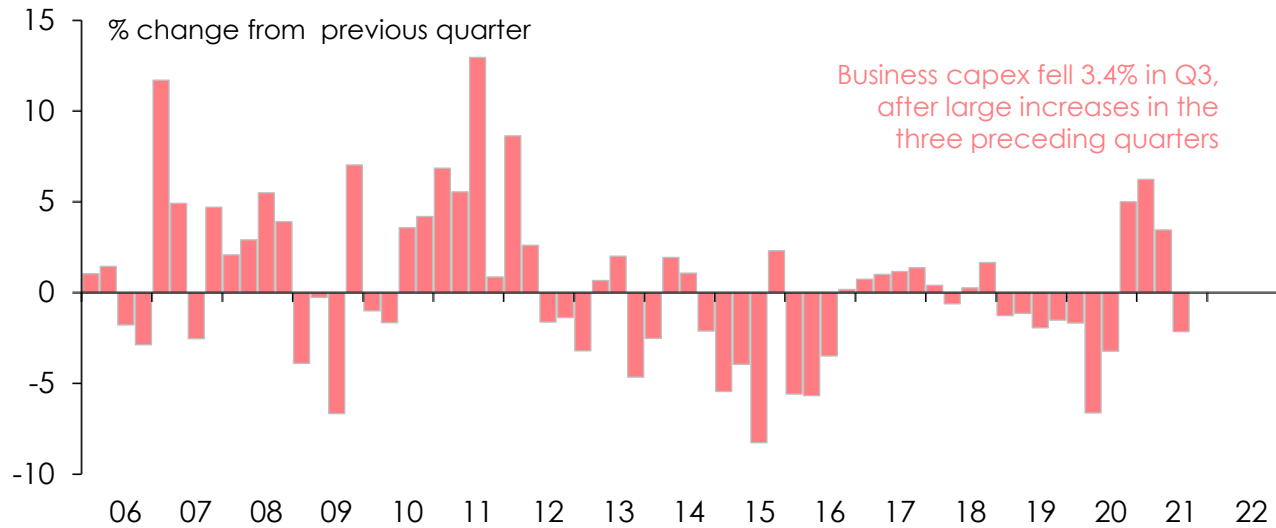


Note: Data depicted in these charts excludes banks and other deposit-taking financial intermediaries, health and general insurers, education and training, and health care and social assistance providers. Source: ABS, [Business Indicators, Australia](#), September 2021. December quarter data will be released on 28th February. [Return to "What's New"](#).

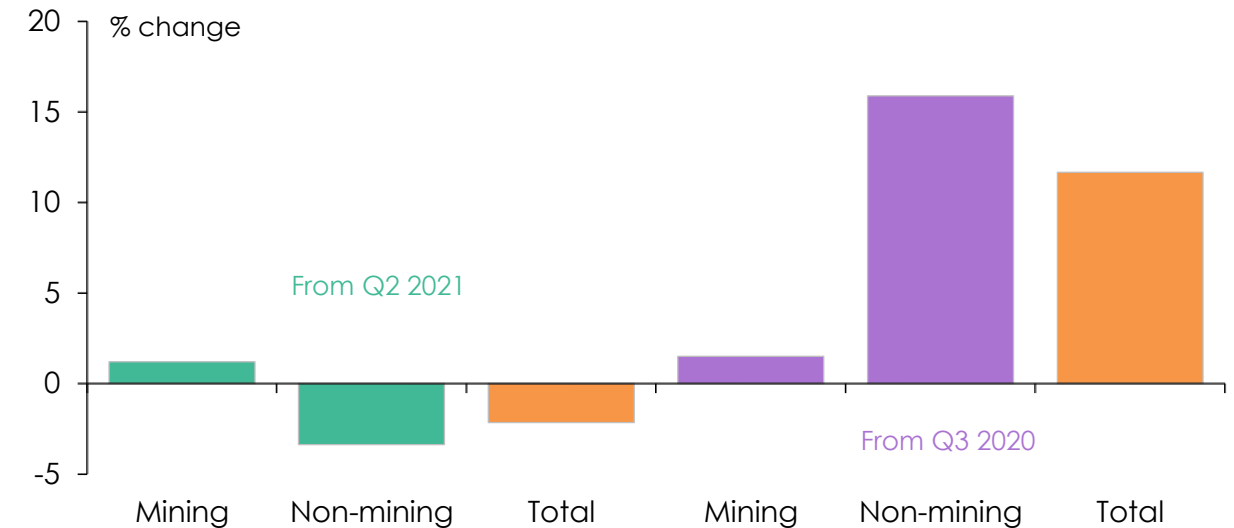
Business capex declined by 3.4% in Q3, after large increases in the three preceding quarters, mainly due to falls in NSW, Victoria and the ACT

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

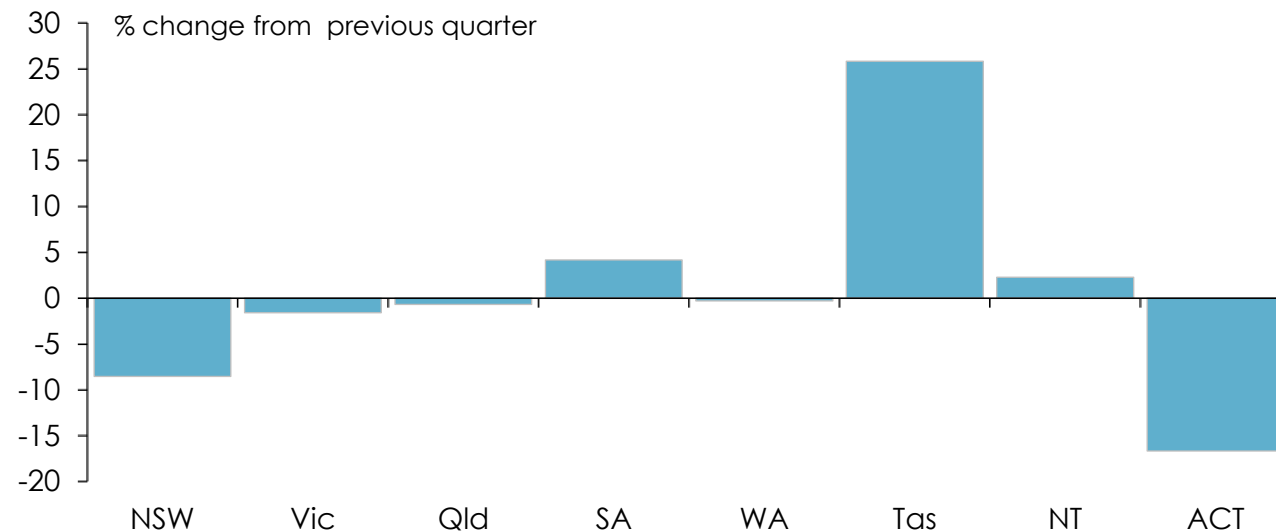
Real business new fixed capital expenditure



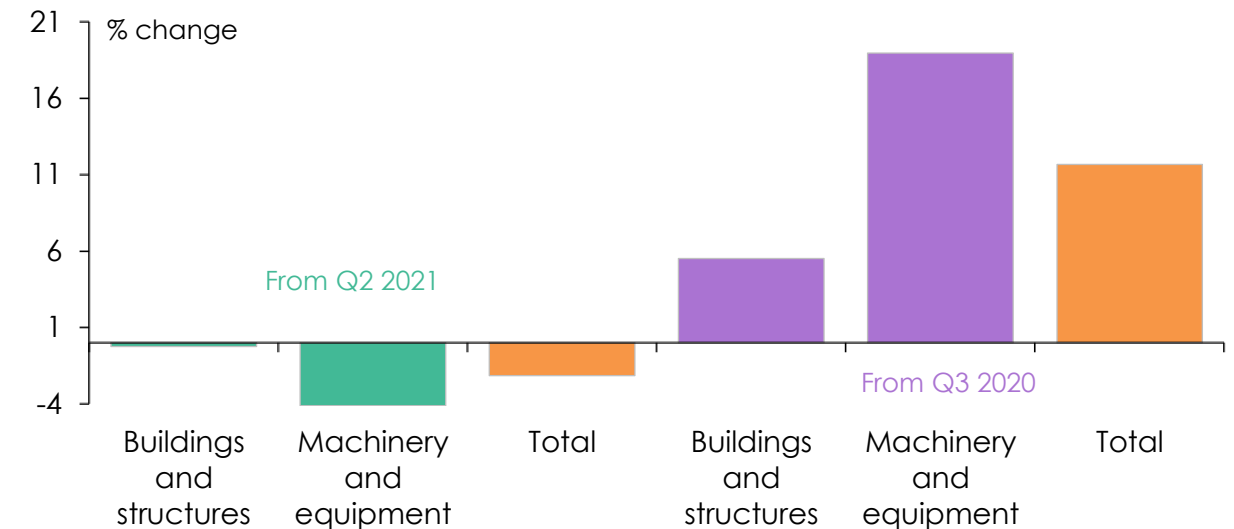
Real business new fixed capex, by industry, Q3



Real business new fixed capex, by state, Q3 2021



Real business new fixed capex, by asset, Q3



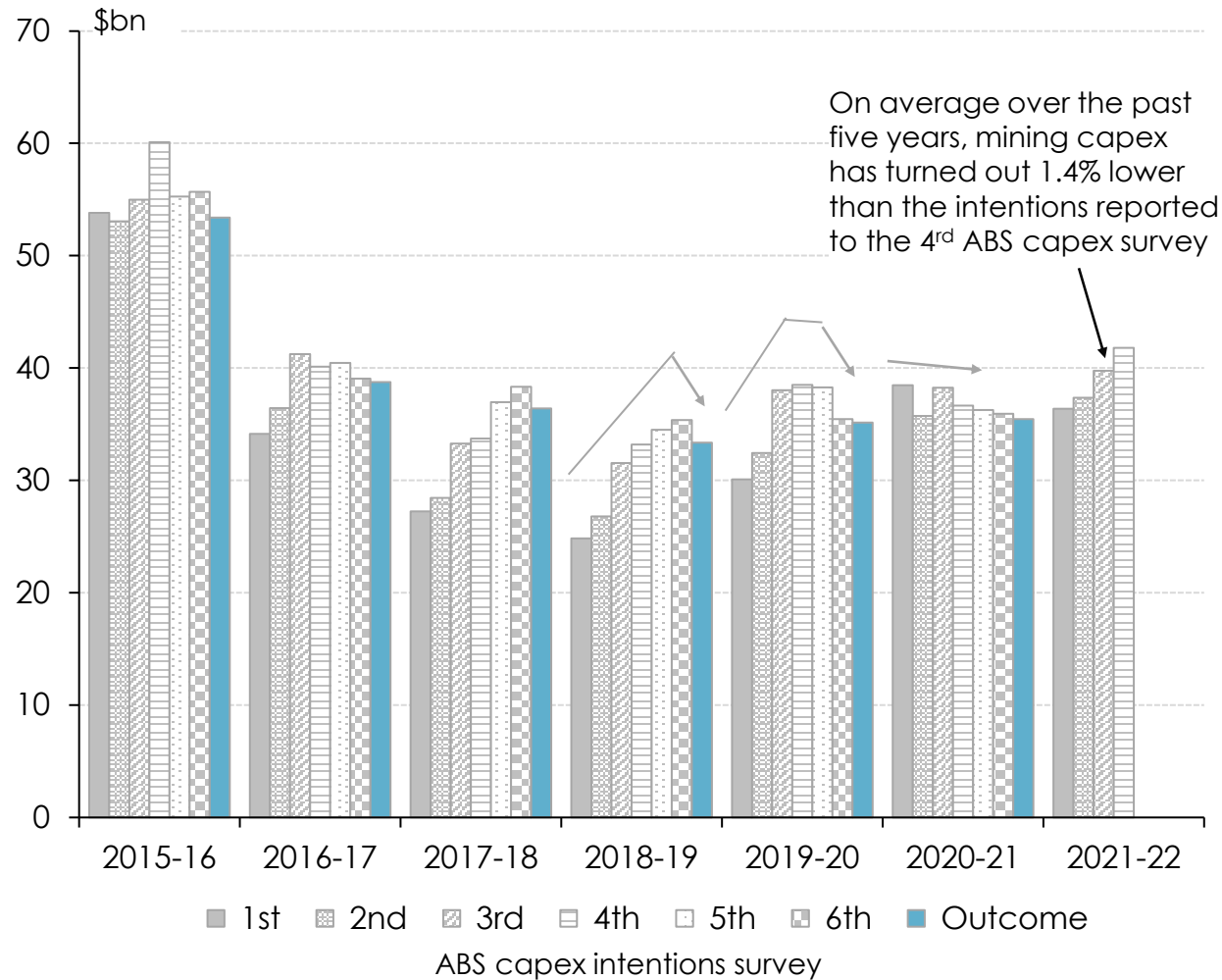
Note: the ABS Survey of New Capital Expenditure excludes the agriculture, forestry & fishing, and public administration & defence sectors, and superannuation funds.

Source: ABS, [Private New Capital Expenditure and Expected Expenditure, Australia](#); December quarter data will be released on 24th February 2022. [Return to "What's New"](#).

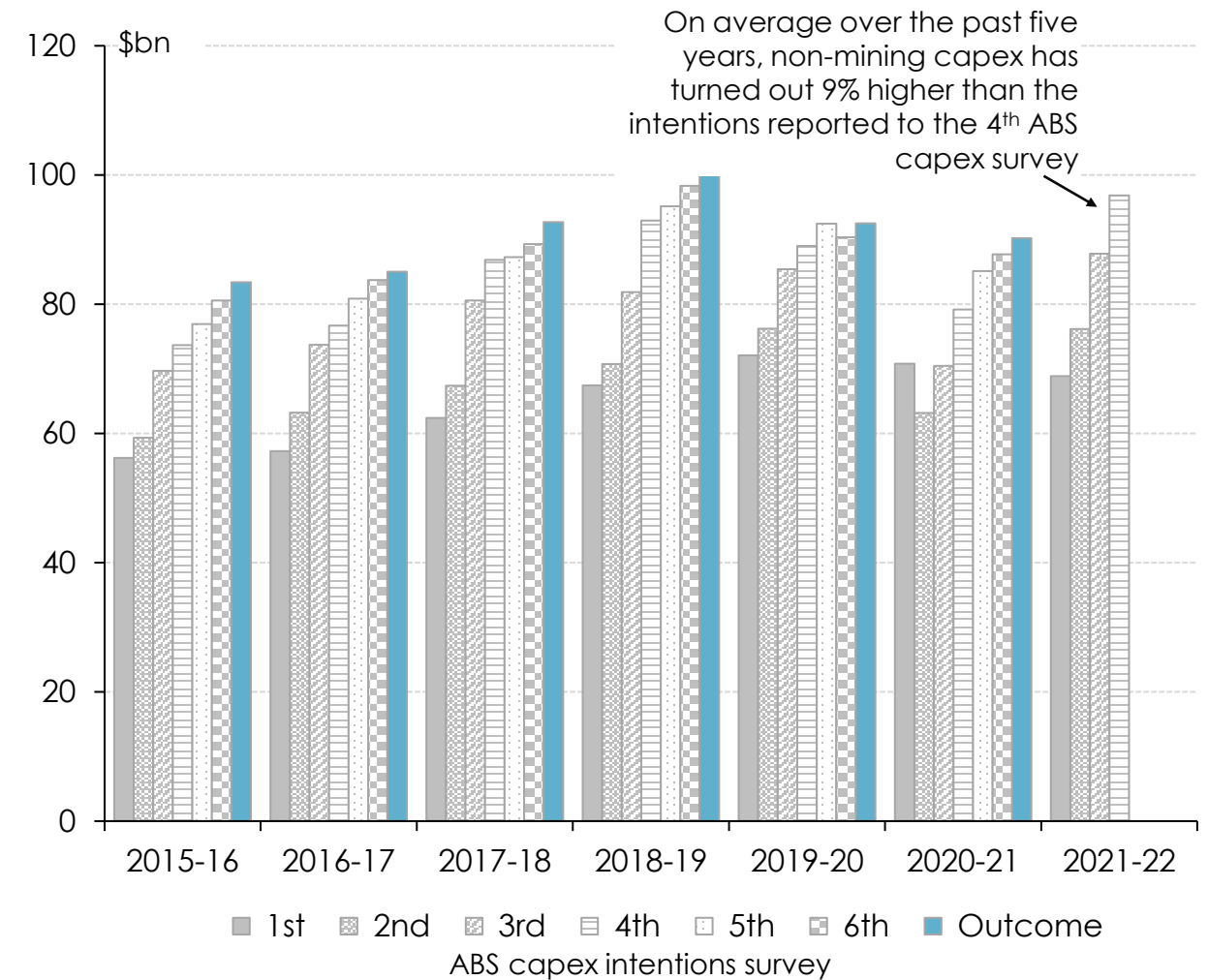
However businesses have again revised up their capex intentions for 2021-22 which if realized as in recent years points to an increase of 16½%

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Capital expenditure intentions - mining



Capital expenditure intentions – non-mining



Note: The ABS conducts six surveys of business' capital expenditure intentions in respect of each financial year. The first is conducted in January & February prior to the commencement of the financial year, the second in May & June, the third in July & August of the financial year, the fourth in October & November, the fifth in January & February of the financial year, and the sixth in May & June. The outcome (actual capital expenditure in the financial year) is determined from the survey taken in July & August after the end of the financial year. From the December quarter 2020 the survey includes the education & training, and health care & social assistance sectors. The estimates shown above are in nominal terms.

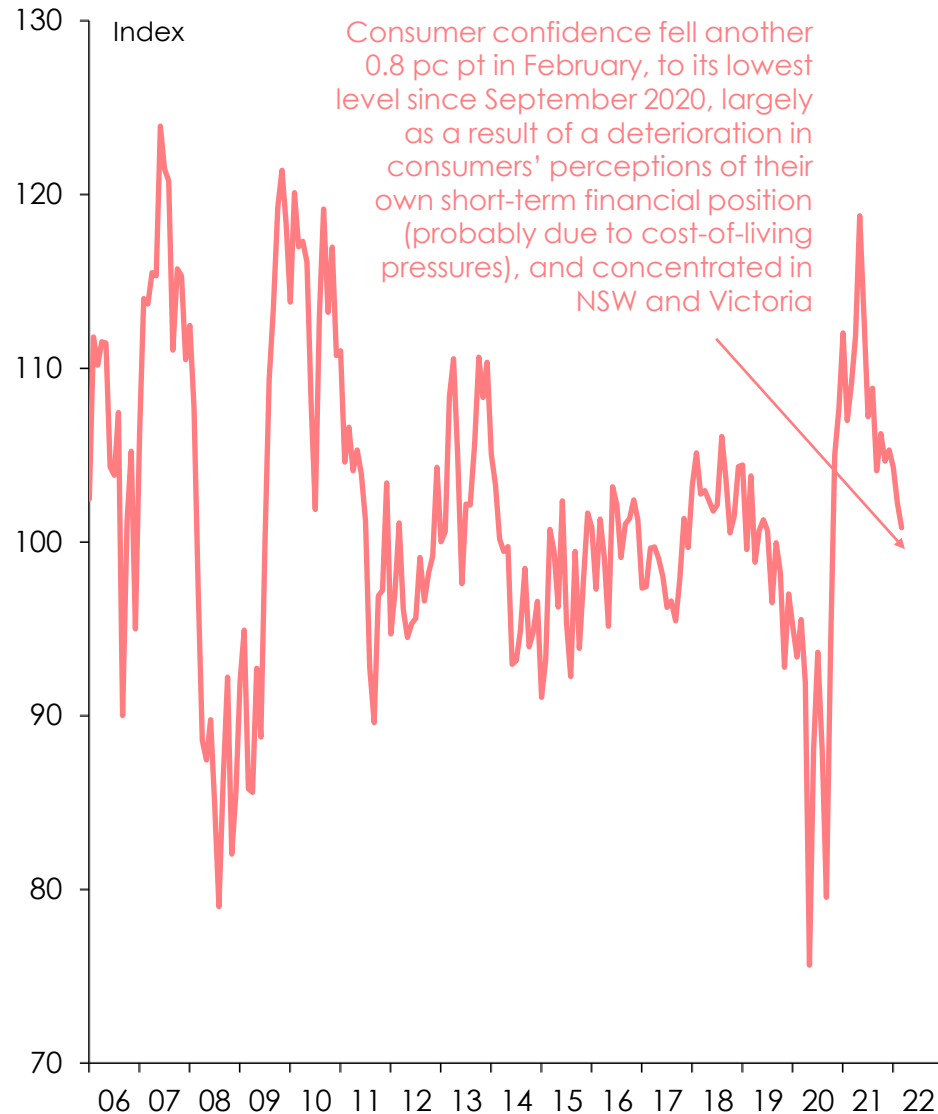
Source: ABS, [Private New Capital Expenditure and Expected Expenditure, Australia](#) (next update is released on 24th February 2022). [Return to "What's New"](#).

The household sector and consumer spending

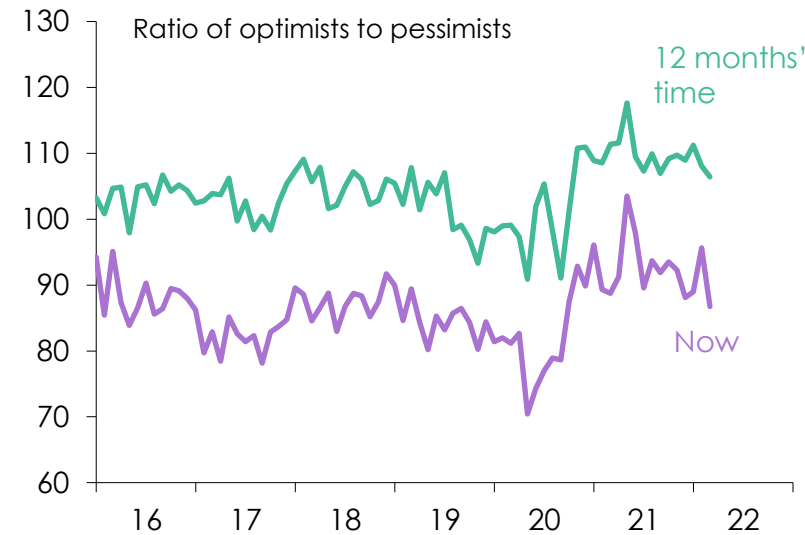
Consumer confidence fell another 0.8 pc pt in February to a 17-month low, largely as a result of rising cost pressures on household finances

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

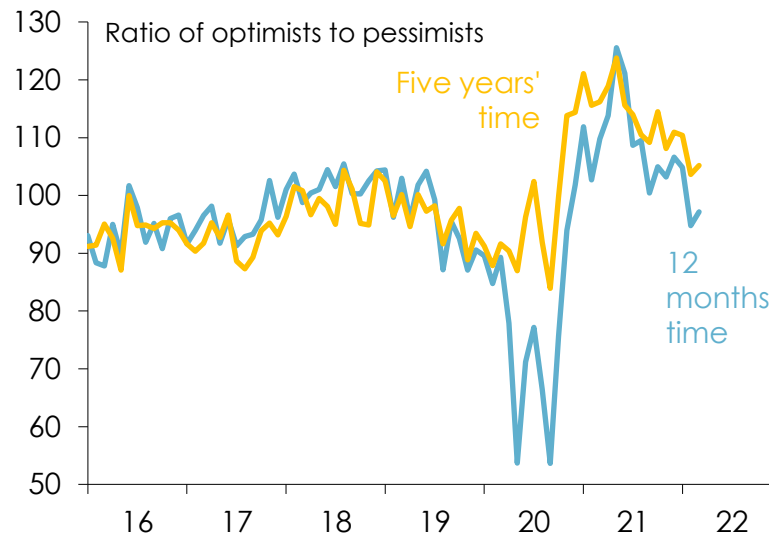
Consumer confidence index



Household finances assessment



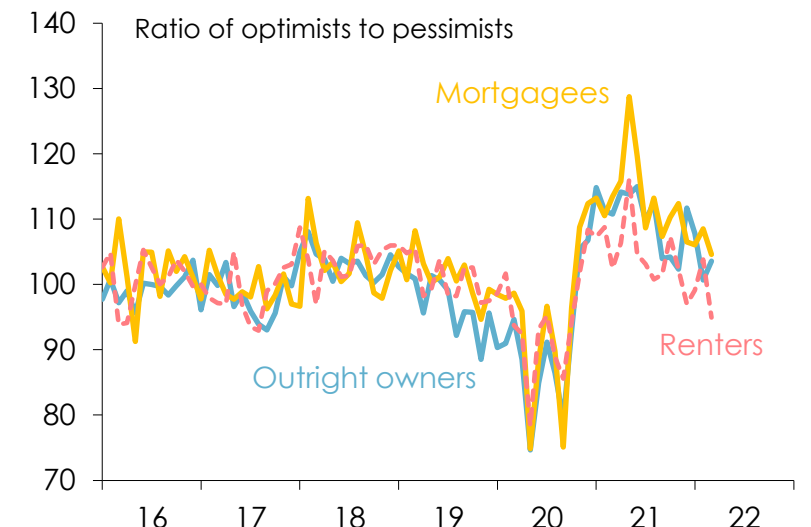
Economic conditions assessment



Buying conditions assessment



Confidence by housing tenure

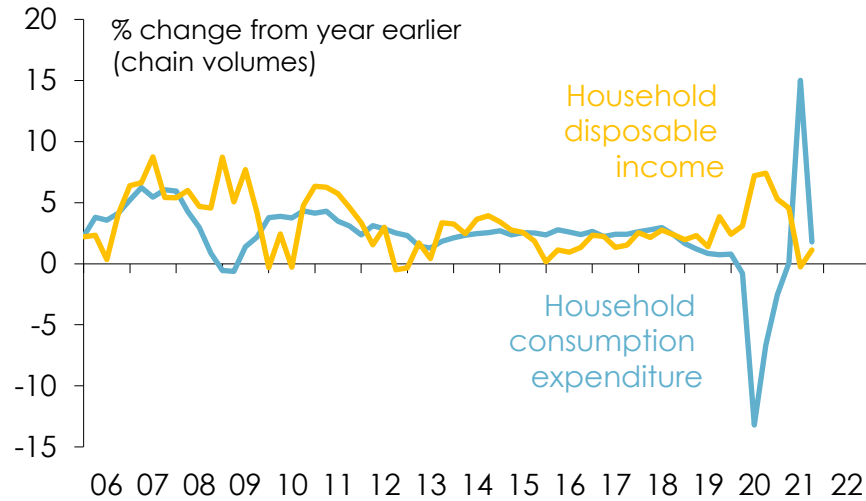


Source: [Westpac Banking Corporation](#). March consumer confidence will be released on 9th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

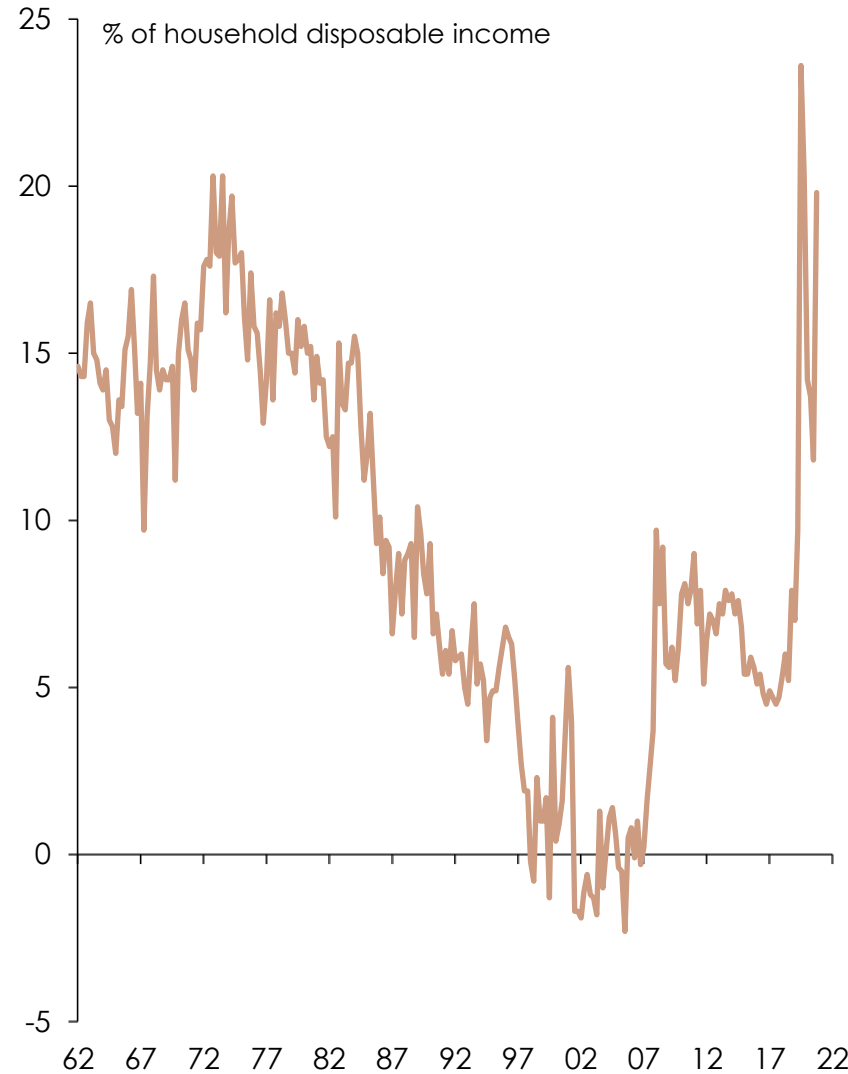
Household incomes have been supported by government payments, but spending has been curtailed, so households have lots of savings to spend

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

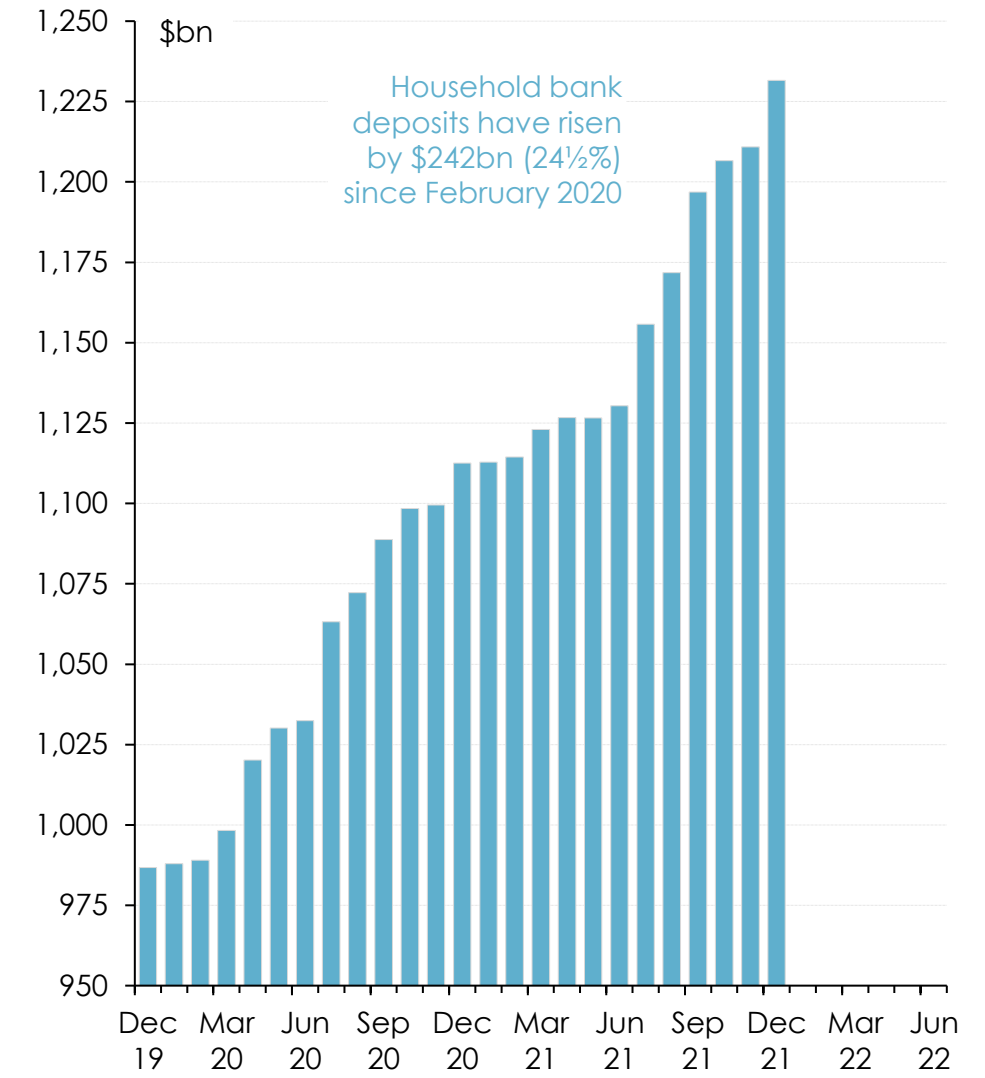
Household income and spending



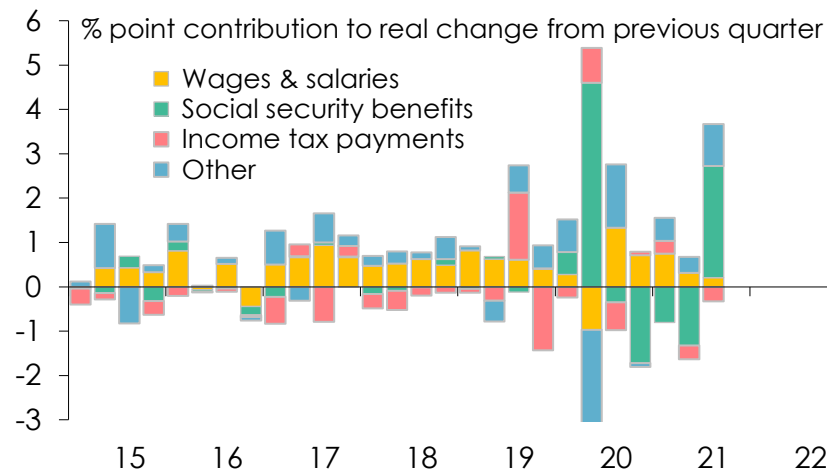
Household saving ratio



Household bank deposits



Sources of household income

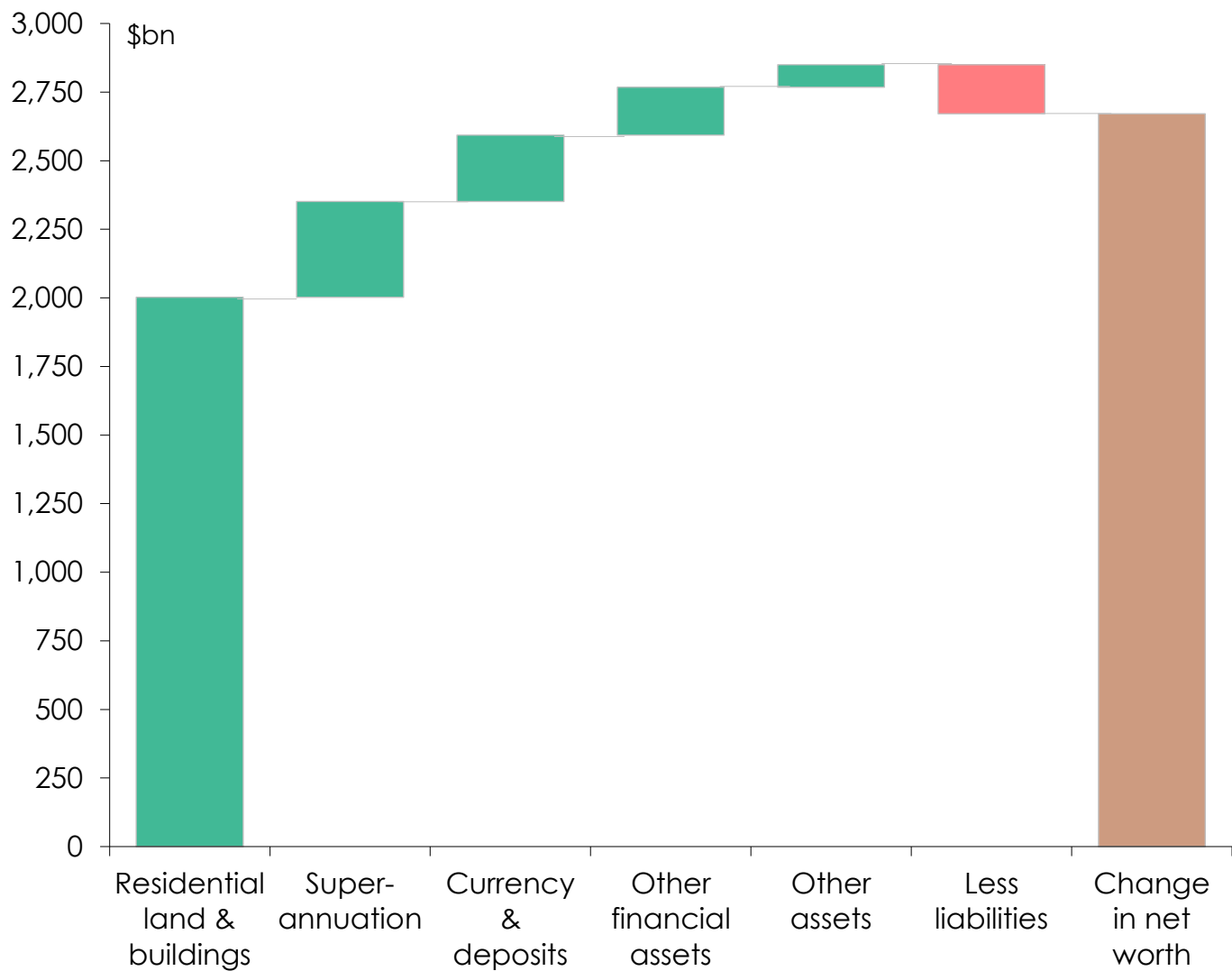


Sources: ABS, [Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product](#), March quarter 2021; Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, [Monthly Authorised Deposit-taking Institution Statistics](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

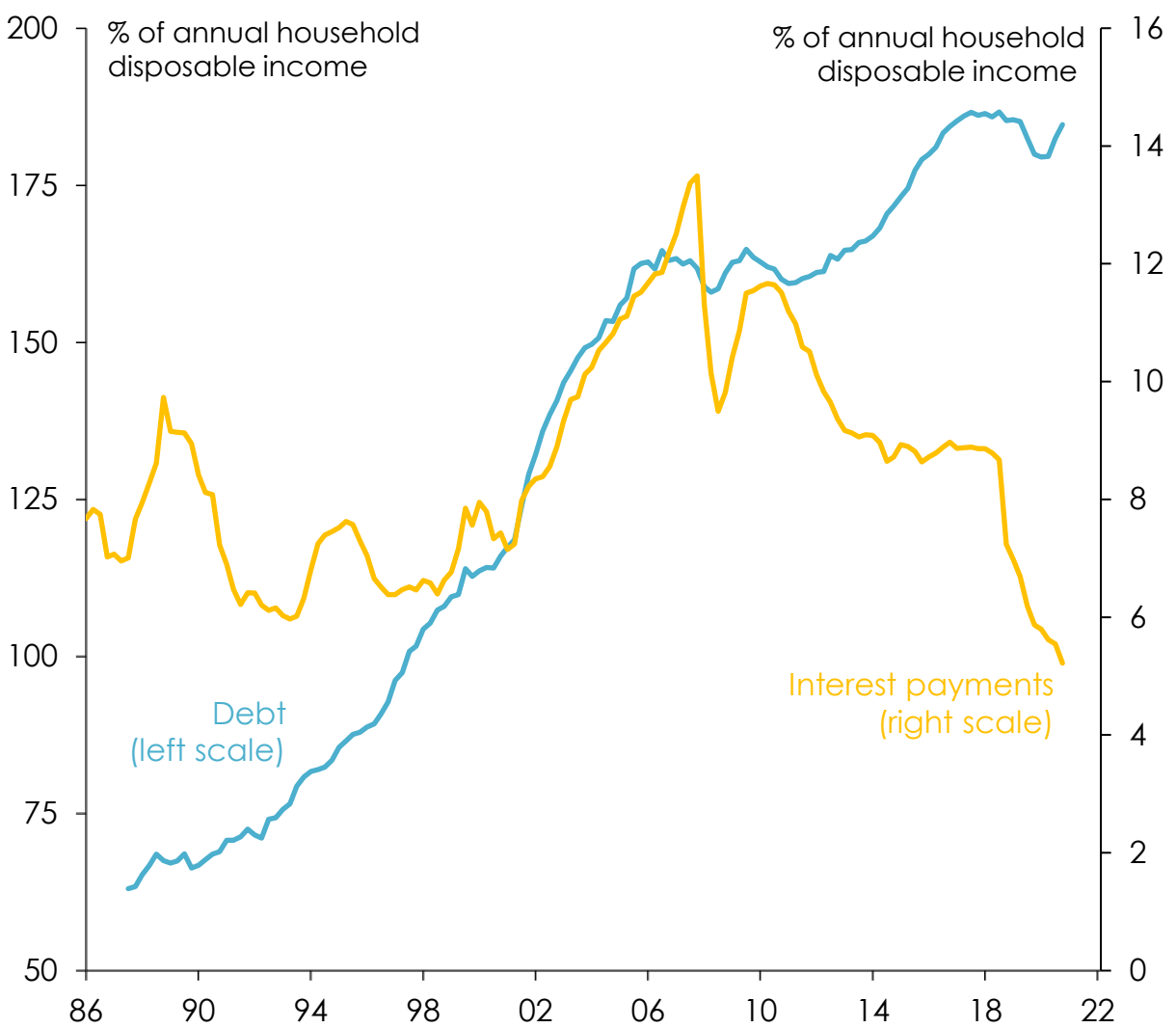
Household net worth has risen by \$2.7trn (23¾%) since the end of 2019, while debt service payments have fallen as a pc of income

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Sources of gains in household net worth, Q4 2019 to Q3 2021



Household net debt and interest payments as a percentage of disposable income

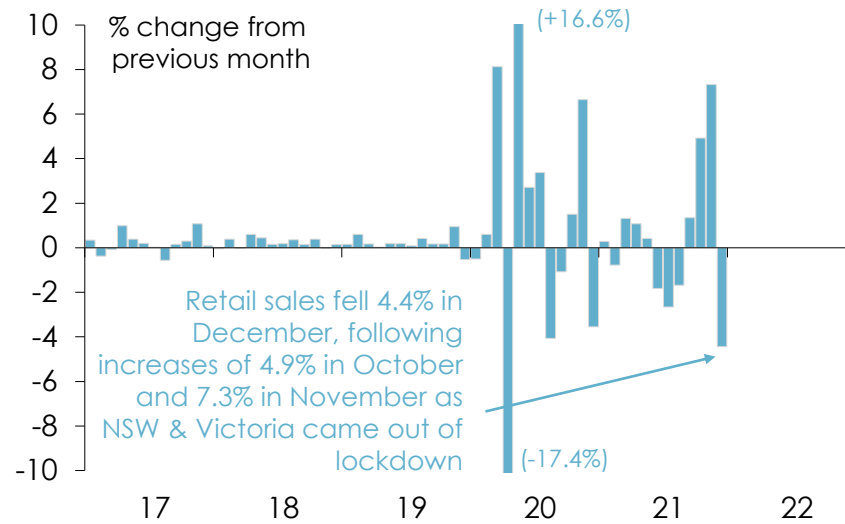


Sources: ABS, [Finance and Wealth Accounts](#), September quarter 2021; RBA, [Statistical Tables](#) E1 & E2. September quarter data will be released on 31st March 2022. [Return to "What's New"](#).

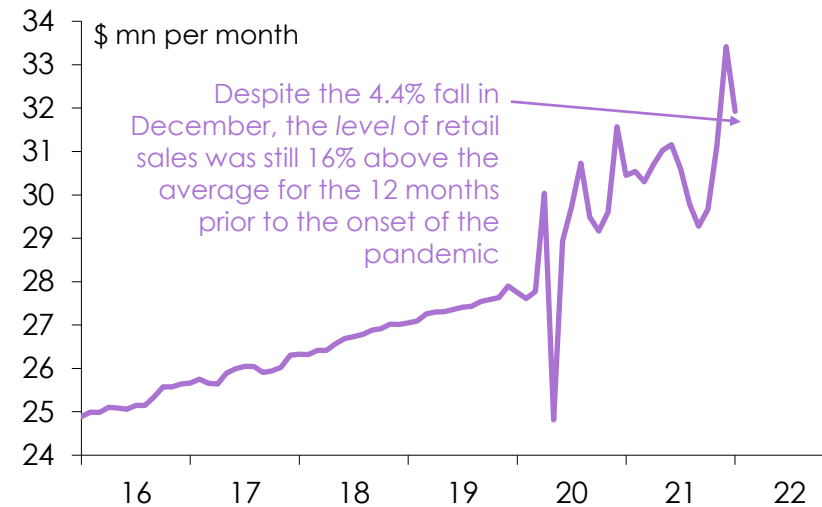
New motor vehicle sales rose 10.8% in January after five successive monthly falls, with double-digit gains in every state except NSW and WA

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

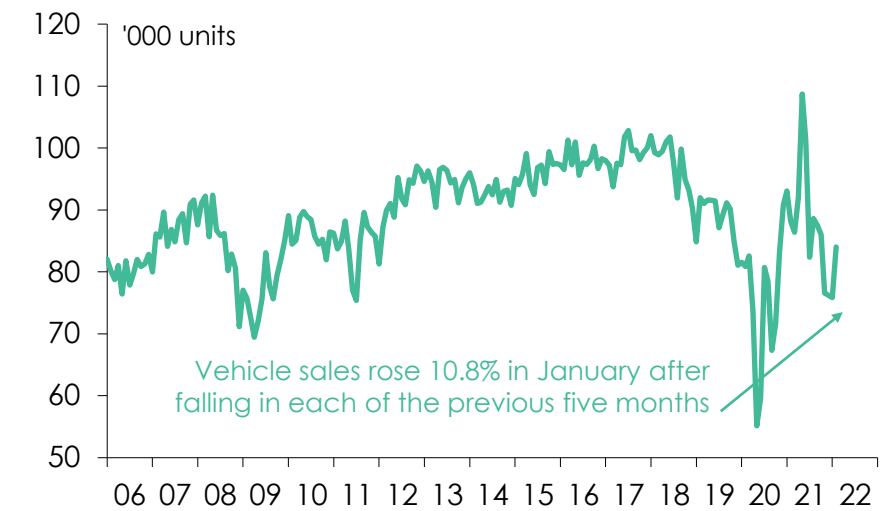
Monthly retail sales



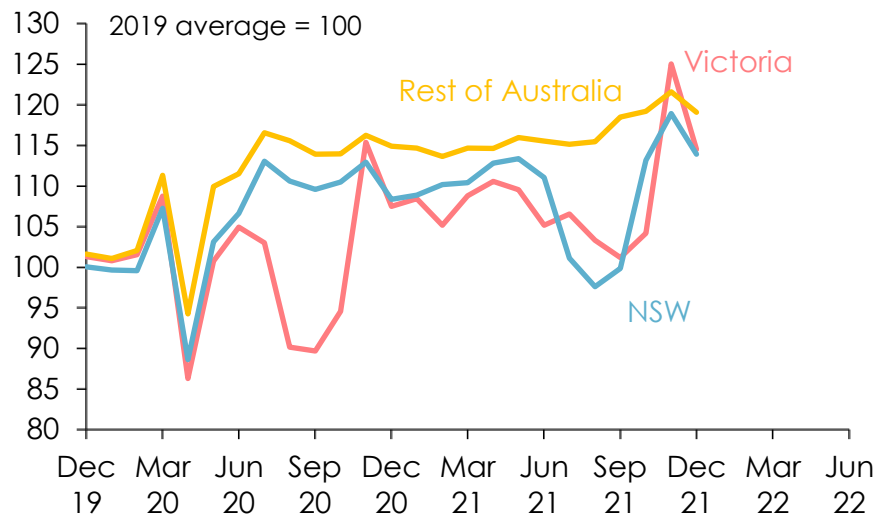
Level of retail sales



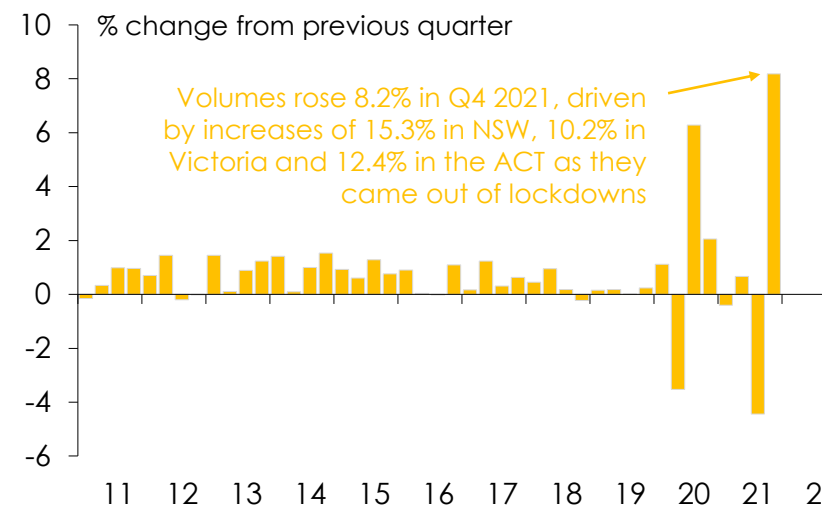
New motor vehicle sales



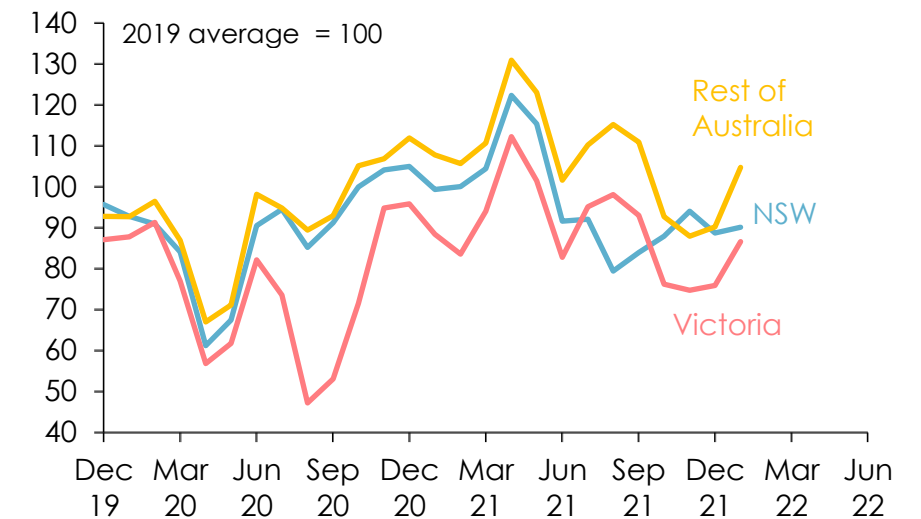
Retail sales – NSW, Vic & the rest



Quarterly retail sales volumes



Vehicle sales – NSW, Vic & the rest

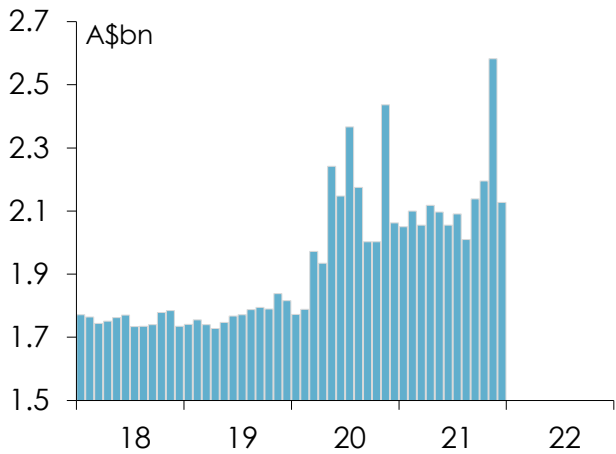


Note: see also [slide 34](#) for more detail on the composition of retail sales since the onset of the pandemic. Sources: ABS, [Retail Trade, Australia](#); Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries [VFACTS](#) (seasonal adjustment of FCAI data by Corinna). Preliminary January retail sales data will be released on 28th February; February motor vehicle sales data will be released in the second week of March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

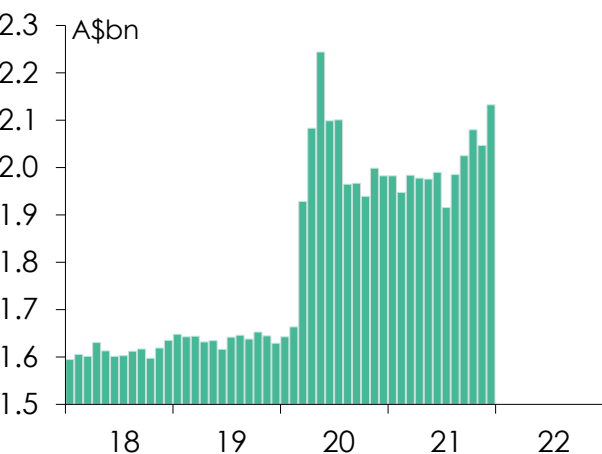
Australians have splurged on durable goods – and on alcohol! – to make up for not being allowed to spend on services (including overseas travel)

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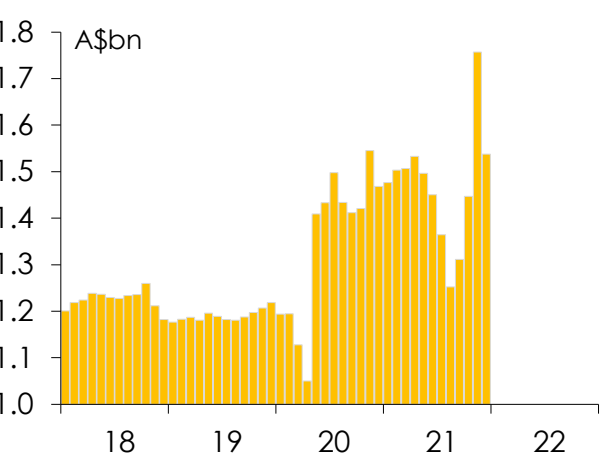
Electronic & electrical goods



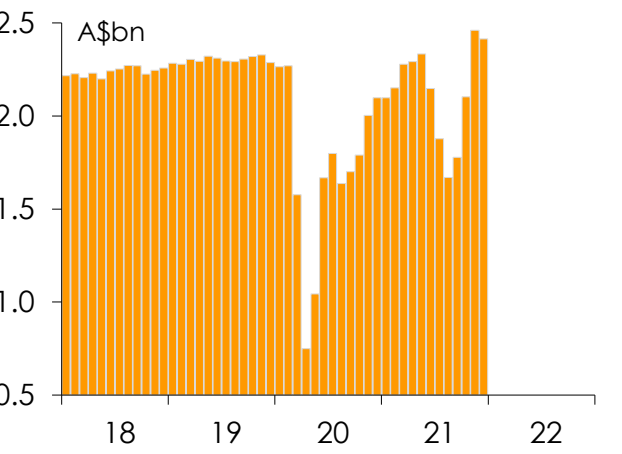
Hardware, building & garden supplies



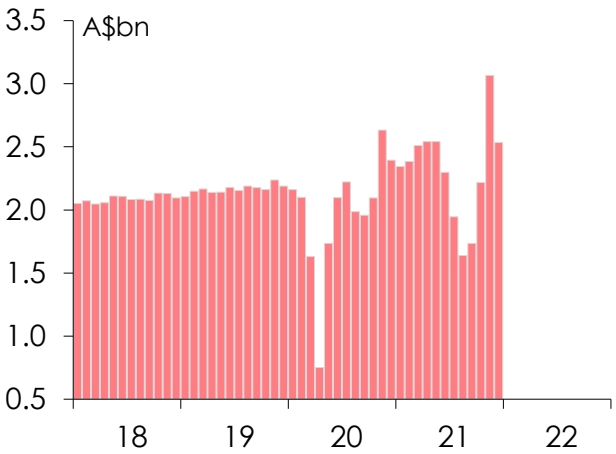
Floor coverings, furniture, housewares etc



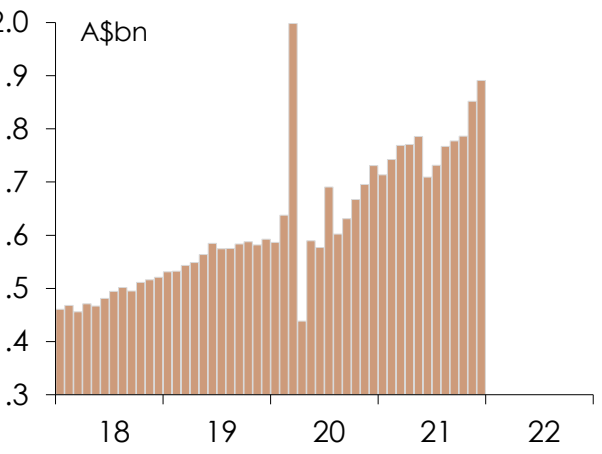
Cafes and restaurants



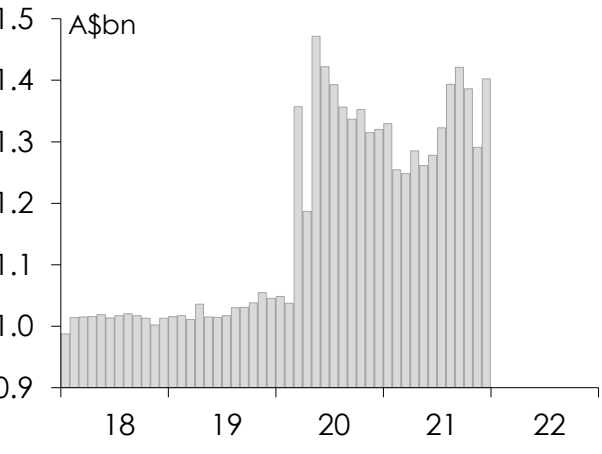
Clothing, footwear & personal accessories



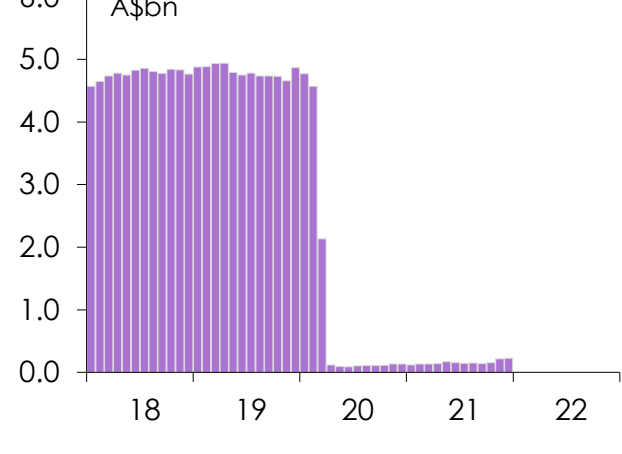
Pharmaceuticals, cosmetics & toiletries



Alcoholic beverages



Overseas travel

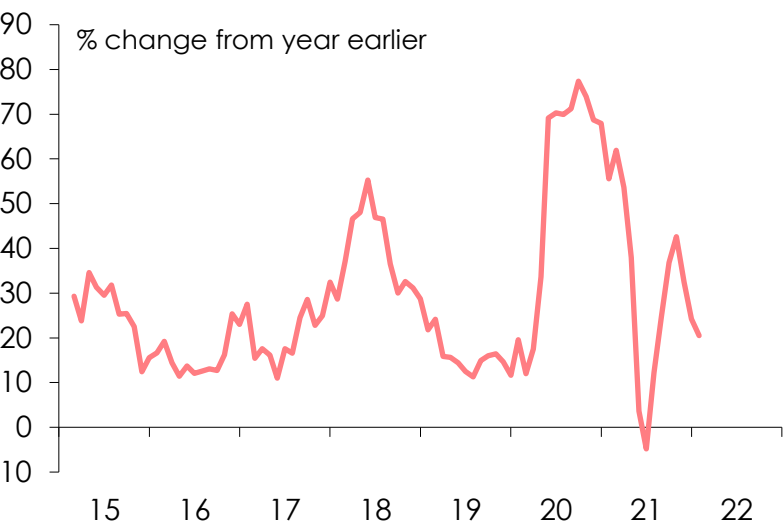


Sources: ABS, [Retail Trade, Australia](#), December 2021 (January data will be released on 4th March); and [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), November 2021. [Return to "What's New"](#).

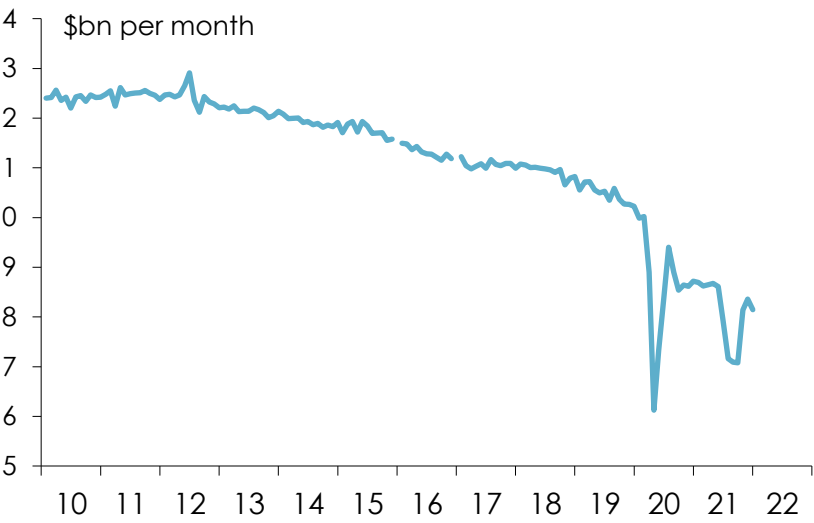
Online spending has eased back after surging during last year's Q3 lockdowns, but remains much higher than before the onset of the pandemic

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

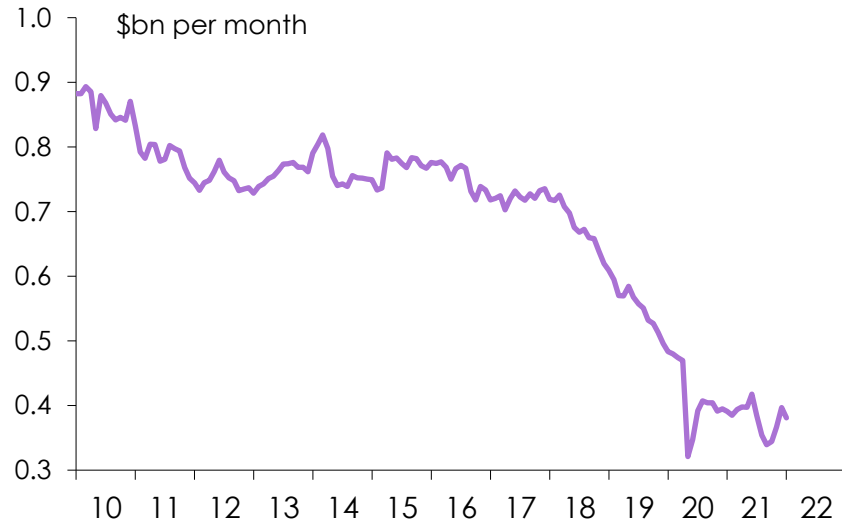
Growth in online retail sales



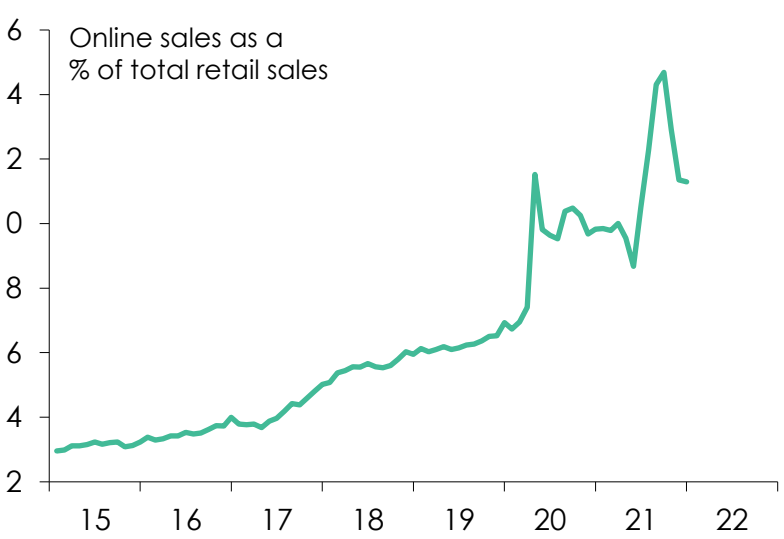
ATM cash withdrawals



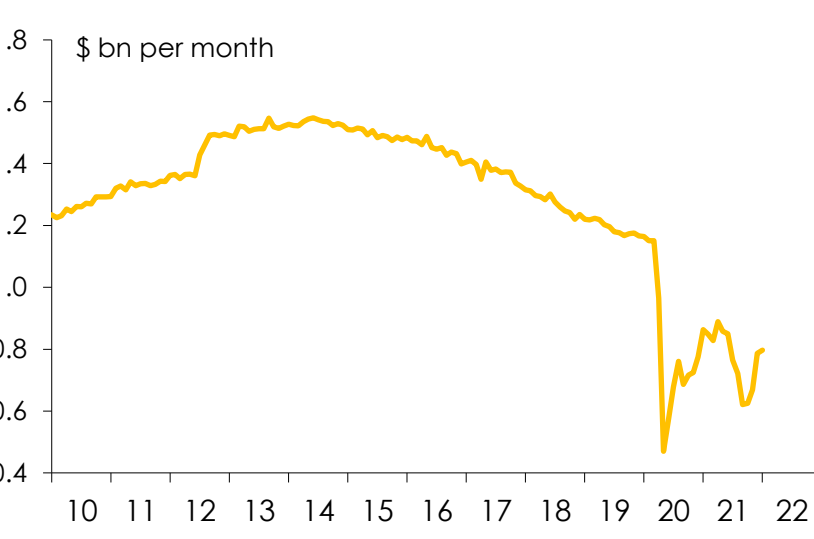
Credit card cash advances



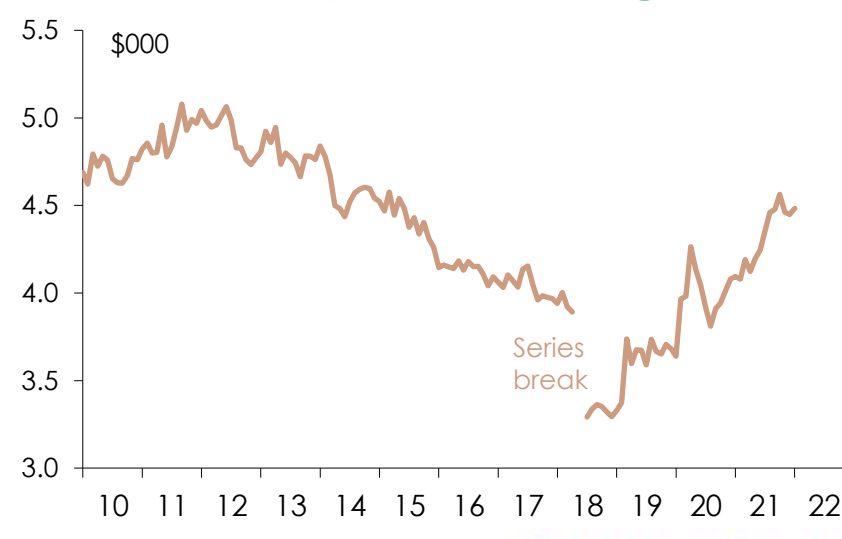
Online retail 'market share'



Debit card cash-outs



Direct entry payments avge value



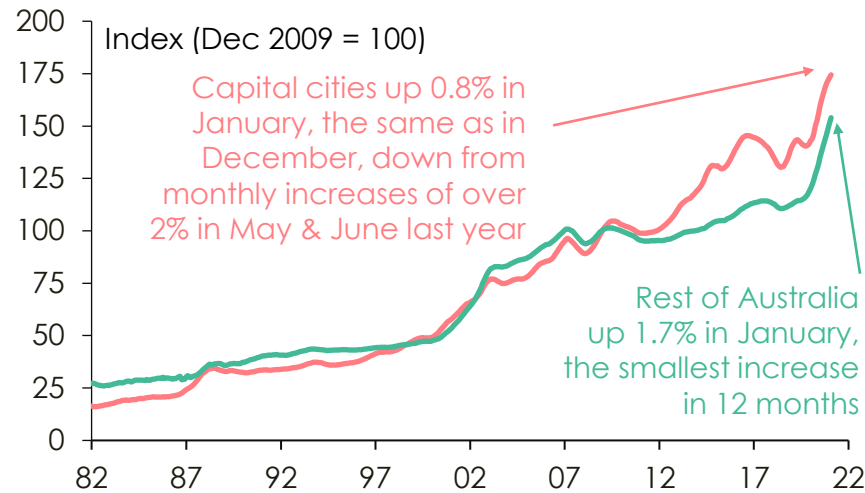
Sources: ABS, [Retail Trade, Australia](#); RBA, [Statistical Tables](#), C1, C2, C4 and C6. Latest data are for December. December online retail sales data will be published on 4th March and payments system data will both be published on 7th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

Housing and the residential property market

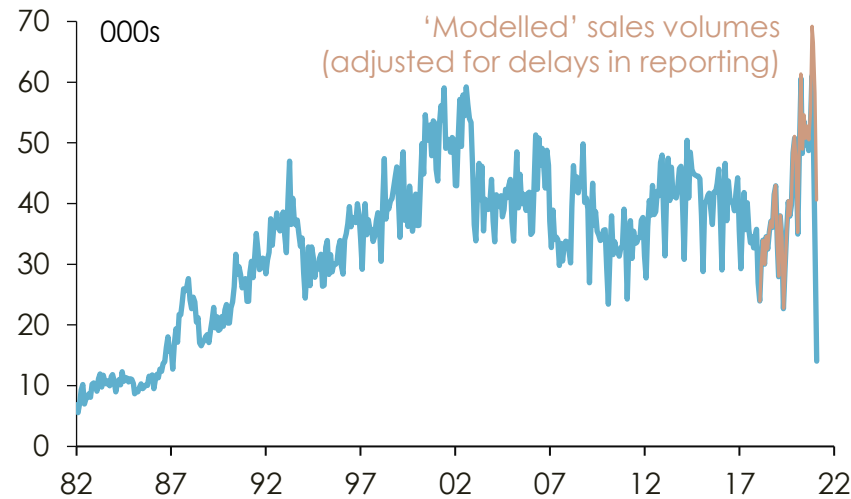
Property prices rose 'only' 1.0% in January, the smallest increase in 12 months, continuing the slowing in monthly price gains since last June

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

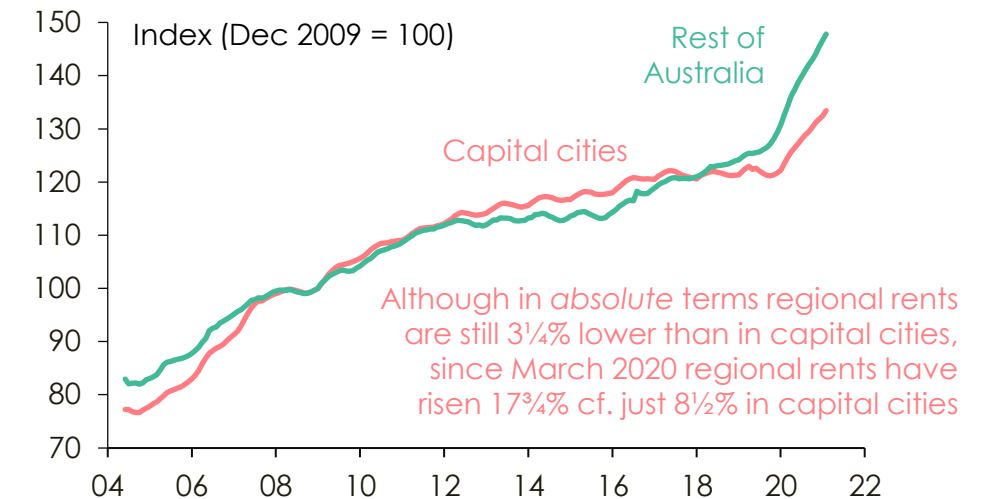
Residential property prices



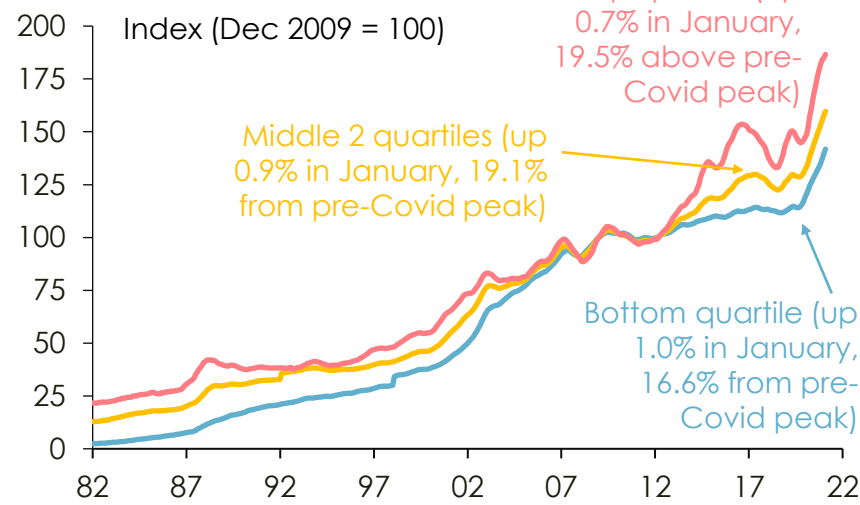
Residential property sales volumes



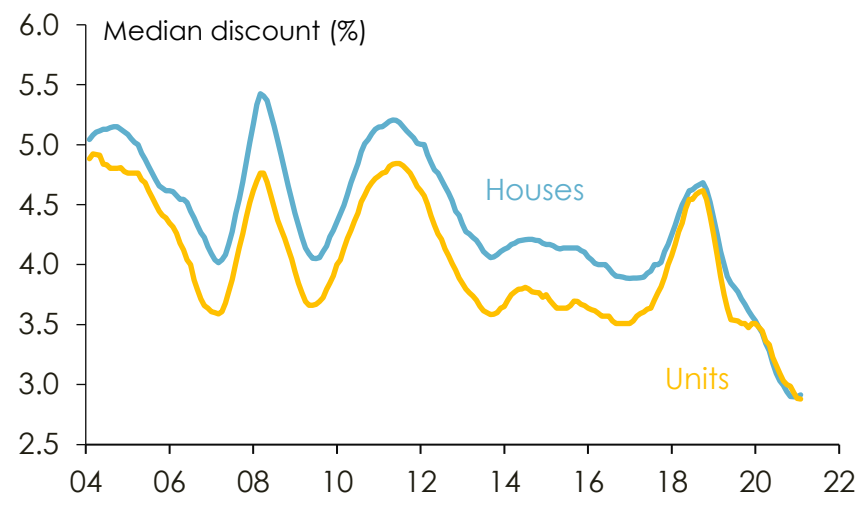
Residential rents



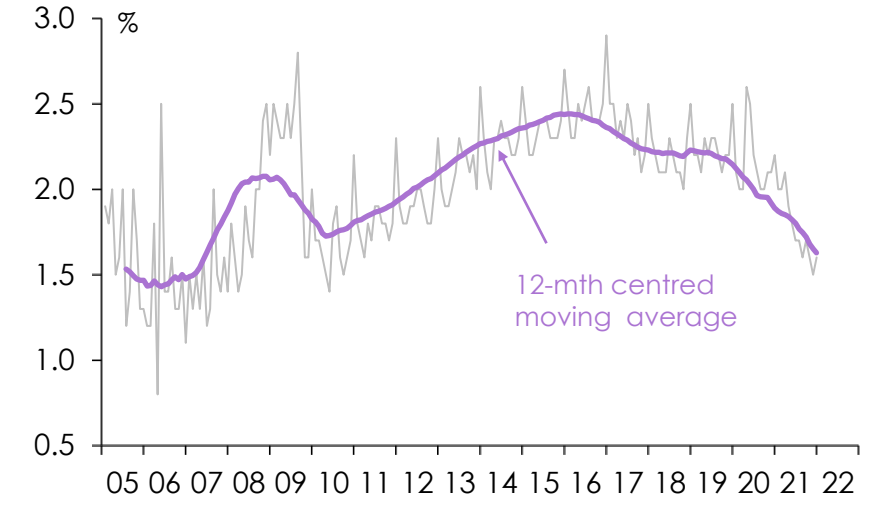
Property prices by tier



Vendor discounting



Capital city rental vacancy rates

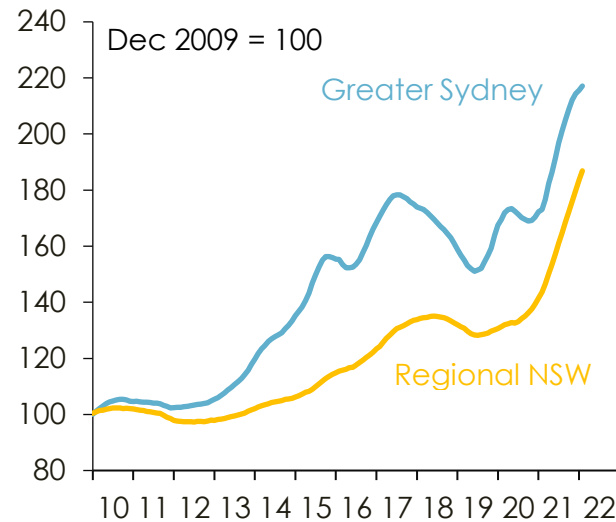


Note: The index of property prices measures the 'organic' change in underlying sales values by using a hedonic regression methodology that takes account of changes in the characteristics of properties being sold from month to month. Property price data shown here are seasonally adjusted. The index of residential rents uses a similar methodology to measure the 'organic' change in underlying rents. The 'modelled' sales volume estimates seek to account for delays in receiving information on transactions that have yet to settle (which can be more than six weeks after the contract date). Latest data are for January (except for vacancy rates which is December). February prices, sales volumes and rents data will be released on 1st March. Sources: [CoreLogic](#); [SQM Research](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

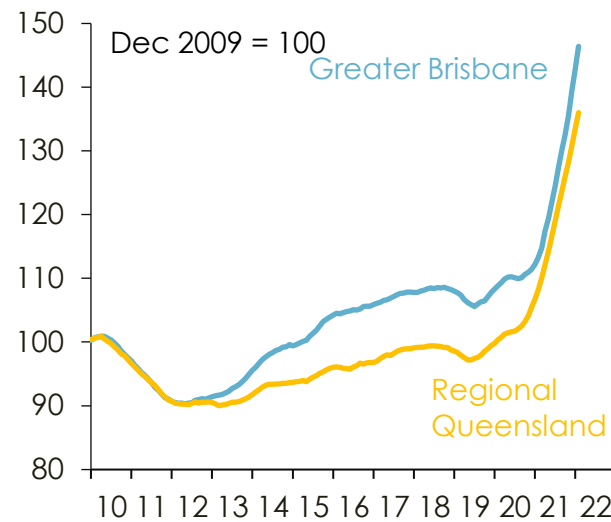
Prices in Brisbane and Adelaide rose more than 2% last month, and along with Hobart and Canberra are more than 30% above pre-Covid levels

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

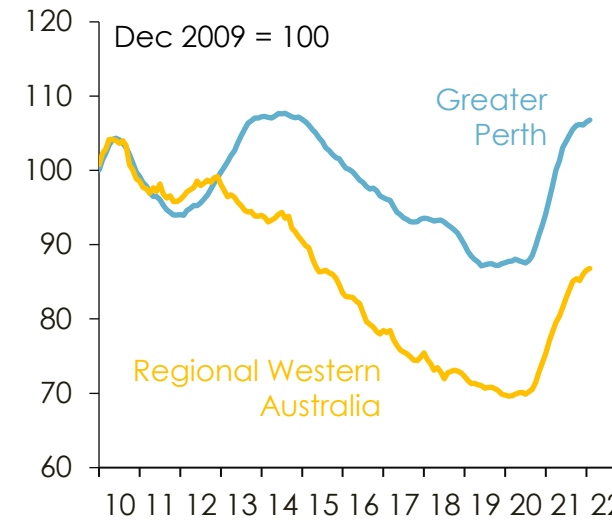
New South Wales



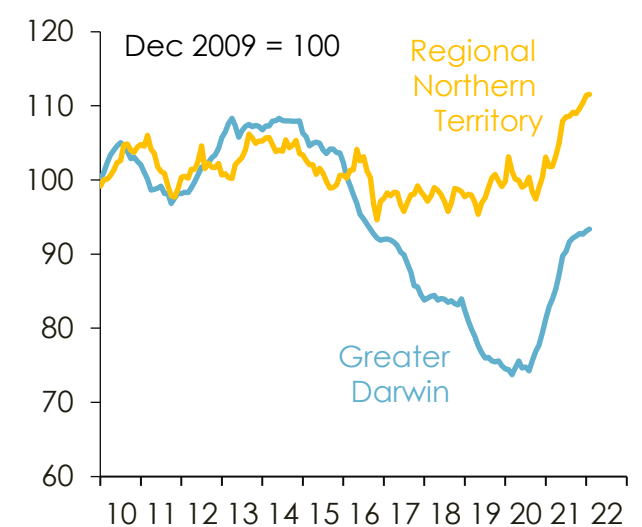
Queensland



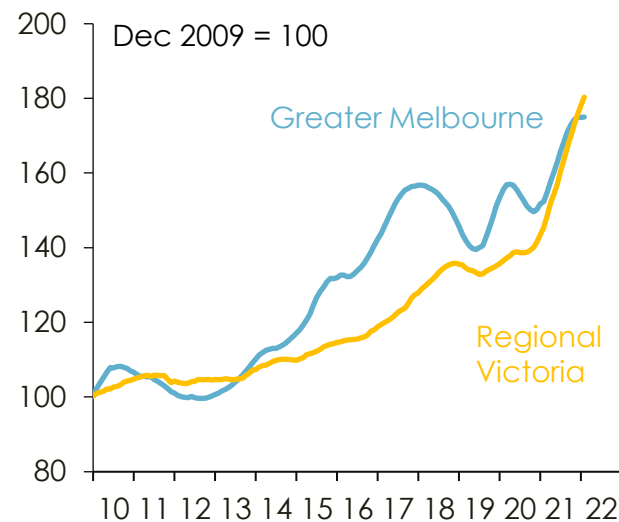
Western Australia



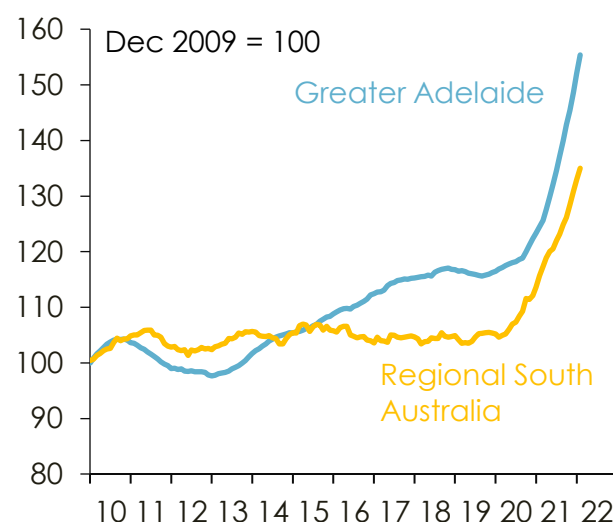
Northern Territory



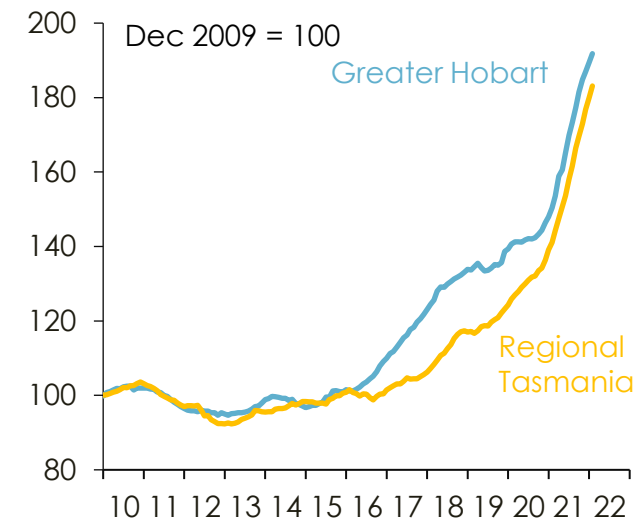
Victoria



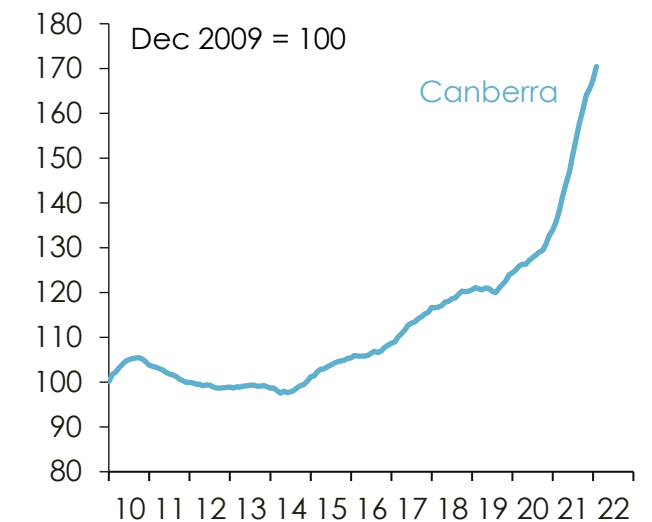
South Australia



Tasmania



Australian Capital Territory

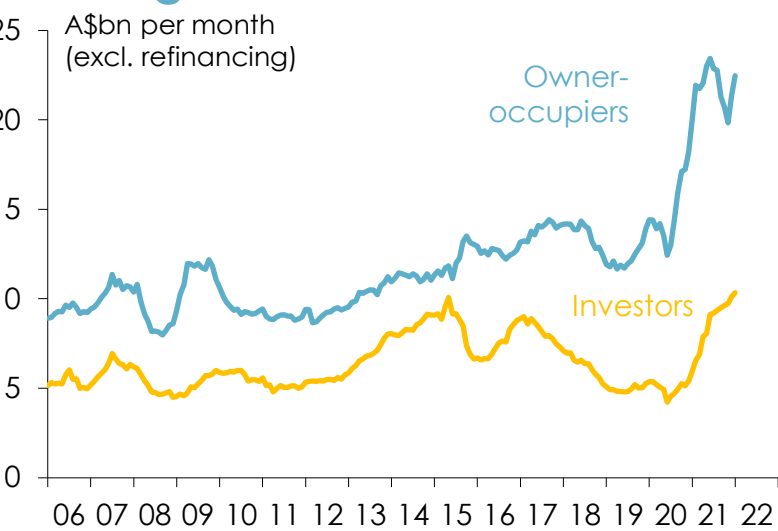


Note: The index of property prices measures the 'organic' change in underlying sales values by using a hedonic regression methodology that takes account of changes in the characteristics of properties being sold from month to month. Property price data are seasonally adjusted. Notice that different states have different vertical scales. Latest data are December; January data will be released on 1st February. Source: [CoreLogic](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

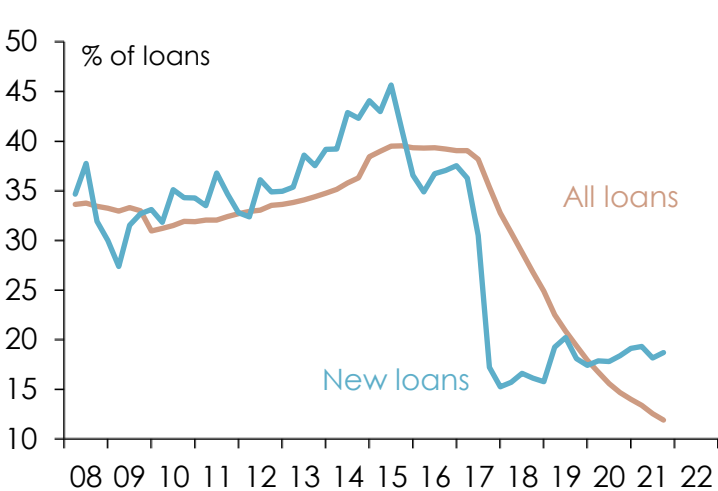
Lending to property investors and to existing home-owners 'trading up' has risen sharply in recent months while FHBs are again being 'squeezed out'

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

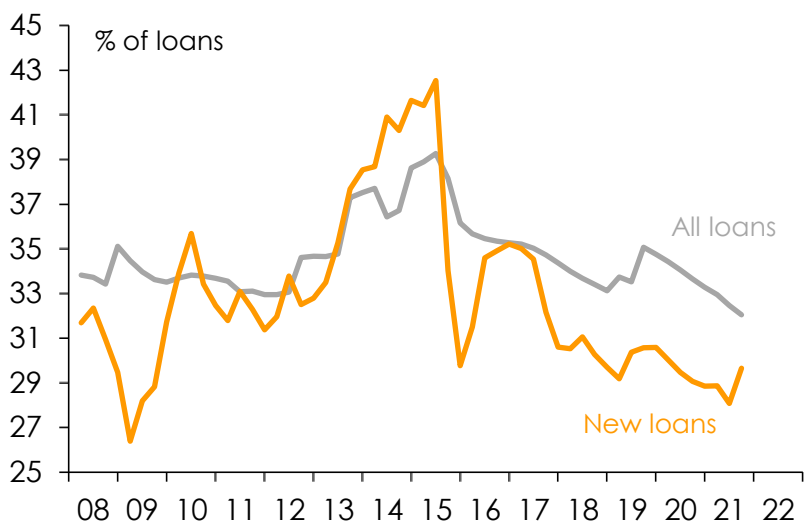
Housing finance commitments



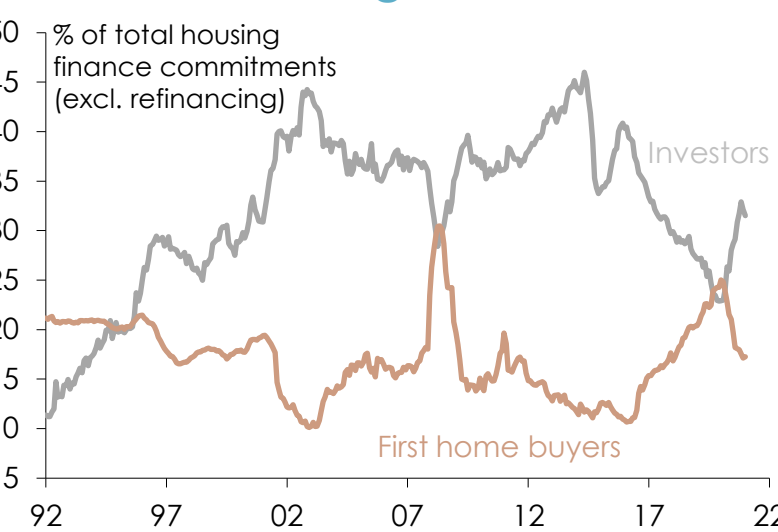
Interest-only loans



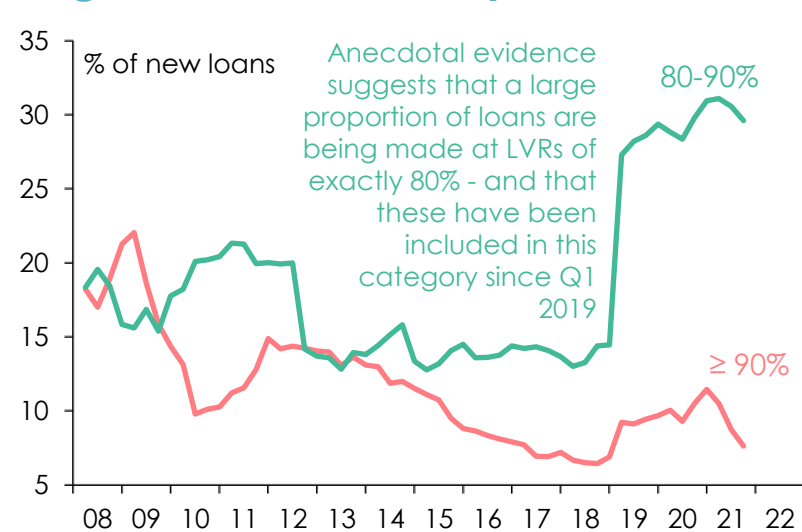
Loans to investors as a pc of total



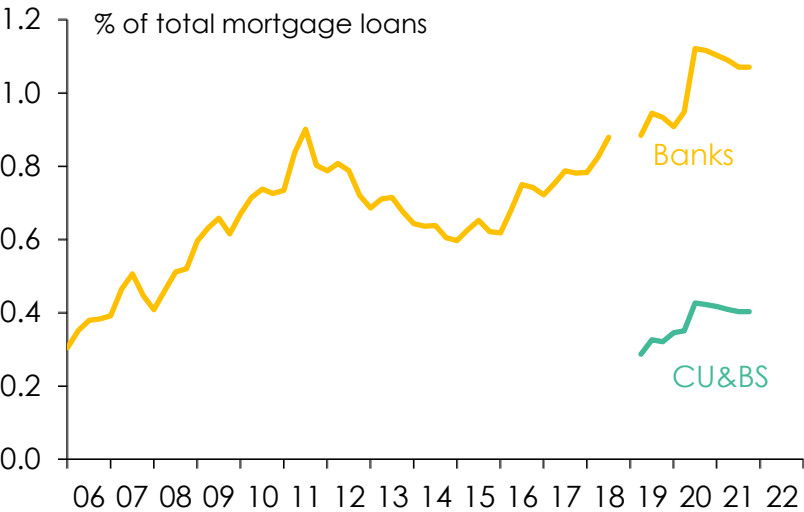
Shares of housing finance



High LVR loans as a pc of total



Non-performing mortgage loans

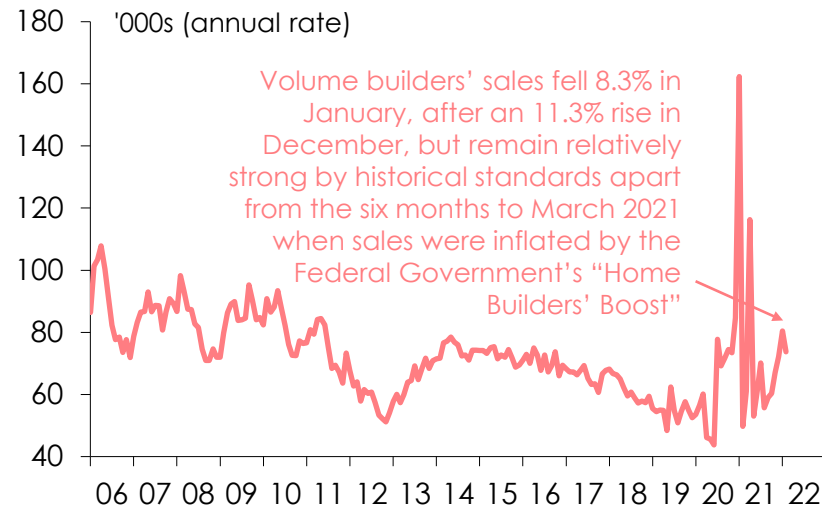


Sources: ABS, [Lending Indicators](#); Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), [Quarterly authorised deposit-taking institution statistics](#). January housing finance data will be released on 1st March; December; APRA data on ADI property exposures for the December quarter will be released on 15th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

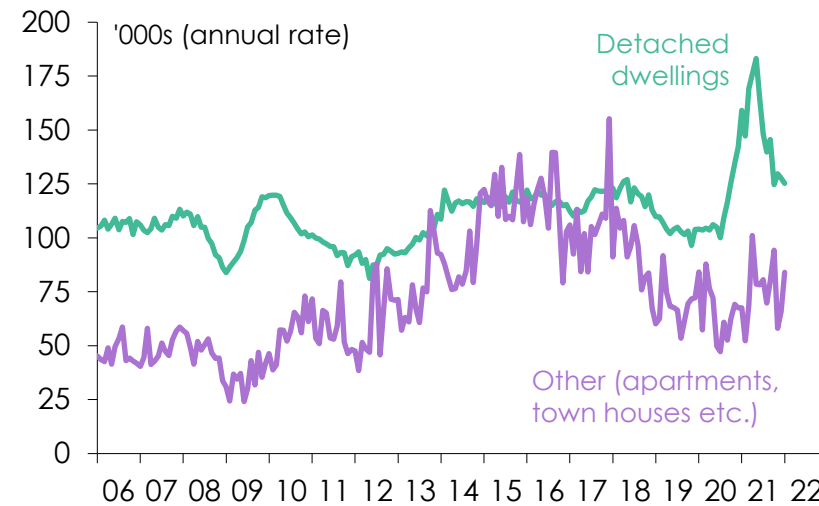
Residential building approvals rose again in December, due to a surge in approvals for apartments, while renovation activity remained strong

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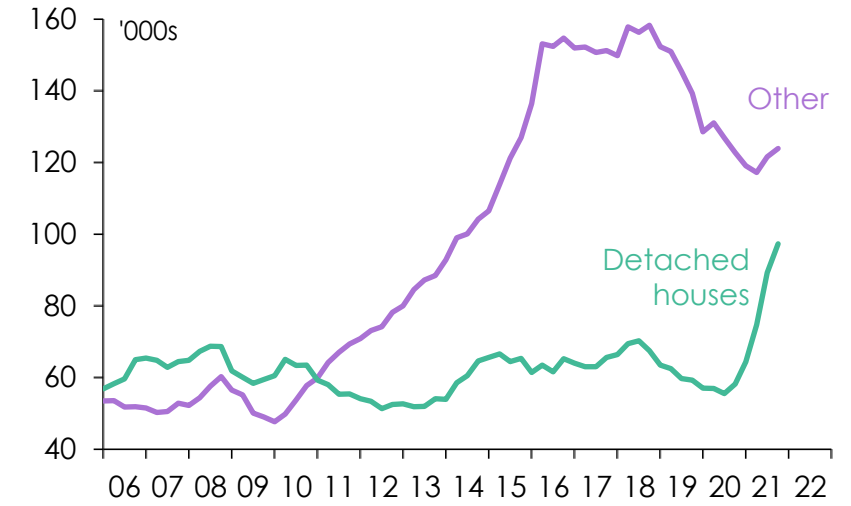
Large builders' new home sales



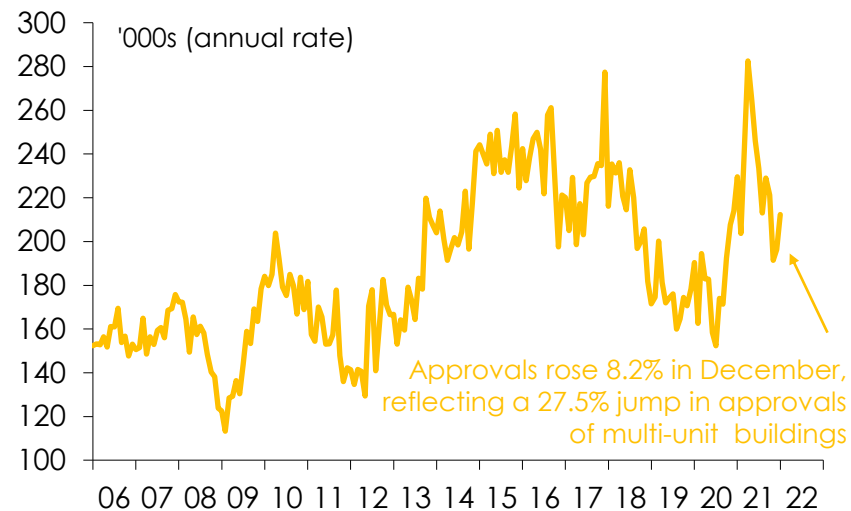
Building approvals, by type



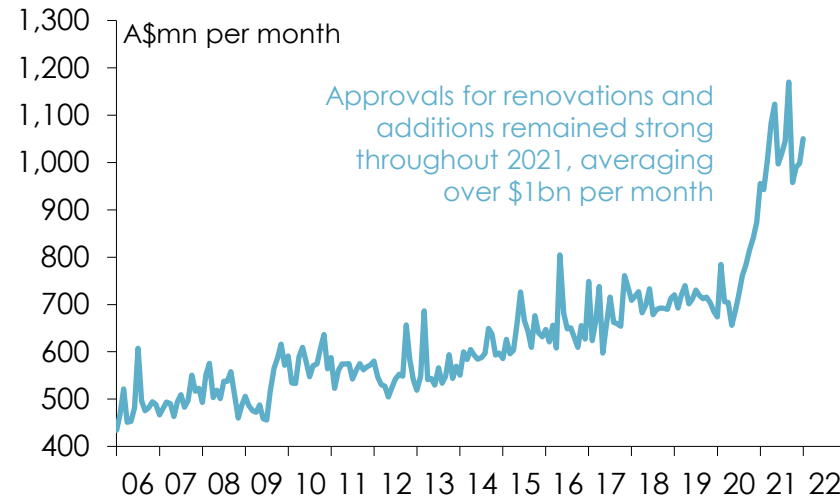
Dwellings under construction



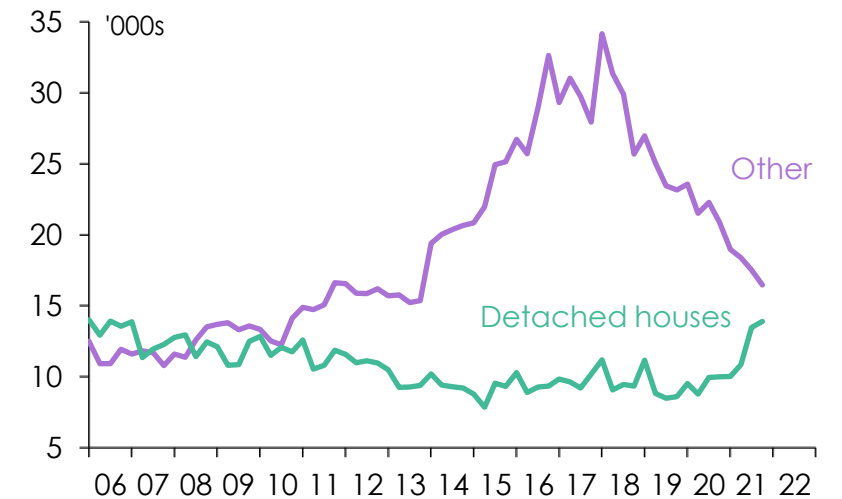
Residential building approvals



Alterations & additions approved



'Pipeline' of work yet to be started

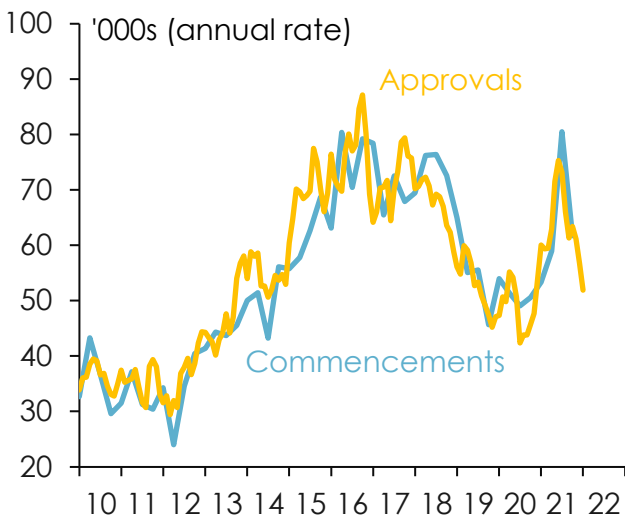


Note: 'New home sales' are of detached dwellings only and exclude small-scale builders. Sources: ABS, [Building Approvals](#) and [Building Activity](#); Housing Industry Association. January building approvals data will be released on 3rd March; December quarter dwellings under construction and 'pipeline' data on 13th April. [Return to "What's New"](#).

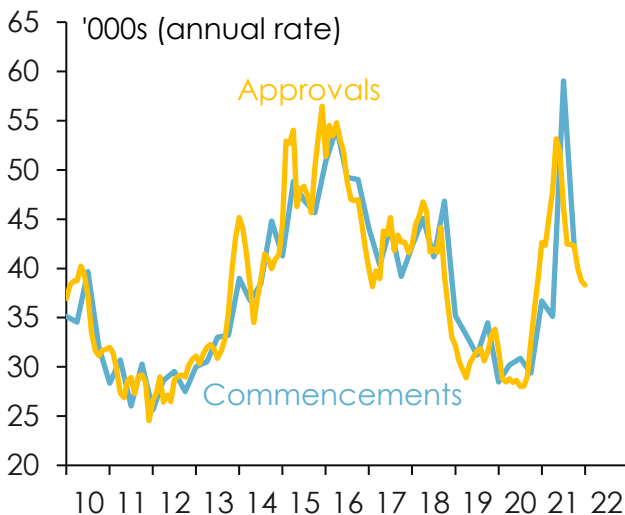
Building approvals have fallen in every state since the end of the “First Home Builders’ Boost” scheme last March, but least in Victoria and SA

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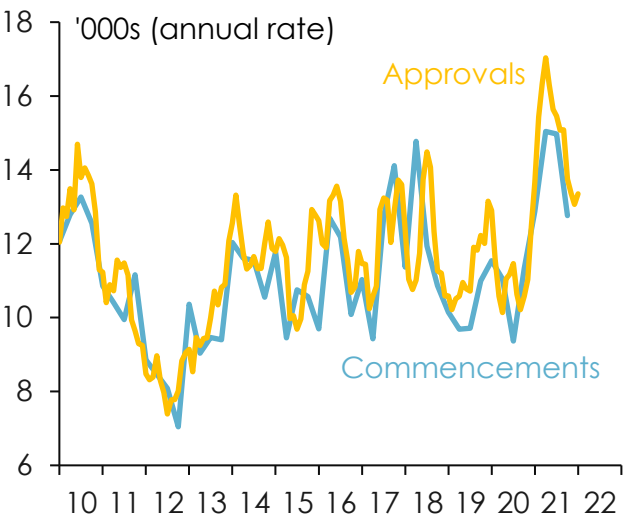
New South Wales



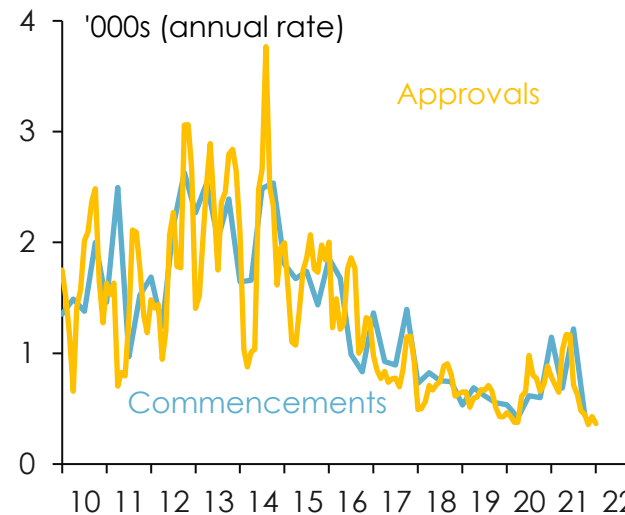
Queensland



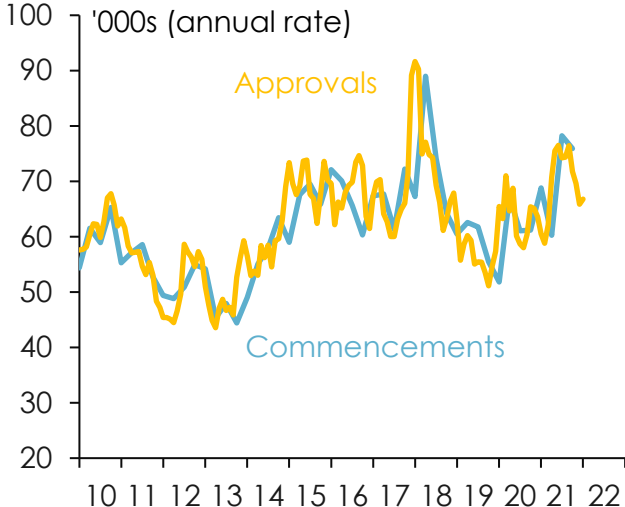
South Australia



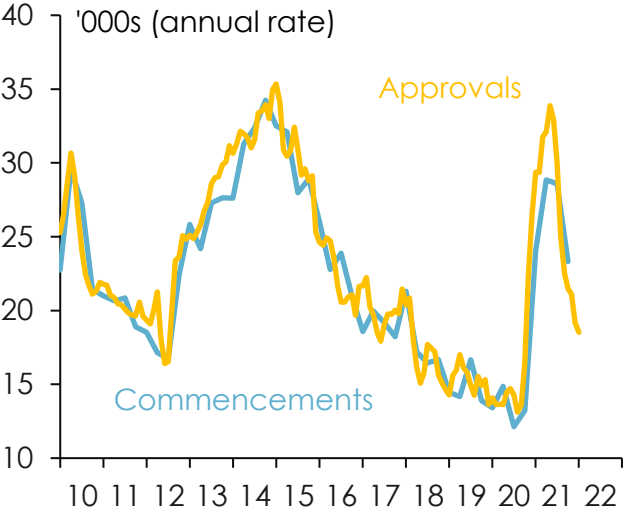
Northern Territory



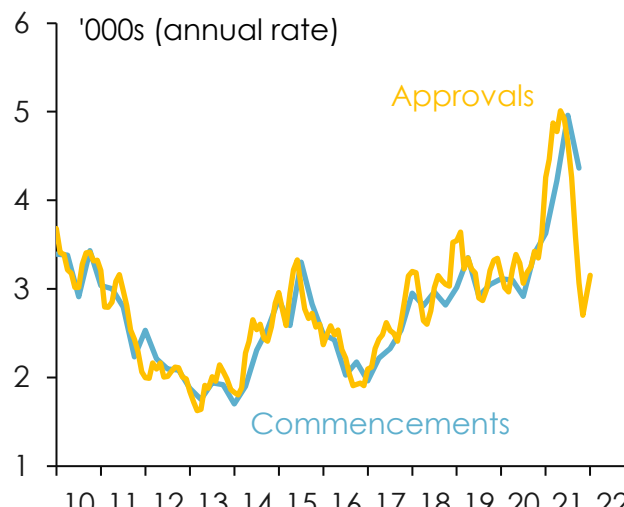
Victoria



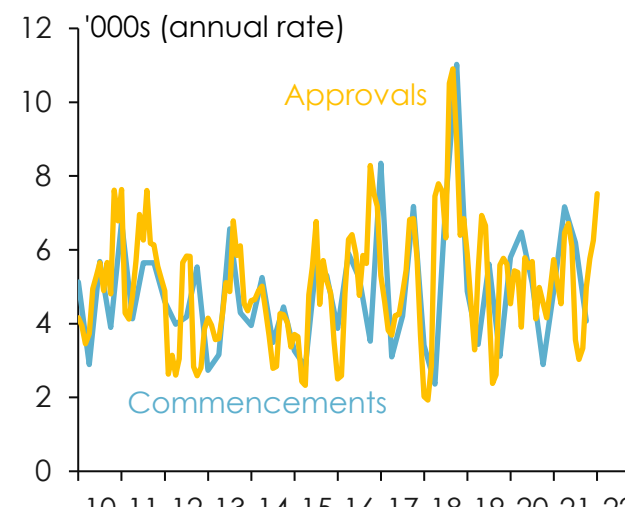
Western Australia



Tasmania



Australian Capital Territory



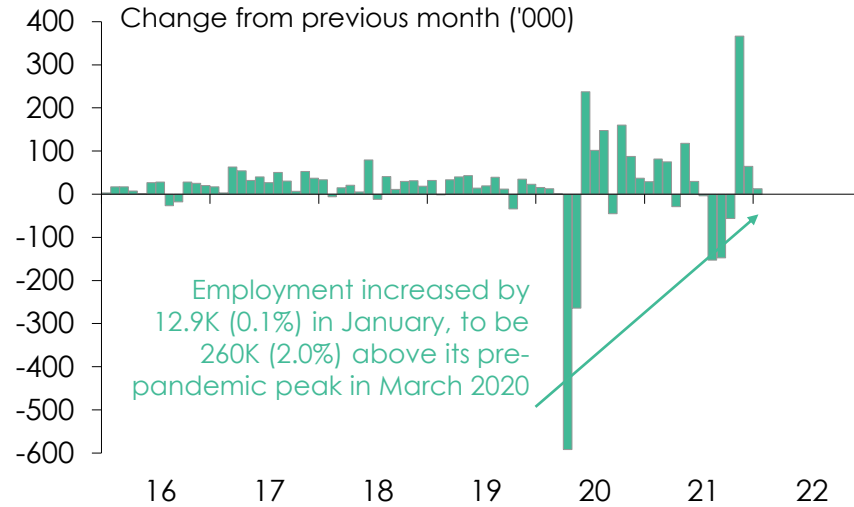
Note: Approvals data are shown as three-month moving averages; approvals data for the NT and ACT are not seasonally adjusted. Commencements data are quarterly.
Sources: ABS, [Building Approvals](#) and [Building Activity](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

The labour market

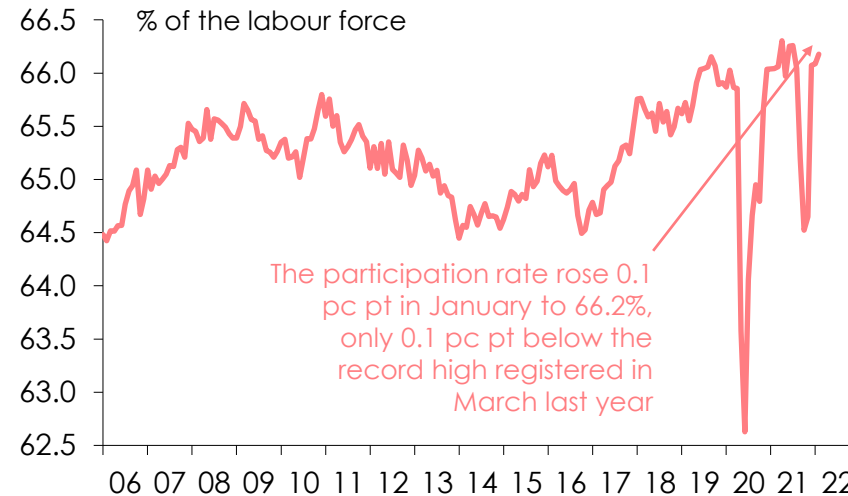
Employment rose 0.1% in January, but a large number of people weren't able to go to work because of omicron, resulting in an 8.8% fall in hours

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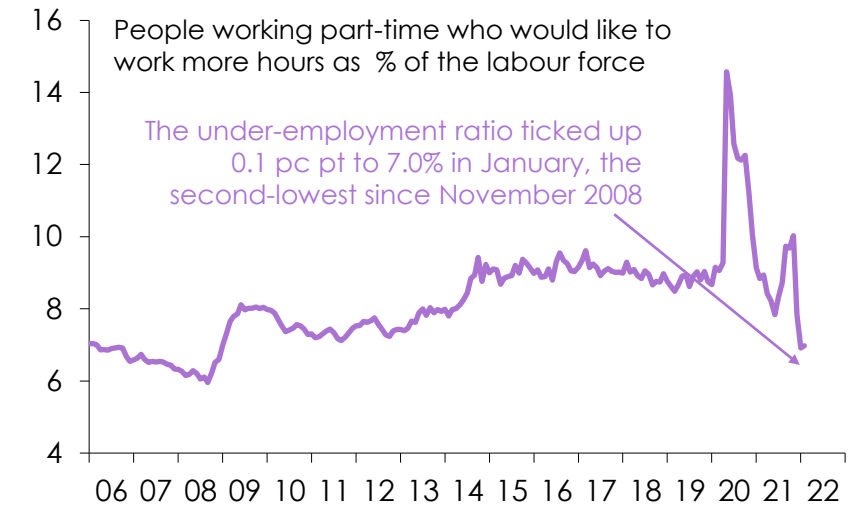
Employment



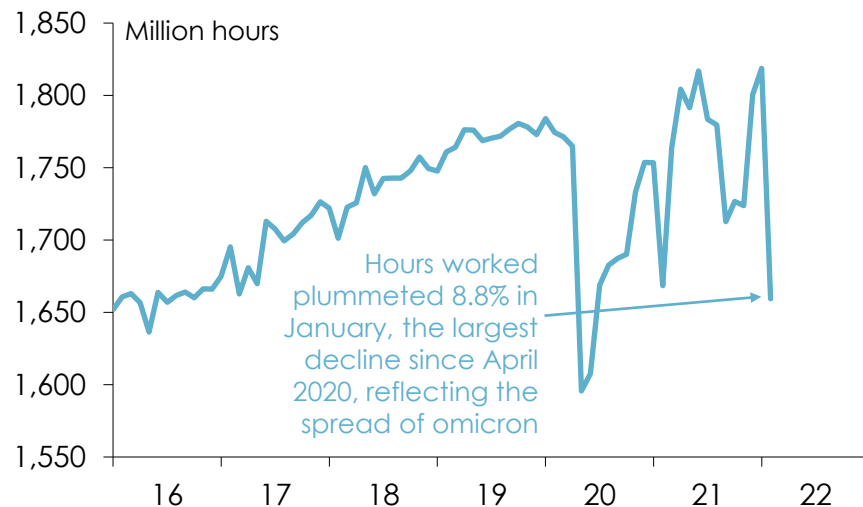
Labour force participation rate



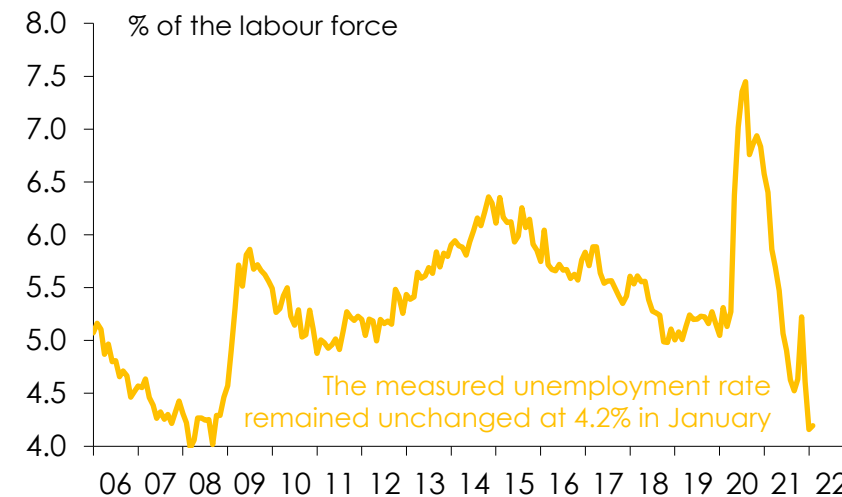
Under-employment ratio



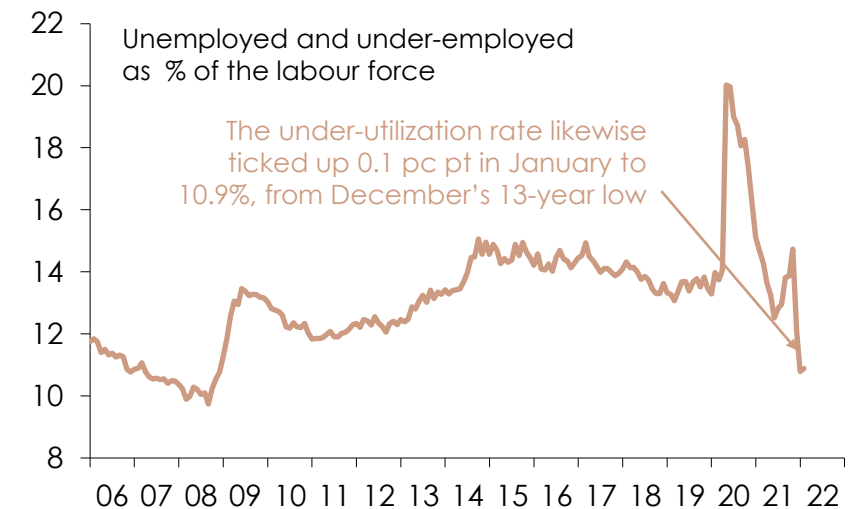
Total hours worked



Unemployment rate



'Under-utilization' rate

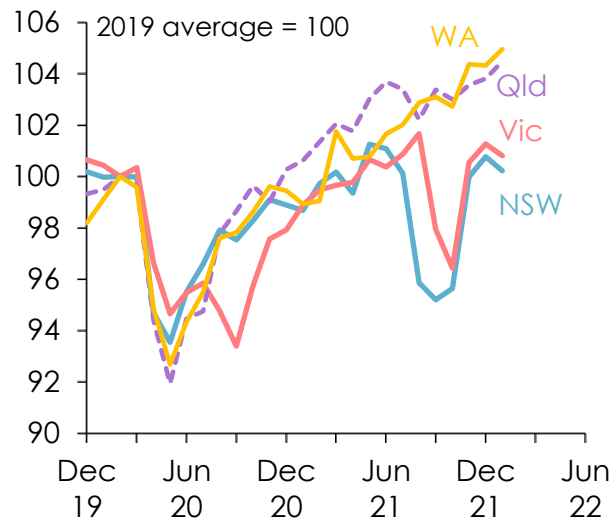


Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia](#), January. February data will be released on 17th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

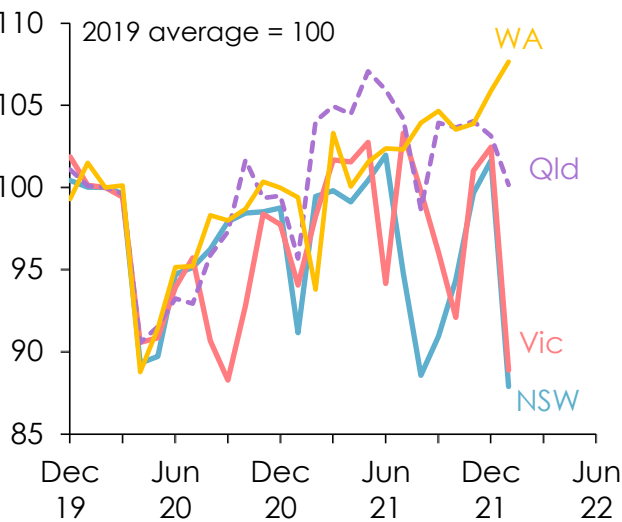
New South Wales and Victoria again accounted for most of the jobs gains in December – but employment hasn't fully recovered in the ACT

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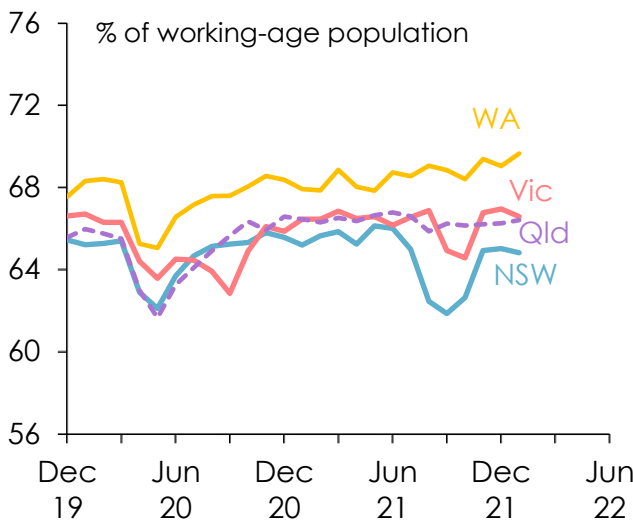
Employment



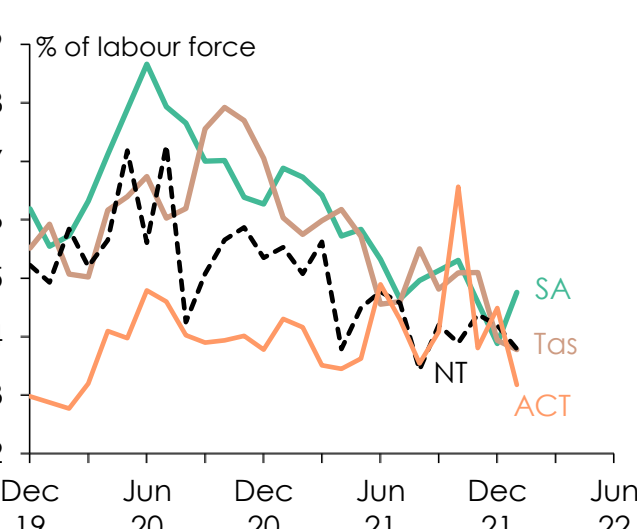
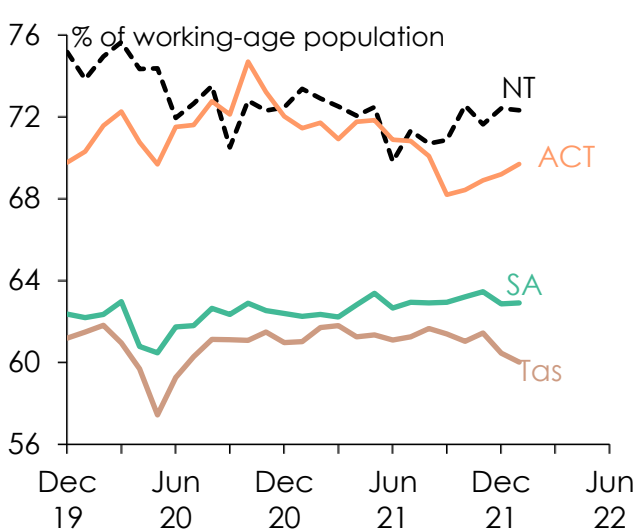
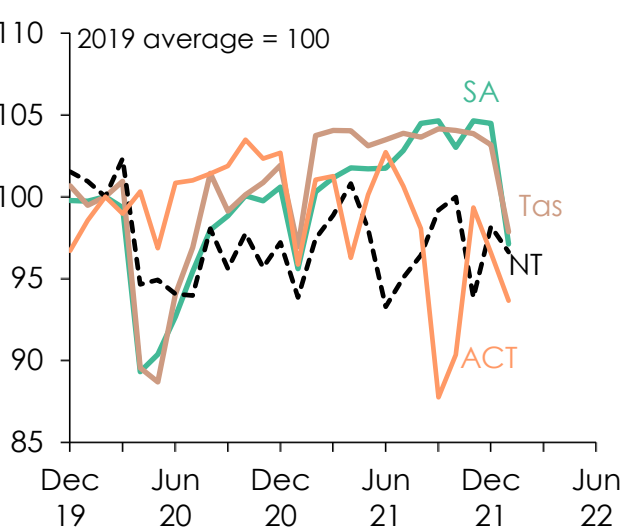
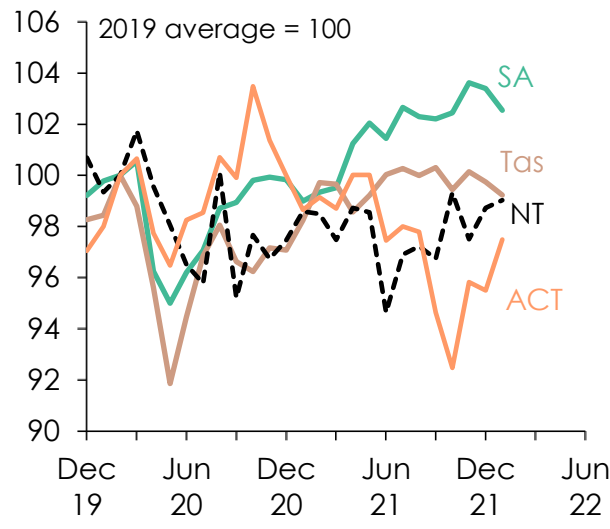
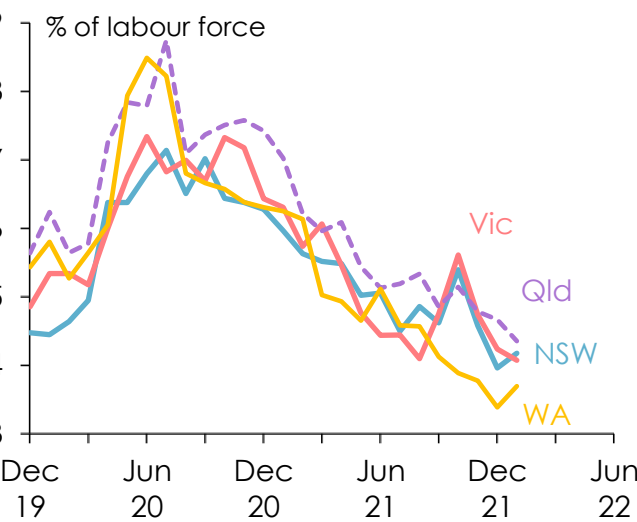
Hours worked



Participation rates



Unemployment rates



Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia](#), January. February data will be released on 17th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The 'effective' unemployment rate rose to 5.8% in January, from 5.0% in December, but well below the 10.3-10.5% rates of August-October last year

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Alternative measures of unemployment



Note: the data on people working zero hours is not seasonally adjusted.

Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia](#), January. February data will be released on 17th March.

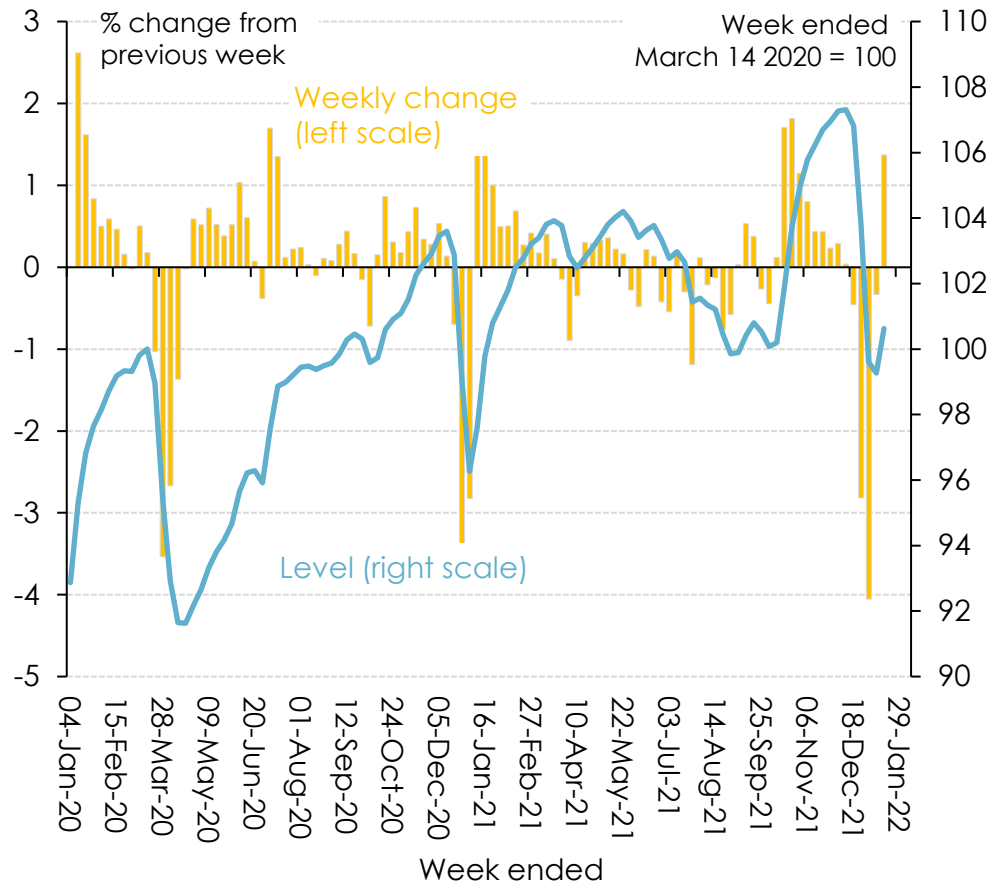
[Return to "What's New"](#).

- ❑ The number of people counted as 'employed' but who worked zero hours for 'economic reasons' (no or insufficient work, or 'stood down') peaked at 249K last August, but by December had fallen to less than 39K; while the number of people counted as 'employed' but who worked zero hours for 'other reasons' (apart from being leave), which peaked at 371K in August, fell to 46K in December
- ❑ Almost 362K people had apparently 'dropped out' of the work force in September – and this number remained at 336K in October – but by December fewer than 35K of them were still out of the workforce
- ❑ In January, the number of people counted as 'employed' but working zero hours for 'economic' reasons rose to 96.5K (some of which may be seasonal), while the number working zero hours for 'other' reasons (apart from being on leave) rose to 117.9K
- ❑ There were also 15.7K people who at face value appear to have remained out of the labour force since the beginning of lockdowns in mid-2021
- ❑ Adding these categories of people back to the 'official' count of unemployed people gives an 'effective' unemployment rate in January of 5.8%, up from 5.0% in December but well below the 10.3-10.5% rates recorded in August, September and October
- ❑ Note these numbers don't include the 3.25mn workers taking annual leave in January (almost 500K more than in January last year) or the 450K (cf. the average since April 2020 of 134K) working zero hours because they were on sick leave

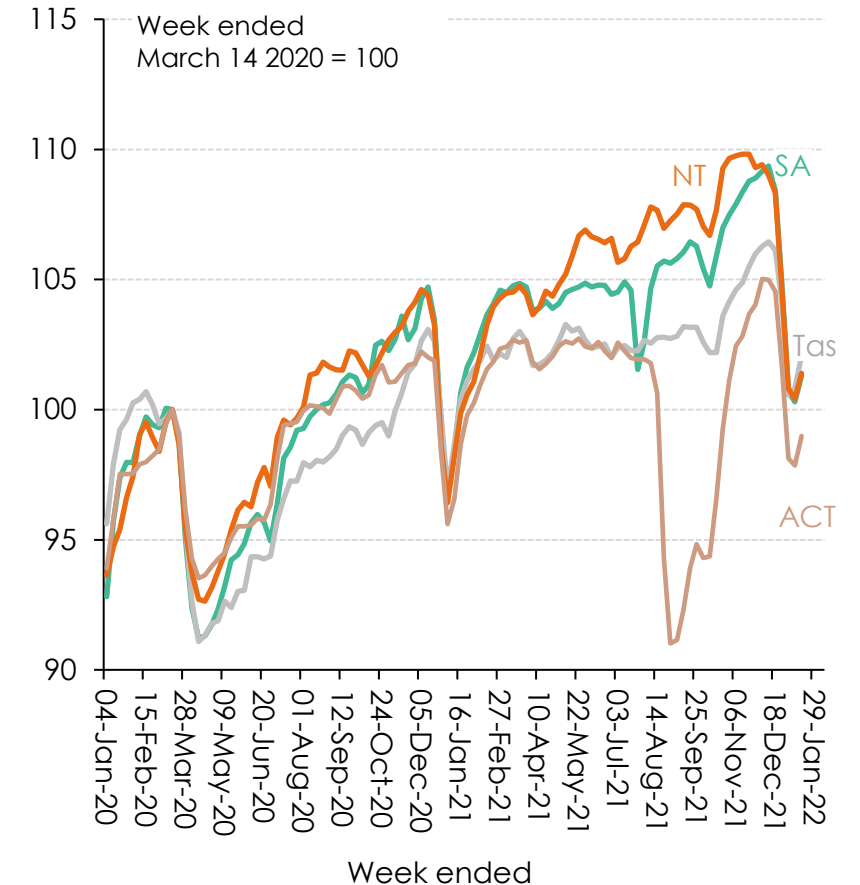
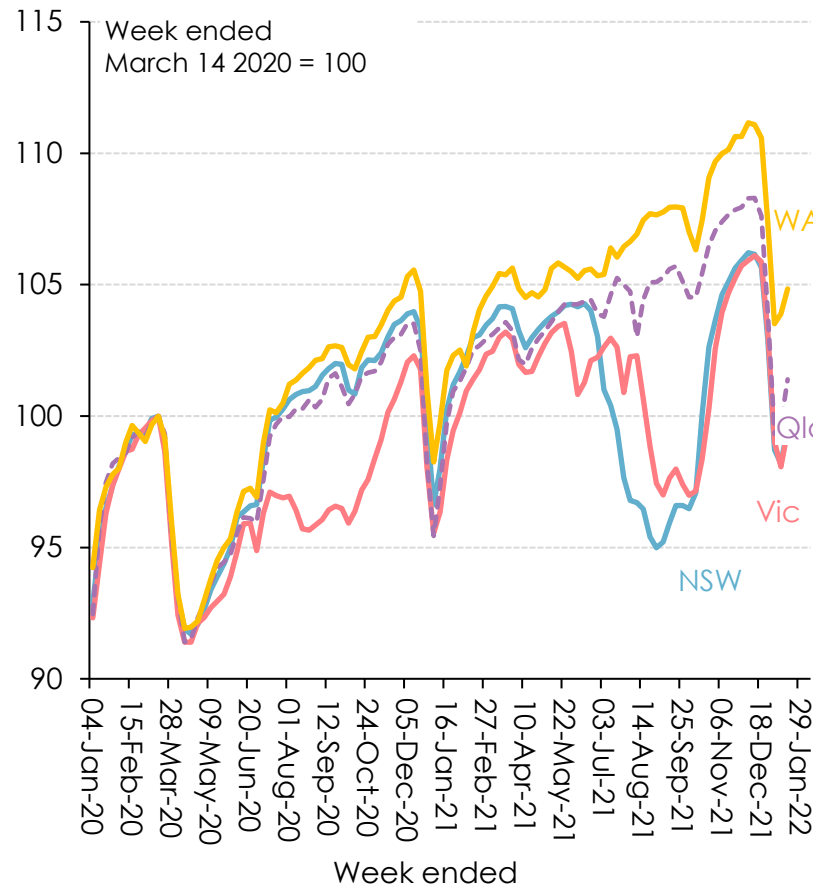
Payroll jobs recovered less rapidly in the first two weeks of this year from the normal end-year downturn than they did in the first two weeks of 2021

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Level and weekly change in the number of payroll jobs



Payroll jobs by State & Territory



- ❑ The number of payroll jobs fell by 7.2% over the last three weeks of December 2021, similar to what occurred in 2020 – but rose by only 1.0% over the first two weeks of January, cf. a rise of 3.7% over the first two weeks of 2021

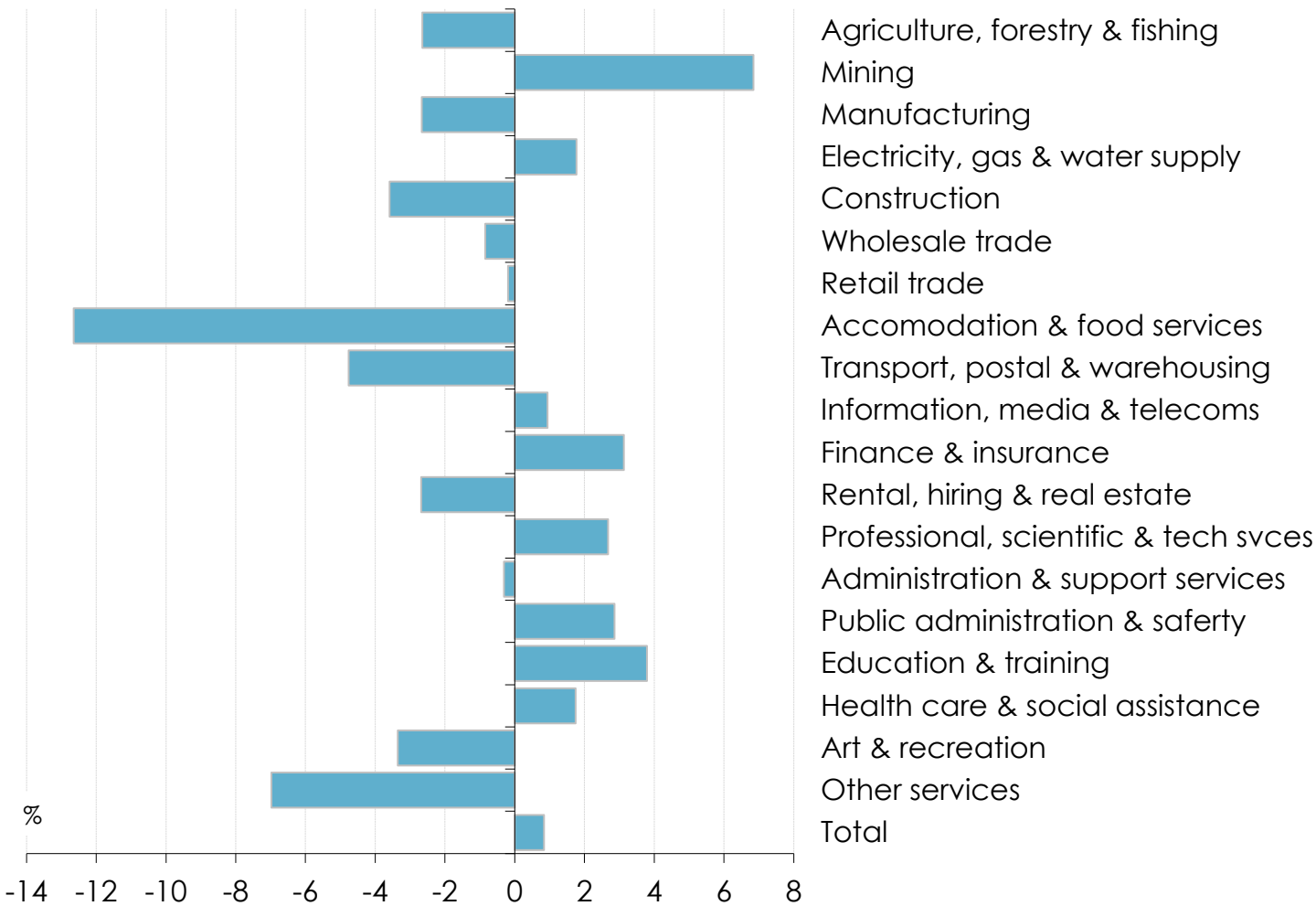
Source: ABS, [Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia](#). Data refers to the number of payroll jobs at businesses participating in the Australian Taxation Office's Single Touch Payroll system, which covers 99% of employers with 20 or more employees and about 71% of smaller employees. People with two or more jobs (about 6% of the total) are double-counted; employers and the self-employed are not included. Data are not seasonally adjusted (so at least some of the week-to-week variations could be due to 'normal' seasonal factors); and the two most recent weeks are subject to (what have often been large) revisions. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The largest falls in payroll jobs over the past year have been in tourism & hospitality-related sectors, transport and construction

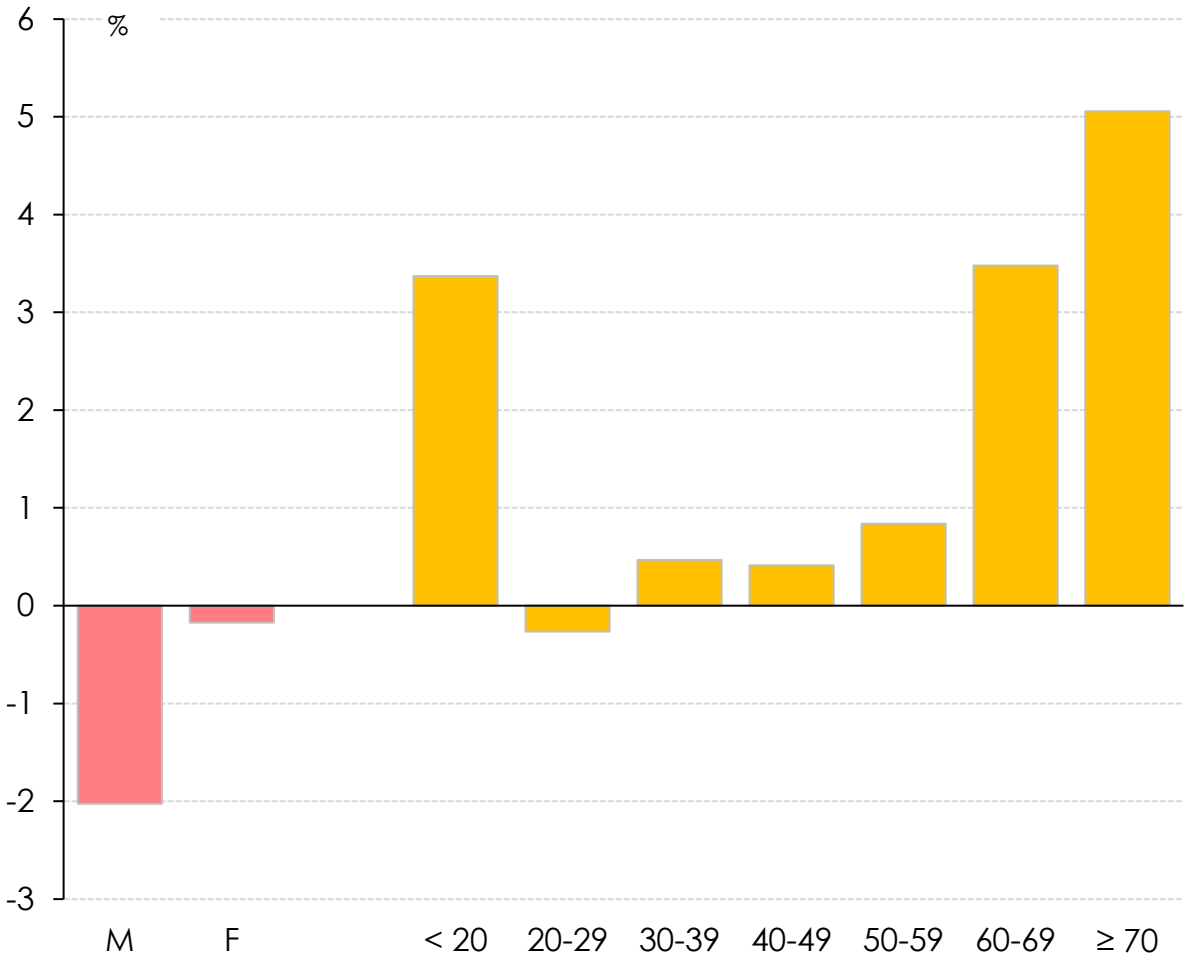
THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Net change in payroll jobs between week ended 16th January 2021 and week ended 15th January 2022

By industry



By gender and age

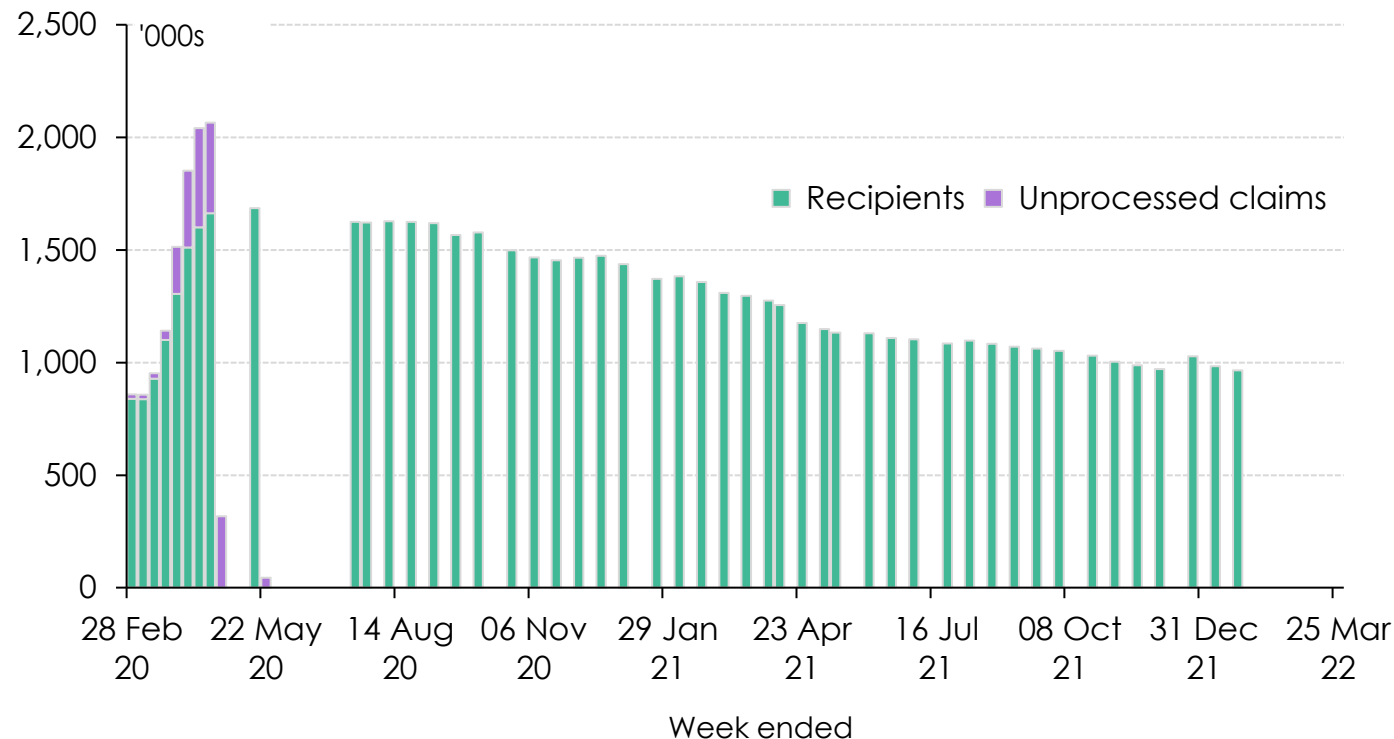


Source: ABS, [Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia](#). Data refers to the number of payroll jobs at businesses participating in the Australian Taxation Office's Single Touch Payroll system, which covers 99% of employers with 20 or more employees and about 71% of smaller employees. People with two or more jobs (about 6% of the total) are double-counted; employers and the self-employed are not included.. [Return to "What's New"](#).

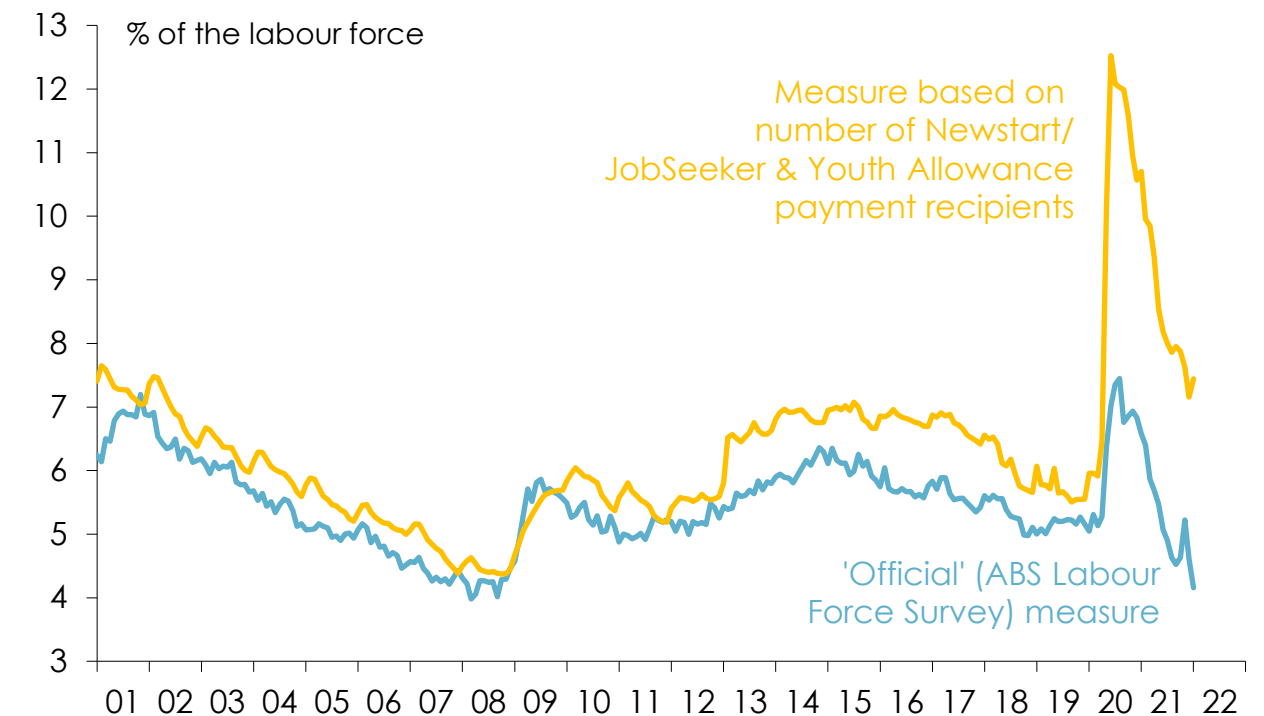
The number of people receiving joblessness-related income support payments at the end of January was the lowest since the onset of Covid-19

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Number of people receiving or seeking Newstart/JobSeeker or Youth Allowance payments



Jobless income support beneficiaries and labour force survey unemployed as a pc of the labour force



- ❑ Ministers receive weekly data on the number of people on JobSeeker and Youth Allowance (Other) benefits – which since late July last year the Department of Social Services has made this available (roughly) every second week to the Senate Select Committee examining the Government's responses to Covid-19
- ❑ The number of people receiving JobSeeker or Youth Allowance (Other) payments fell by 19,550 (2.0%) between 14th and 28th January, to just under 965,000 - the lowest number since 20th March 2020, ie since the onset of Covid-19

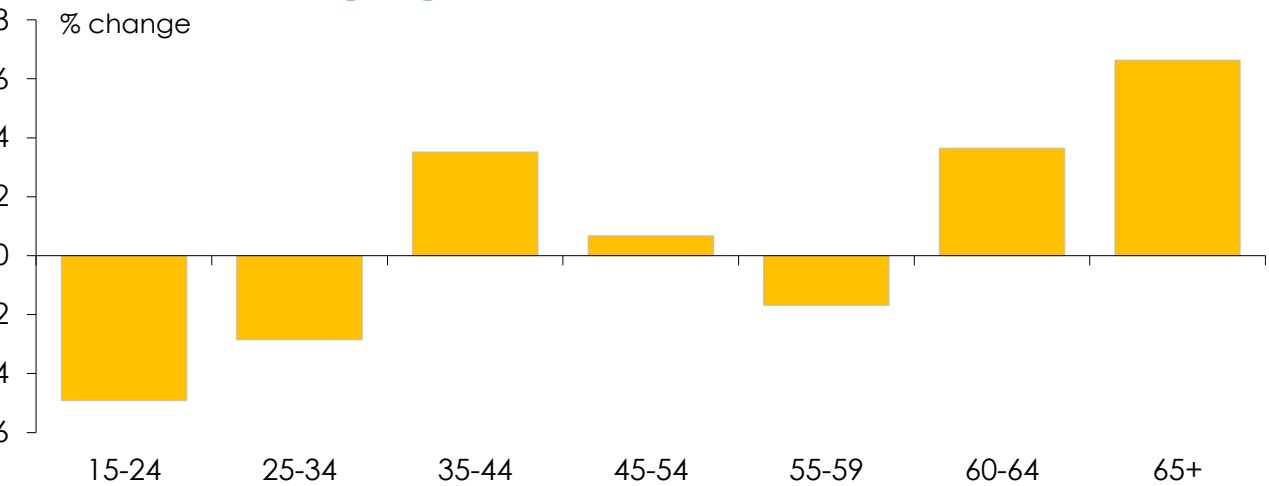
Sources: Department of Social Services, [JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance Recipients - monthly profile](#), ABS; Senate Select Committee on Covid-19, [Additional documents](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

The decline in employment among young people over the past two years reflects the fact that many of them (students?) have left the country

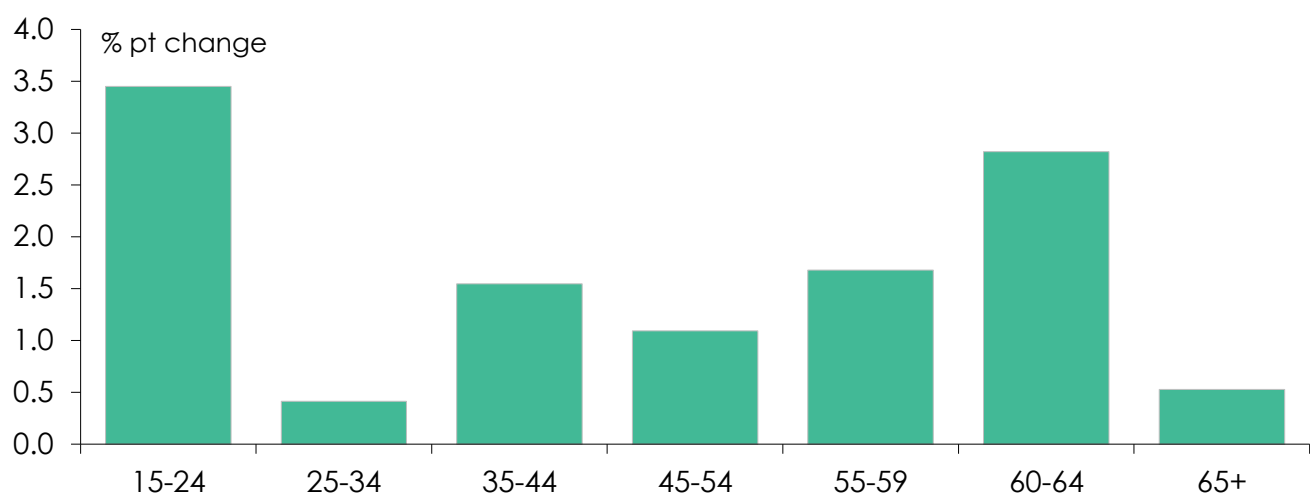
THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Changes over the two years to December 2021, by age groups

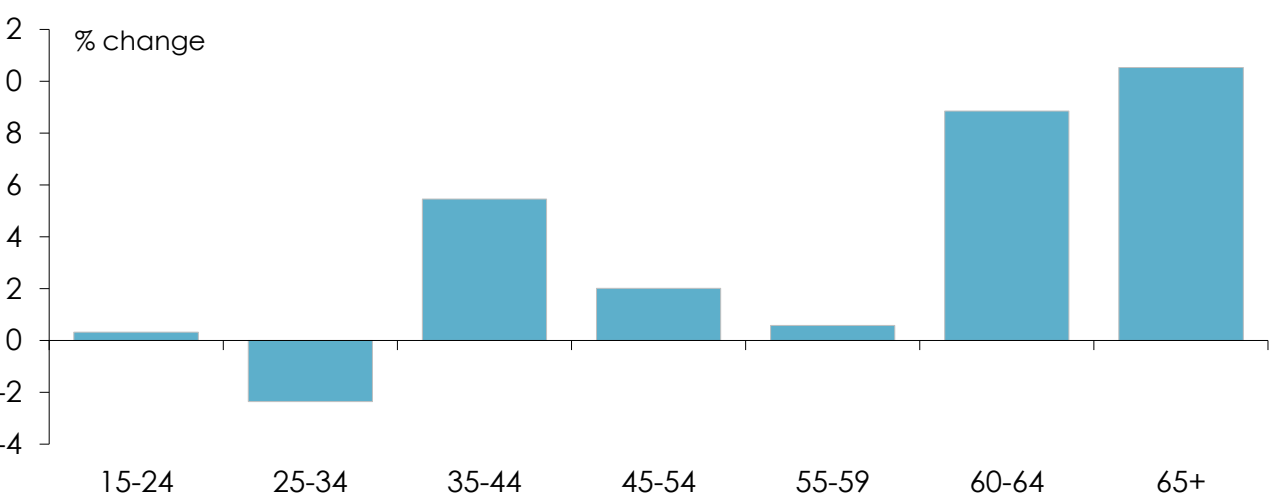
Civilian working age population



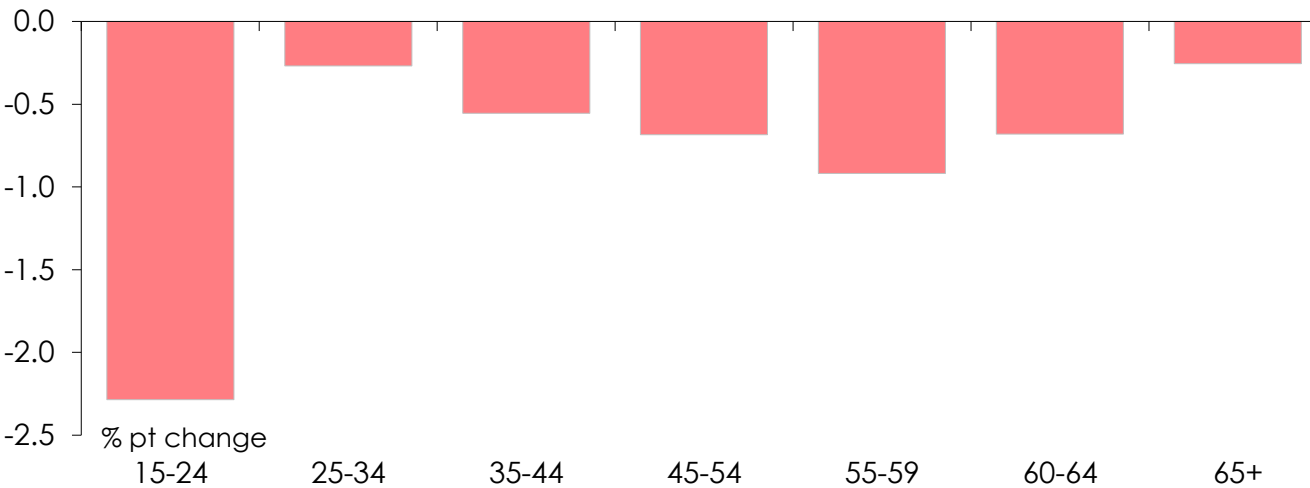
Employment-population ratio



Employment



Unemployment rates

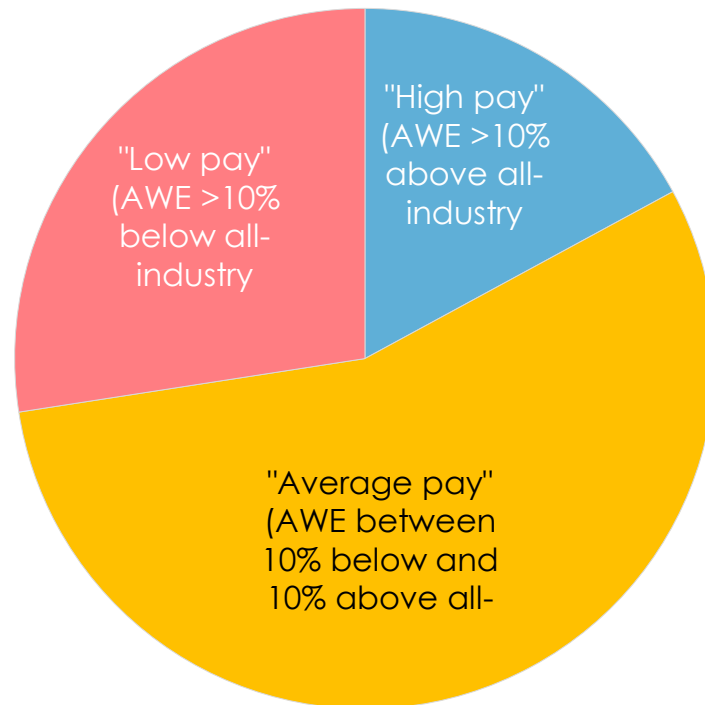


Note: The data from which the above charts are derived isn't seasonally adjusted, hence the need to make comparisons between December 2019 and December 2021.
Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed](#), December 2021; January data will be released on 24th February. [Return to "What's New"](#).

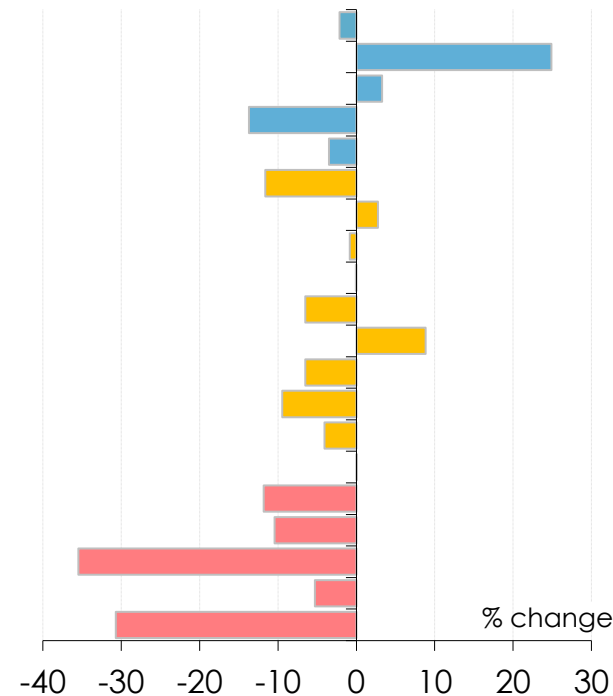
Workers in low-pay industries experienced the bulk of job losses during the downturn and the greatest difficulty regaining them since then

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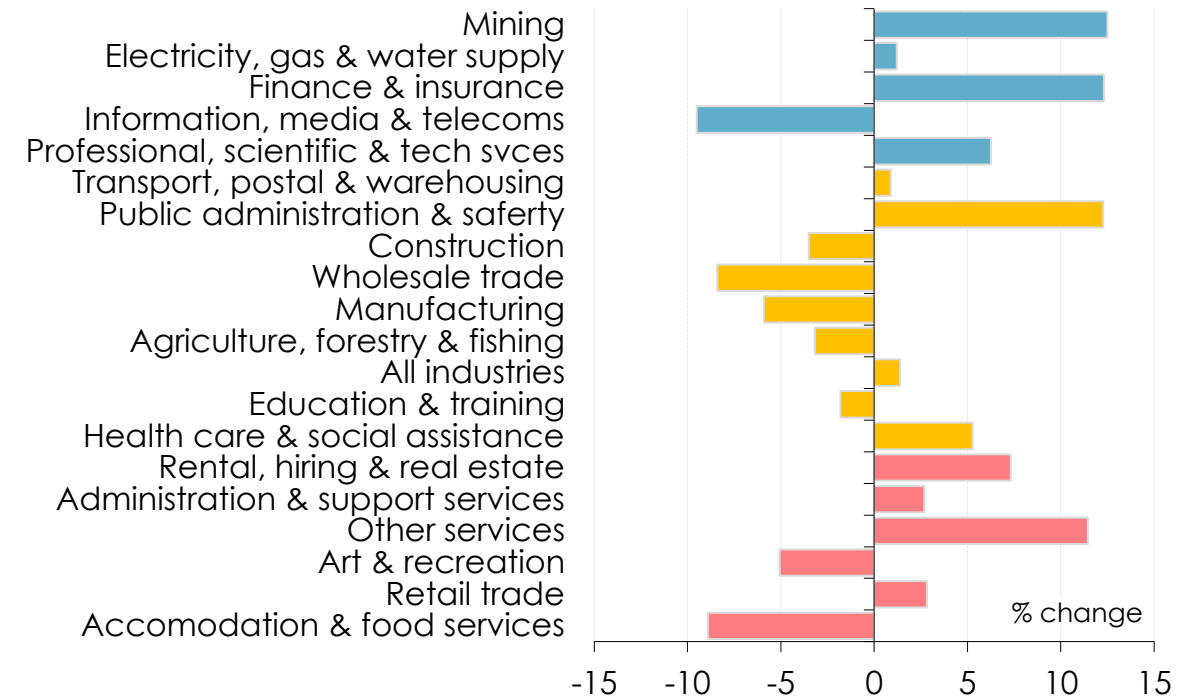
Composition of employment by industry ranked by average weekly earnings, February 2020



Change in employment by industry
February-May 2020



February 2020 – November 2021



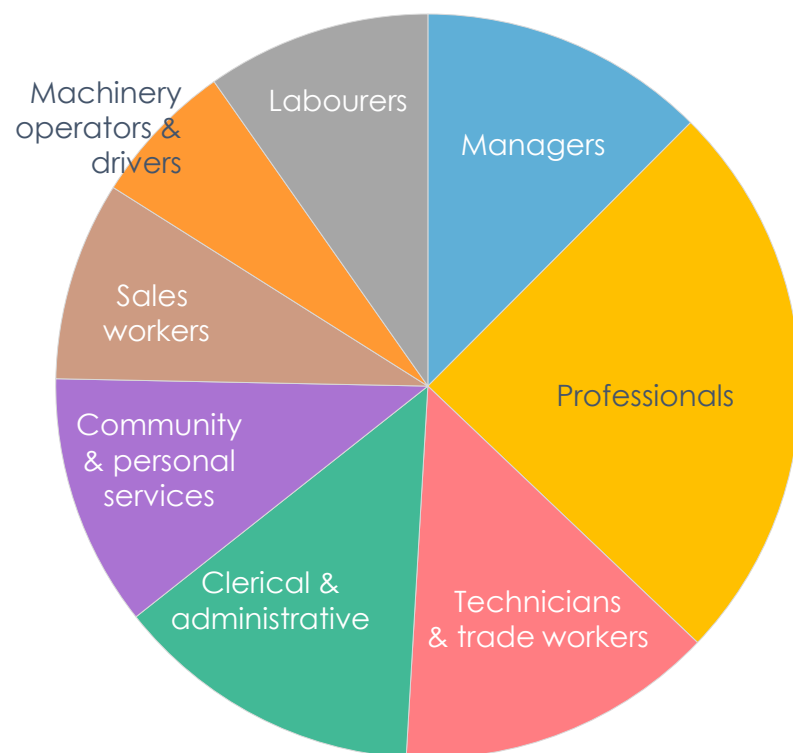
- ❑ Industries with average earnings which are 10% or more below average accounted for 27½% of the pre-pandemic workforce, but experienced 64% of the job losses between February and May last year – and 89% of job losses between May and August this year – and despite the recovery in November, employment in these industries was only 0.6% higher than in February 2020
- ❑ By contrast employment in “high pay” industries (17% of the pre-pandemic workforce) was 6.4% higher in November than it had been in February last year

Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed](#), November 2021 and [Average Weekly Earnings, Australia](#), November 2019. Labour force survey data on employment by occupation are available only for the middle month of each quarter: February 2021 data will be released on 24th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

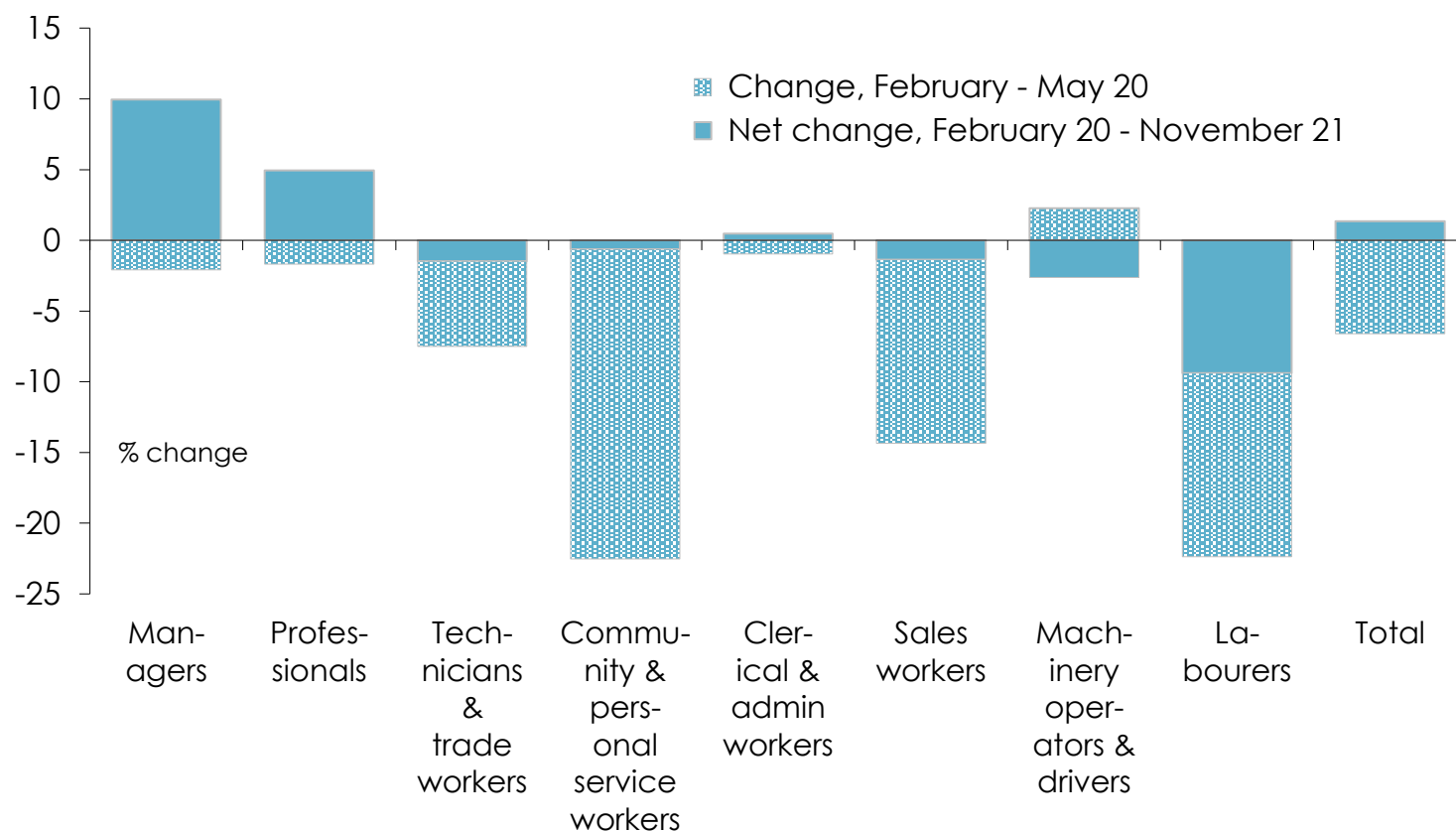
Community & personal service workers, sales workers and labourers have borne the brunt of job losses since the onset of the pandemic

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Employment by major occupation category, February 2020



Change in employment between February 2020 and November 2021, by occupation



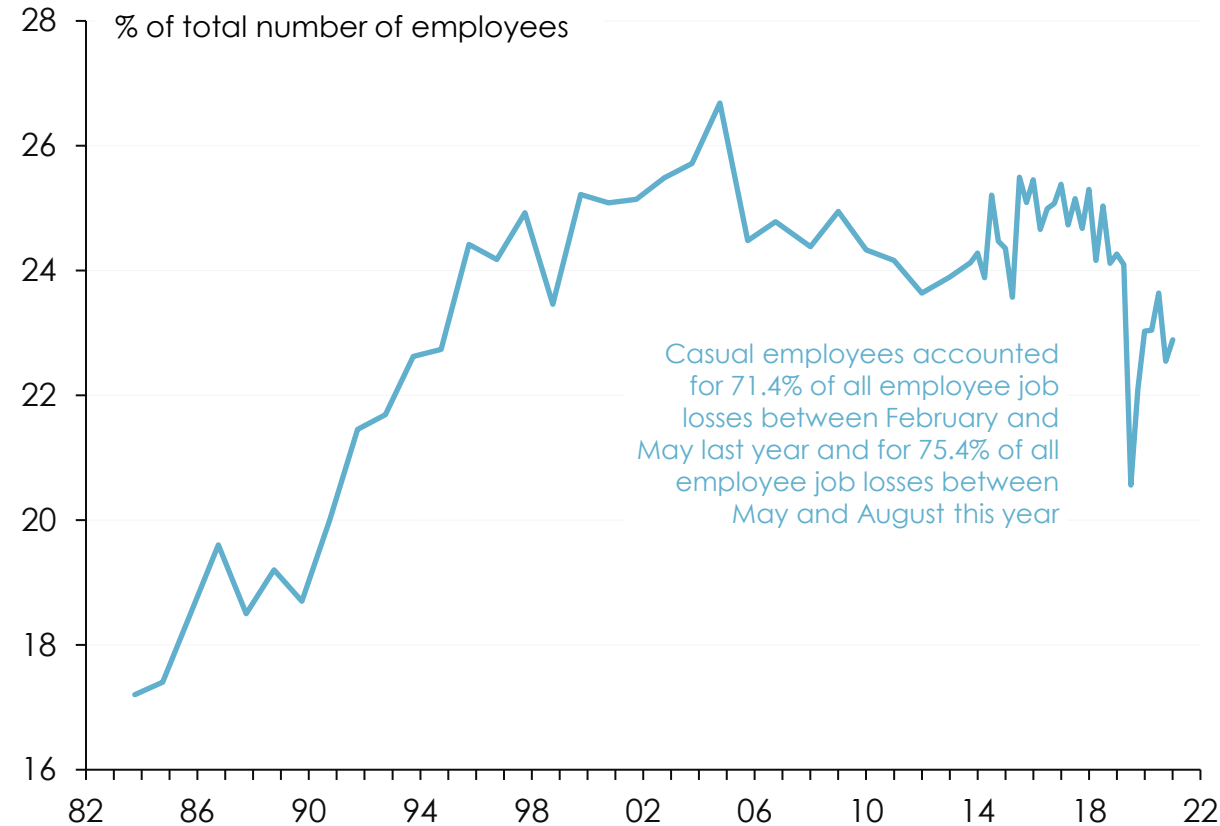
- ❑ Community & personal services workers, sales workers and labourers accounted for 29% of the pre-covid work force, but experienced 73% of the job losses between February and May last year – and for 73% (again) of job losses between May and August this year – and there were 3.8% fewer of them in November than in February last year
- ❑ ... whereas there are 6.6% more employed managers and professionals than there were in February last year

Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed](#), November 2021. Labour force survey data on employment by occupation are available only for the middle month of each quarter: February 2021 data will be released on 24th March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

Contrary to popular belief neither casual jobs nor 'gig economy' jobs have become more commonplace during the past two decades

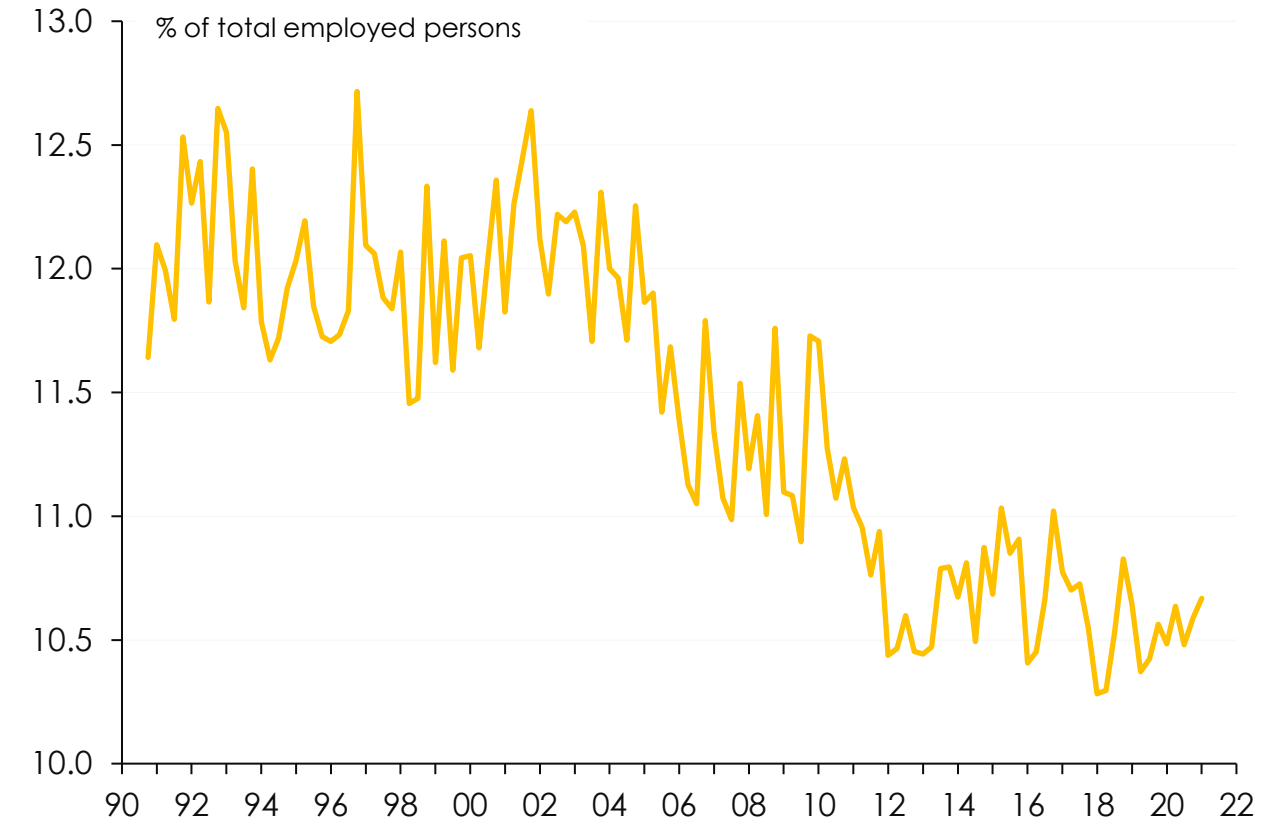
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'Casual' employees (those without any kind of paid leave entitlement) as a pc of total



- ❑ Casual employment increased significantly as a share of the total during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s but has not changed significantly since then – except for a sharp drop during the current recession

Owner-managers of unincorporated enterprises with no employees as a pc of total employment



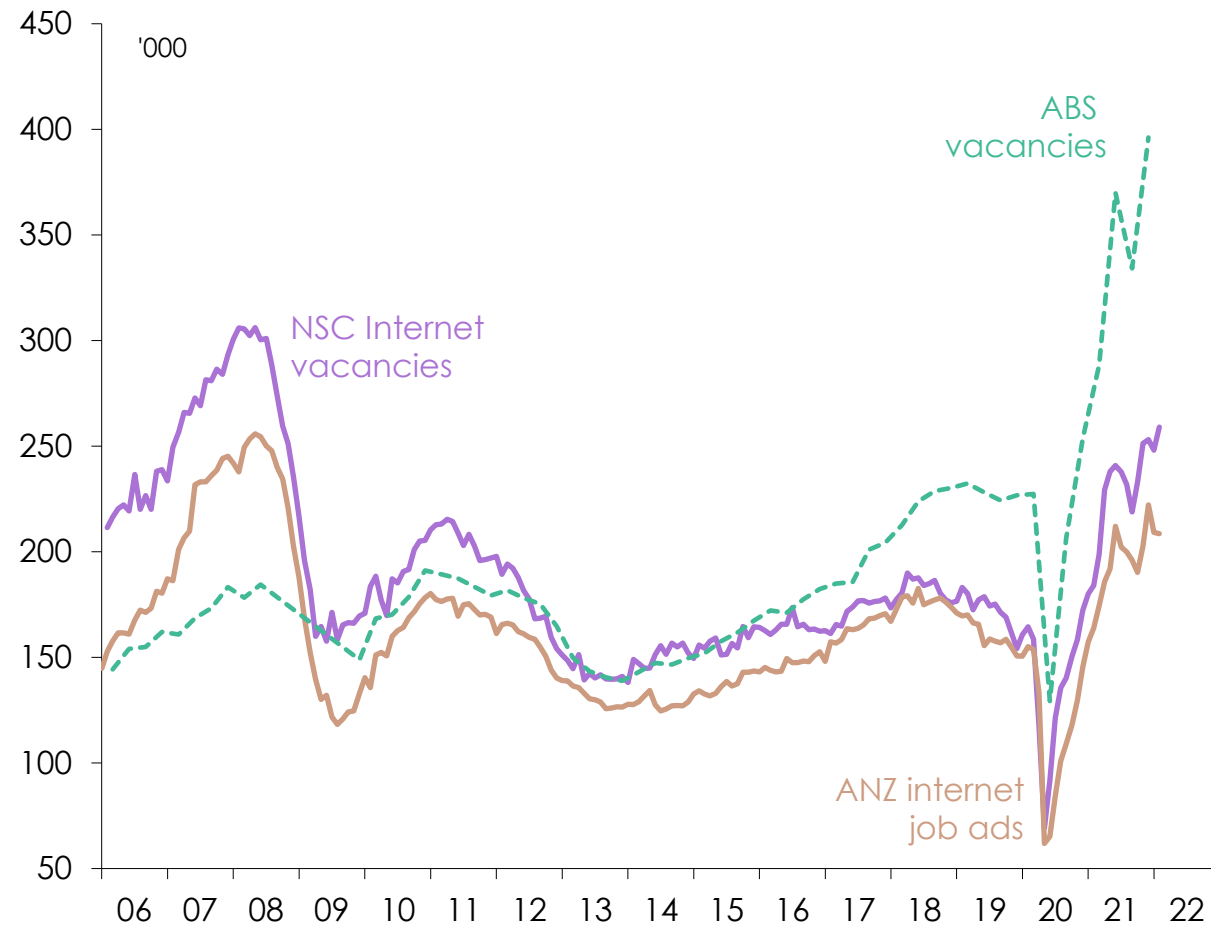
- ❑ 'Independent contractors' have actually declined as a share of the workforce since the early 2000s – had haven't increased during the current recession

Note: data on casual employment are for August between 1984 and 2008; for November between 2009 and 2013; and for the middle month of each quarter since then; data on owner-managers are for the middle month of each quarter. Sources: ABS, [Characteristics of Employment, Australia](#), and earlier equivalents; [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed](#); and [Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

Job vacancies have rebounded swiftly from their recession lows – there are now fewer than two jobseekers for every vacancy, a record low

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Measures of job vacancies



- ❑ Job vacancies as measured by the National Skills Commission reached their highest level since August 2008 in January, although the ANZ measure eased slightly

Ratio of unemployed people to job vacancies

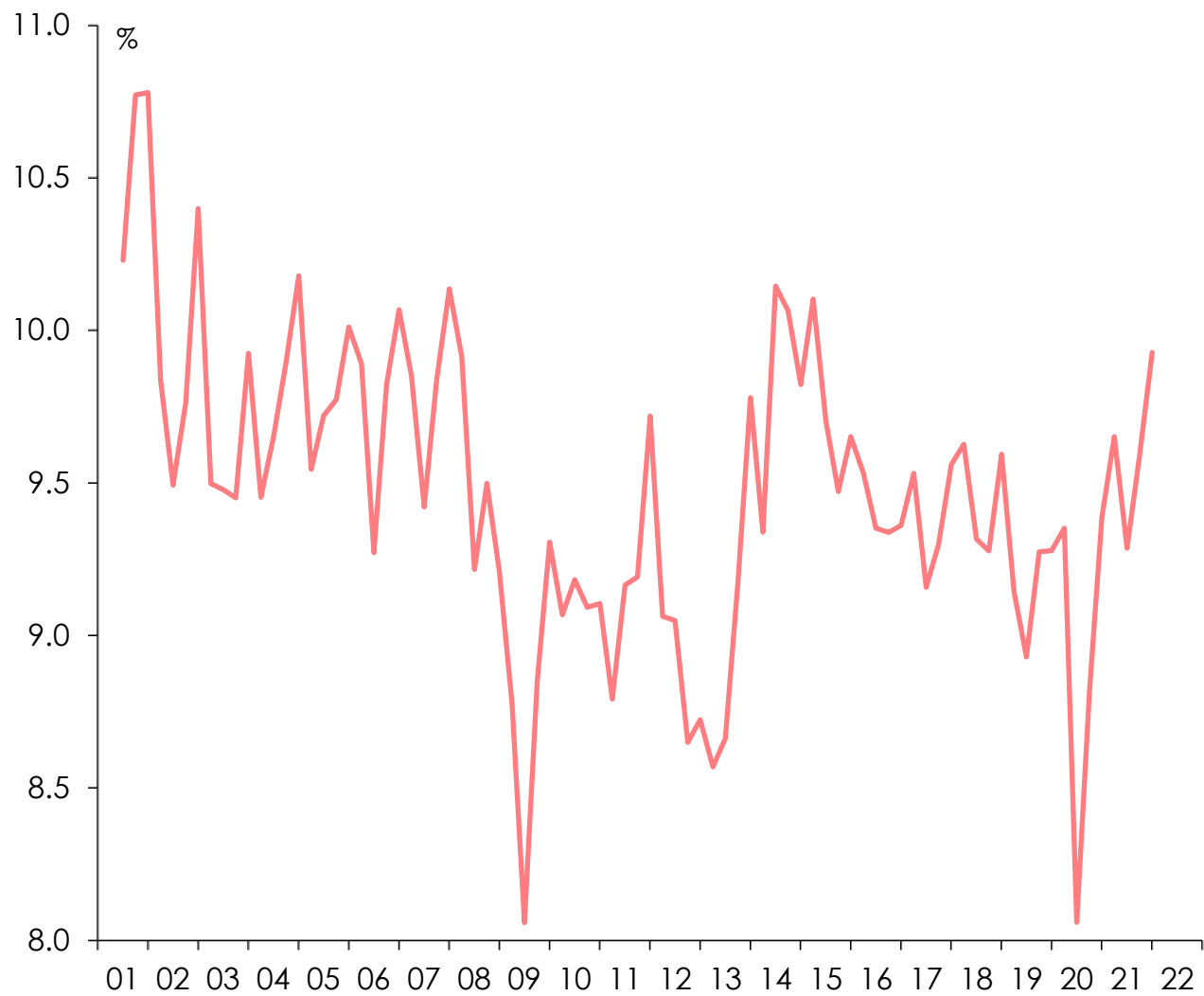


- ❑ There are fewer unemployed people for every job vacancy than at any other time in the past 43 years

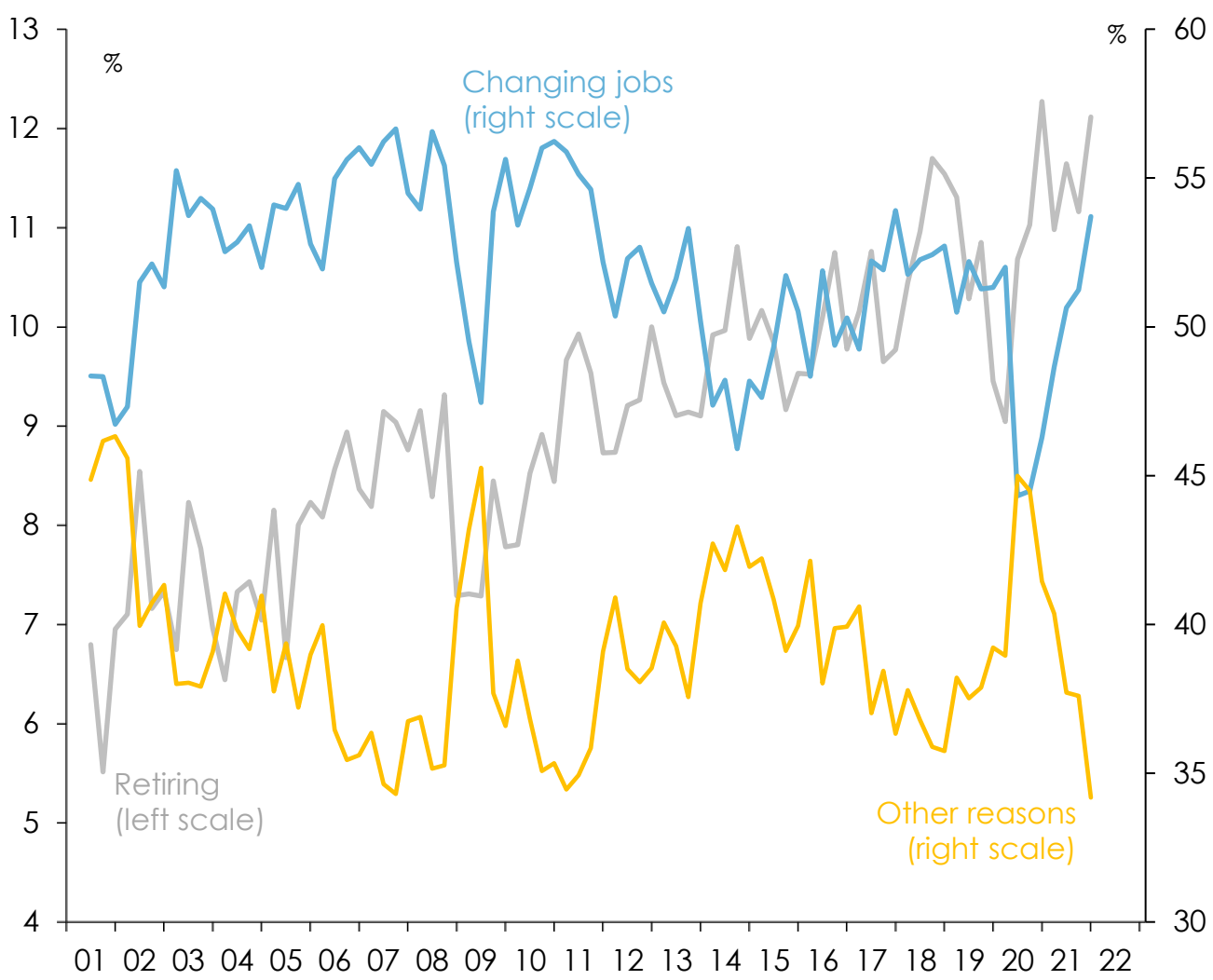
There's no evidence of a US-style 'Great Resignation' in Australia – especially when allowance is made for retirements

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Proportion of employees who don't expect to be with their current employer or business in 12 months' time



Reasons for not expecting to be with their current employer or business in 12 months' time



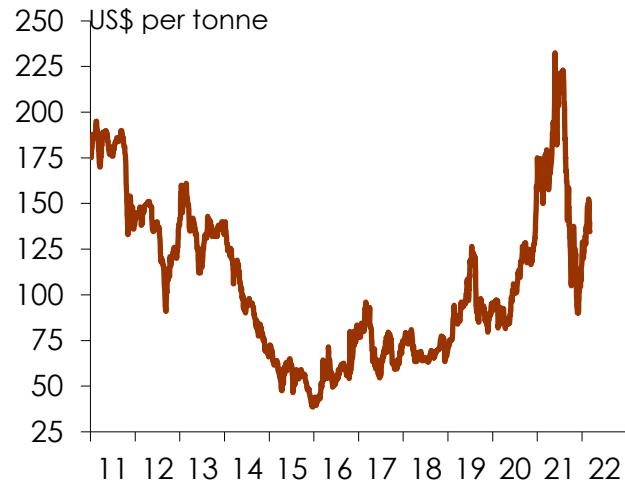
Note: 'other reasons' for not expecting to be with current employer or business in 12 months' time include employer closing or down-sizing; study, travel or family reasons; and the seasonal, casual or temporary characteristics of current employment. Source: ABS, [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table 17](#), November 2021.

Trade and the balance of payments

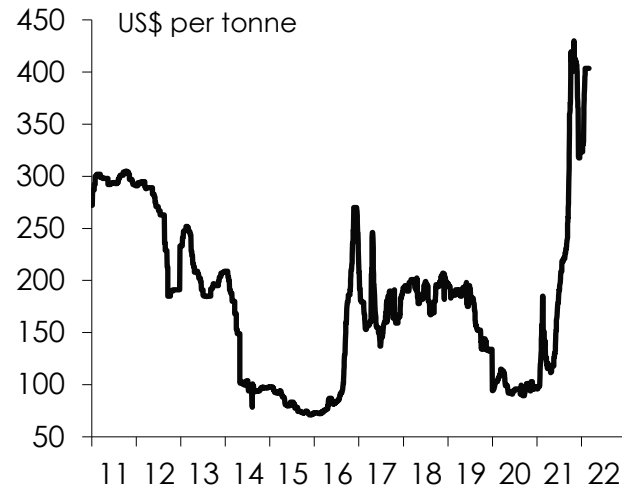
The iron ore price fell more than 10% this week on renewed Chinese regulatory intervention, thermal coal fell 3¾% but base metal prices rose

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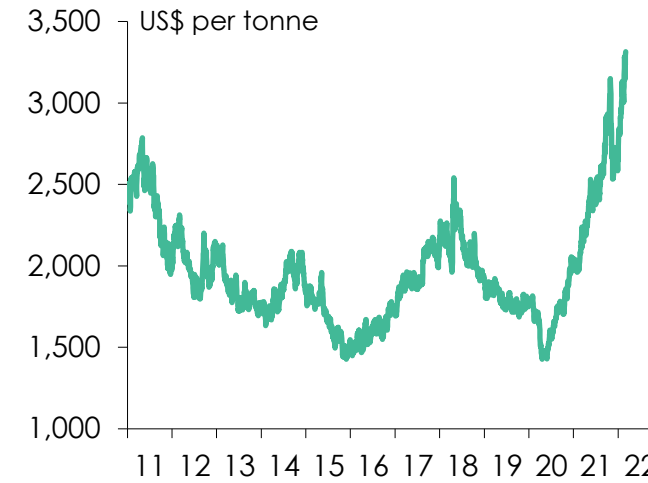
Iron ore



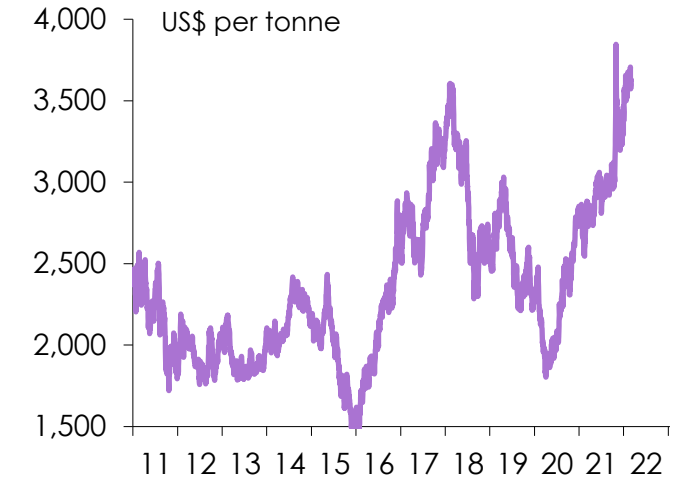
Metallurgical coal



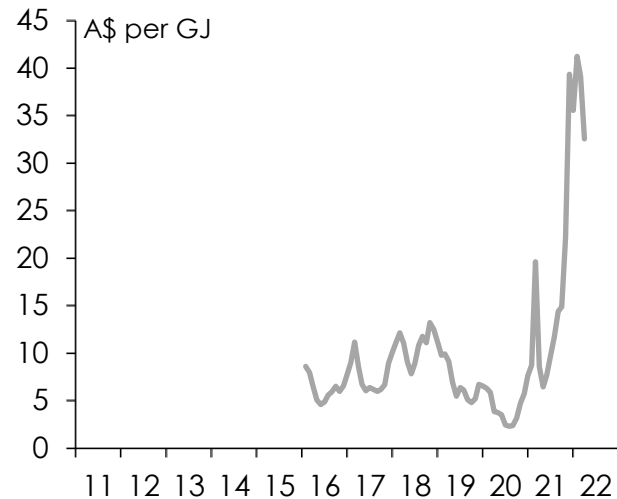
Aluminium



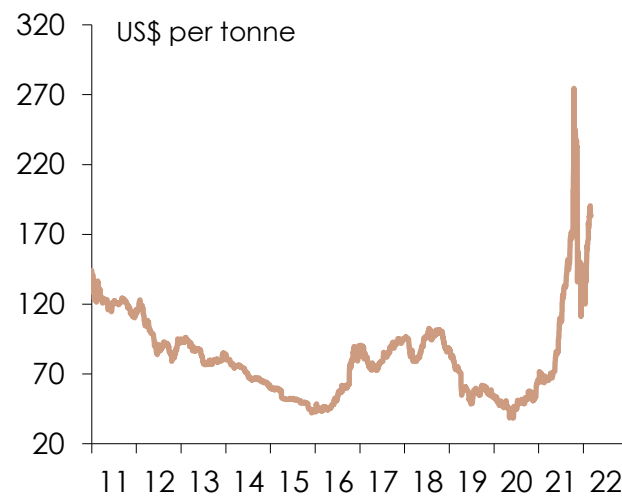
Zinc



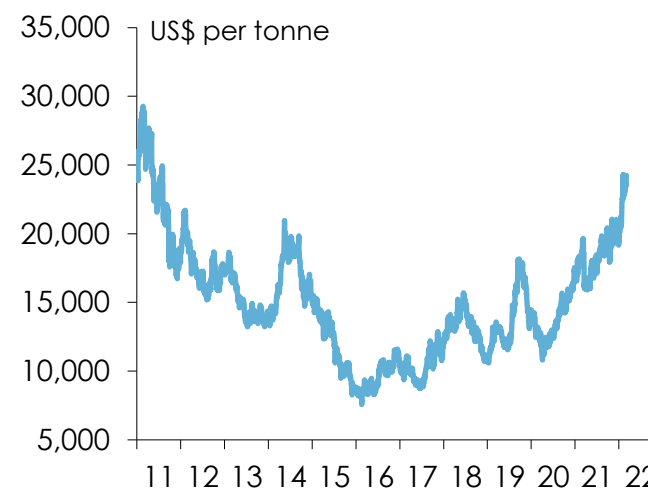
LNG



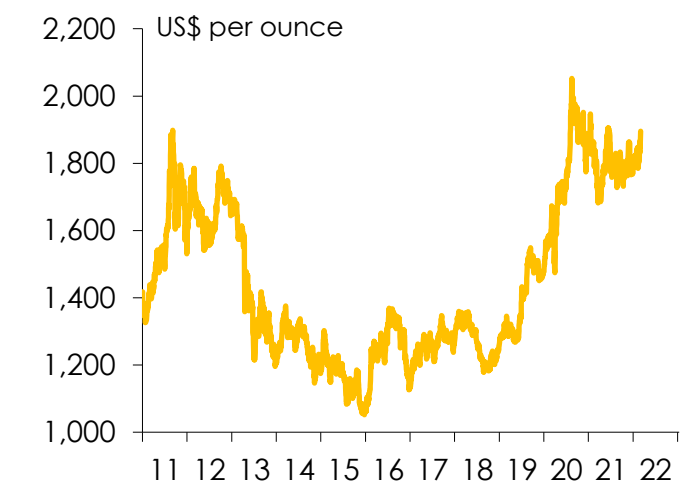
Thermal coal



Nickel



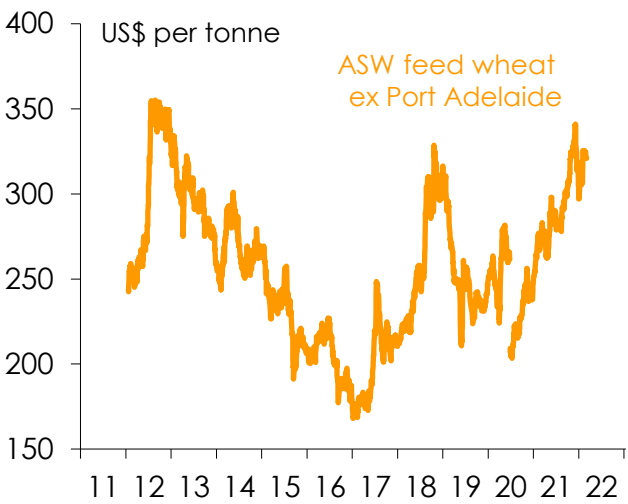
Gold



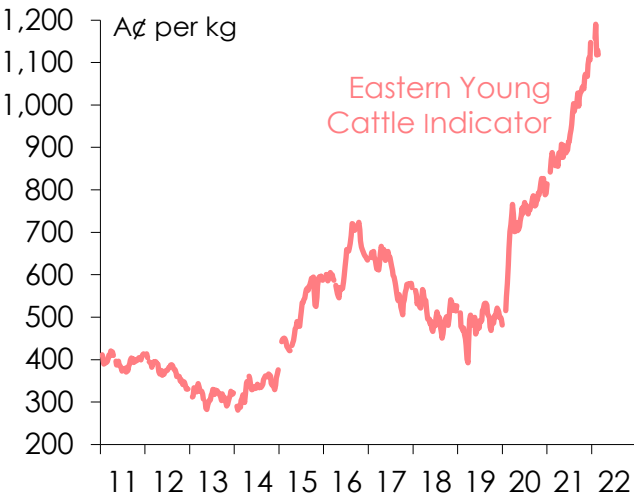
Most major agricultural commodities were a little softer this week after several months of strong gains

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

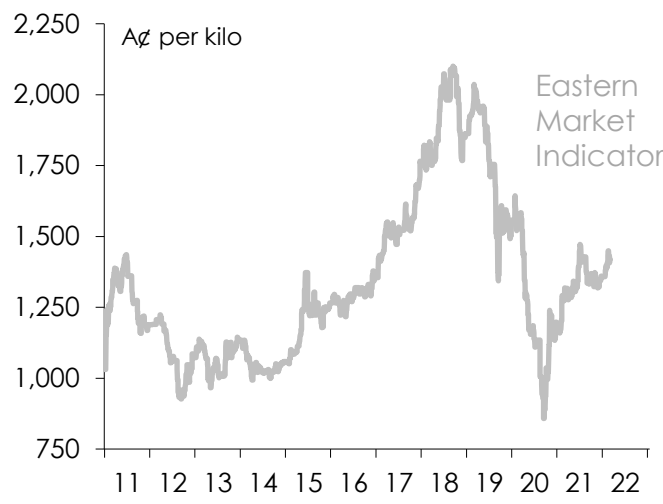
Wheat



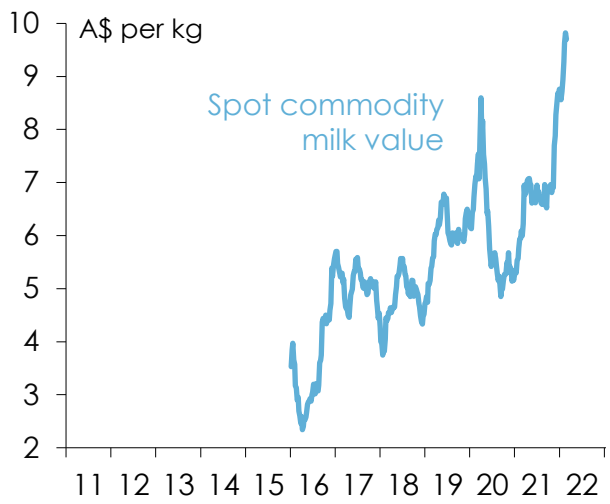
Beef cattle



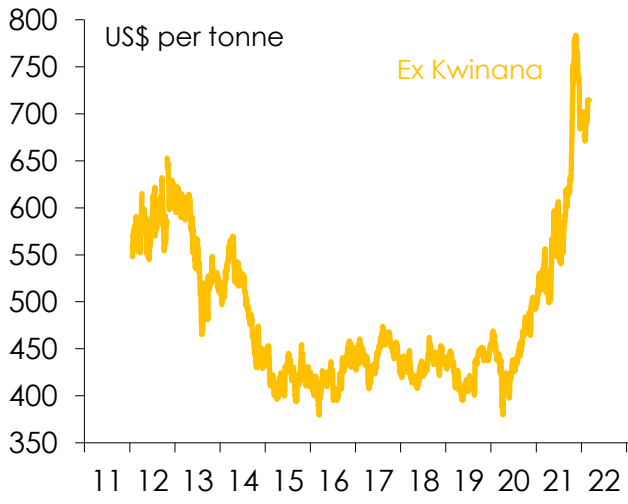
Wool



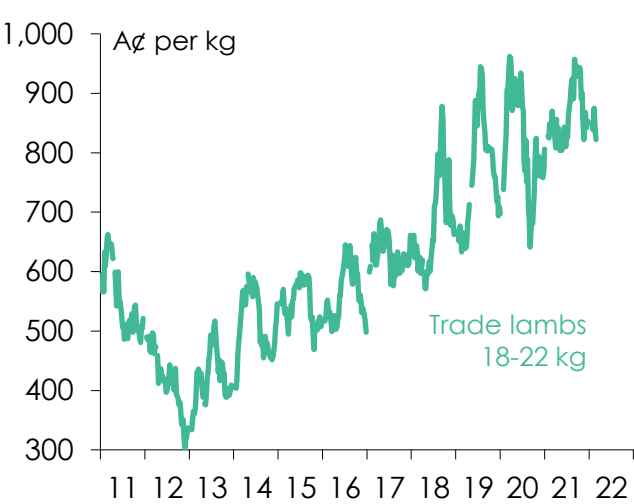
Milk



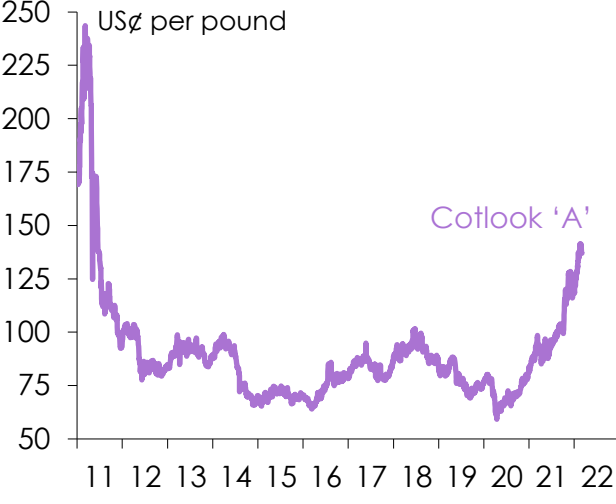
Canola



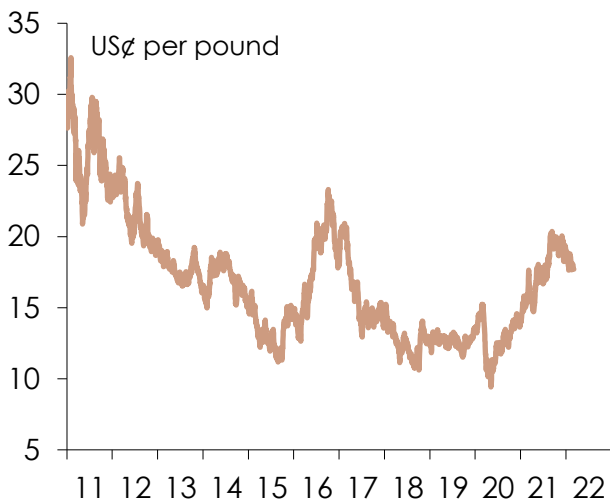
Sheep



Cotton



Sugar

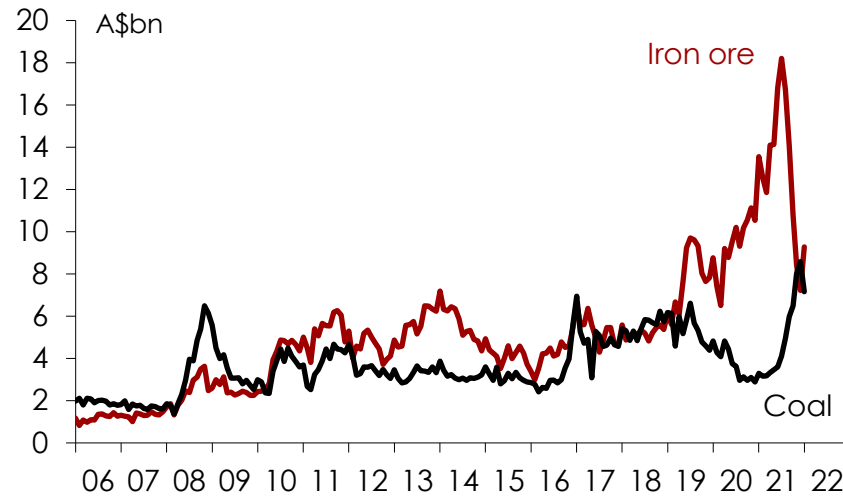


Sources: Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), [Weekly Commodity Price Update](#); Australian Wool Innovation Ltd, [Market Intelligence Weekly](#); Meat & Livestock Australia, [Market Information Statistics Database](#); Australian Dairy Products Federation, [Milk Value Portal](#). Data up to 18th February.

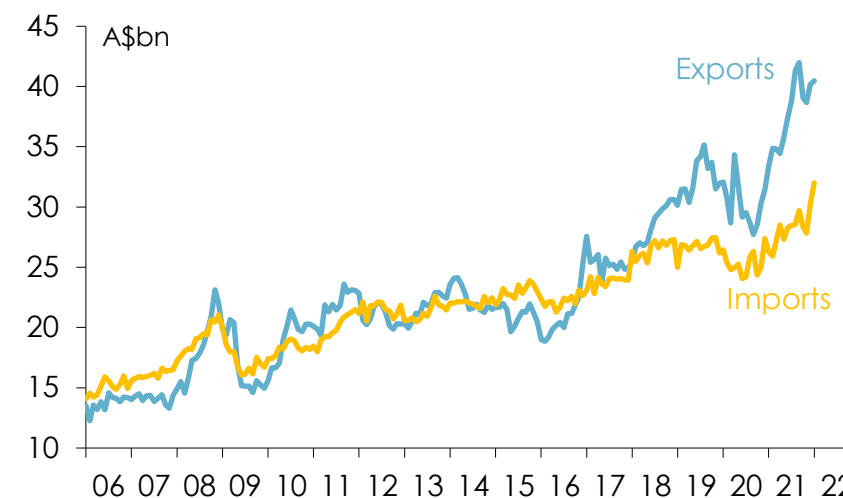
Australia's trade shrank by another \$1.4bn, to \$8.4bn, in December – the 5th successive decline, this time largely due to rising imports

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

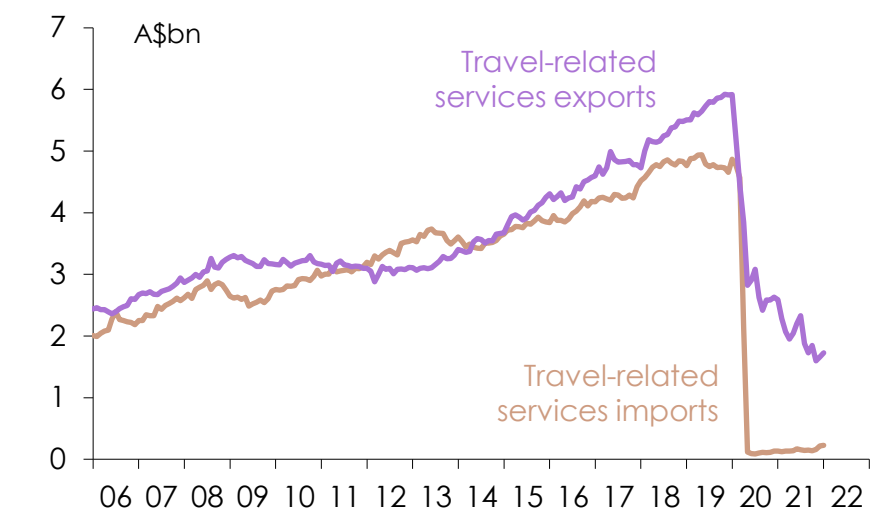
Iron ore and coal exports



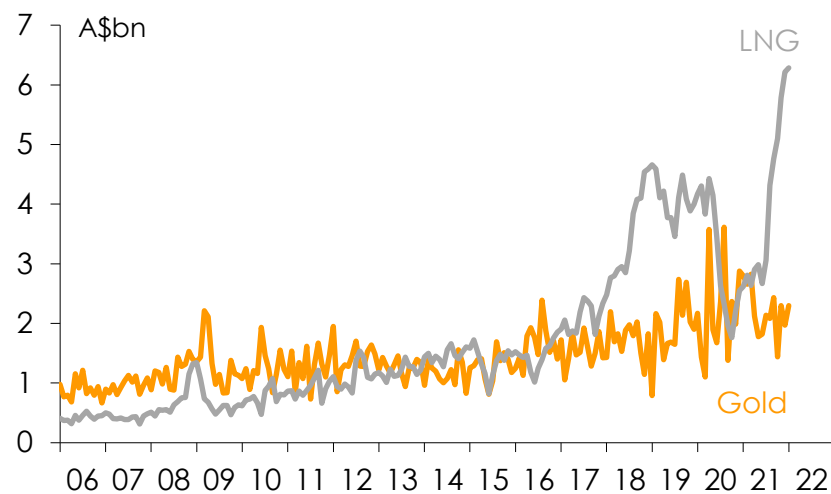
Merchandise exports and imports



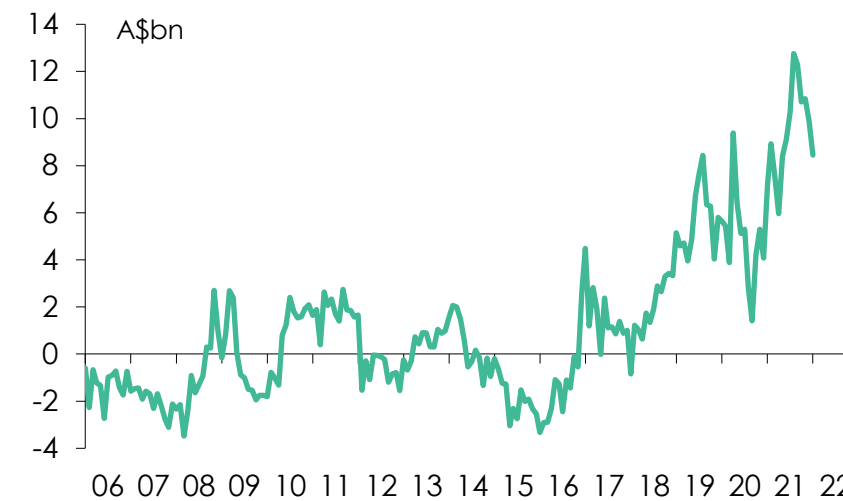
Tourism-related services trade



LNG and gold exports



Merchandise trade balance



Tourism services trade balance

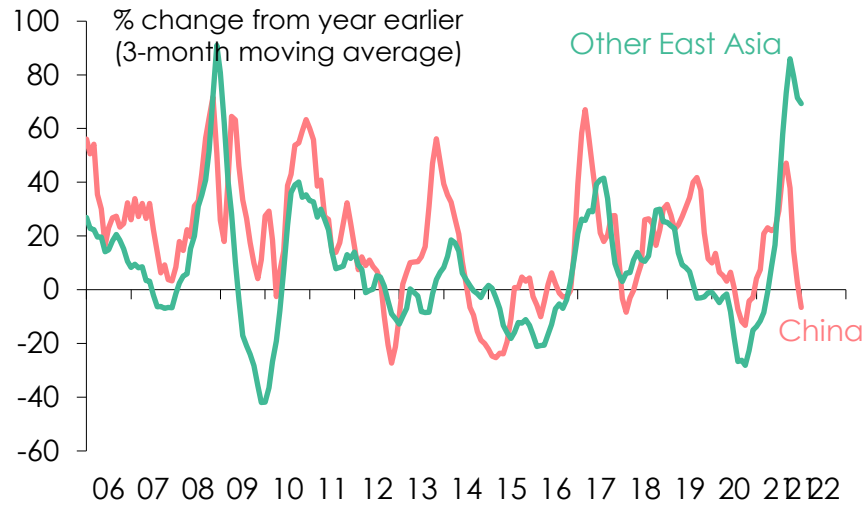


Source: ABS, [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), December 2021. January data will be released on 3rd March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

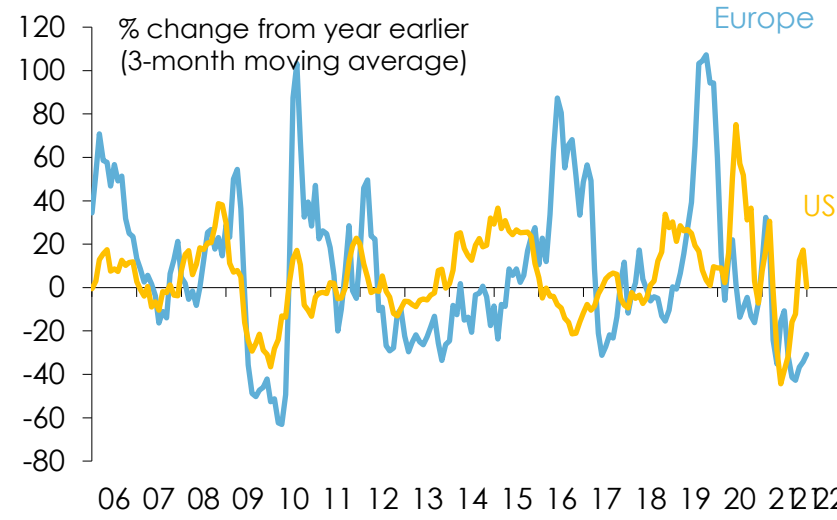
Australia's trade surplus with China has peaked as iron ore prices have eased, but surpluses with other Asian countries have increased

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

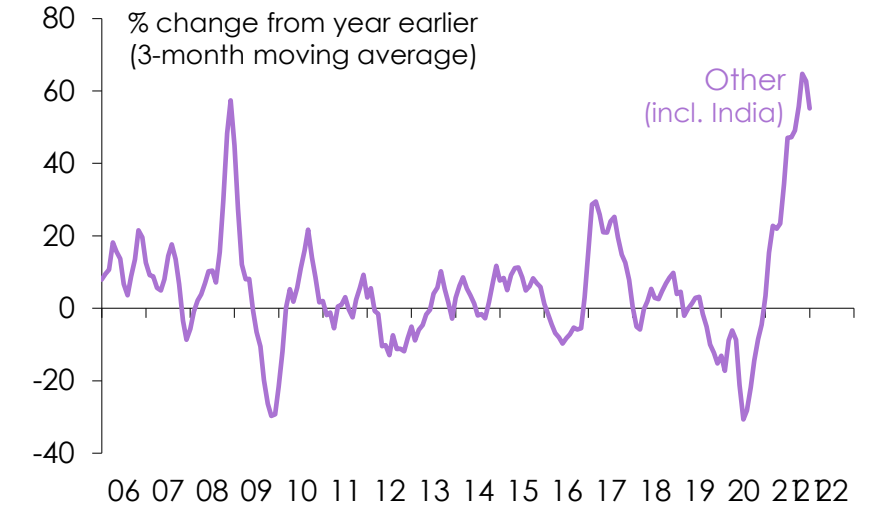
Merchandise exports – East Asia



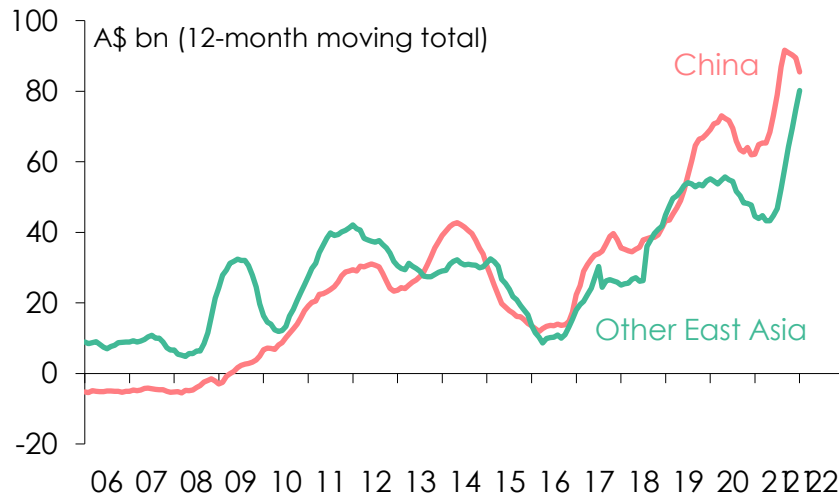
Merchandise exports – US & Europe



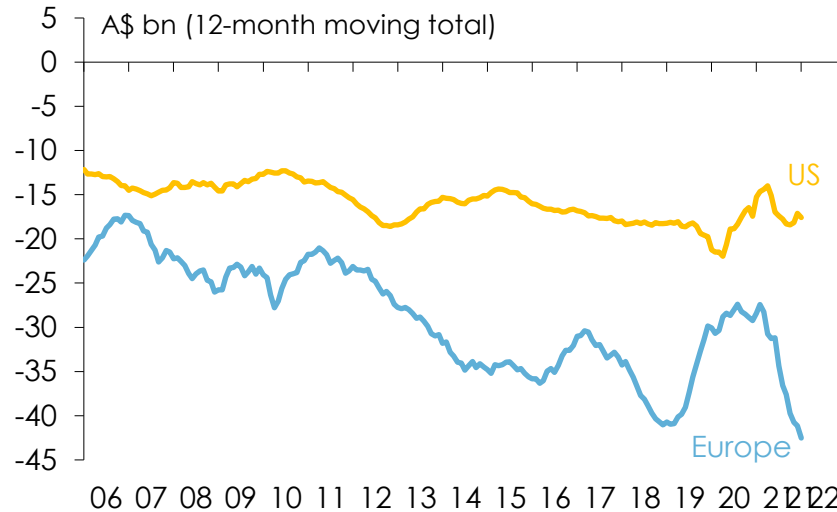
Merchandise exports – other



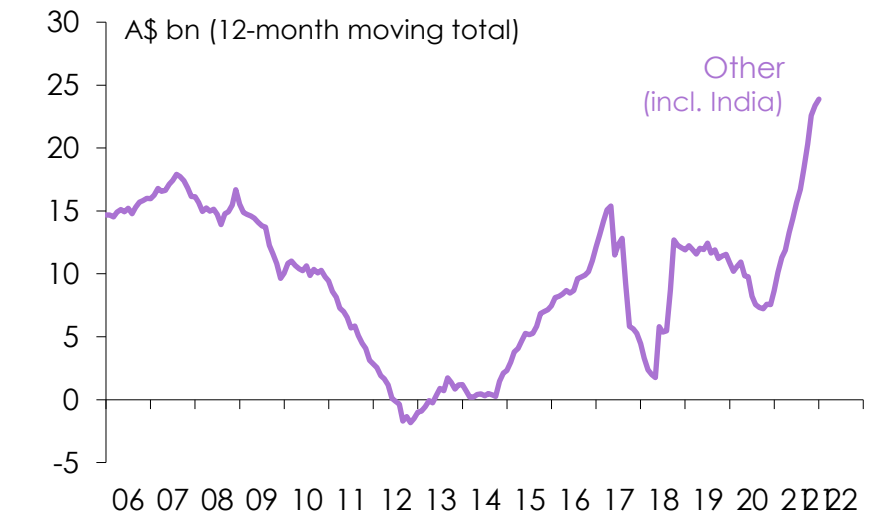
Goods trade balance – East Asia



Goods trade balance – US & Europe



Goods trade balance – other

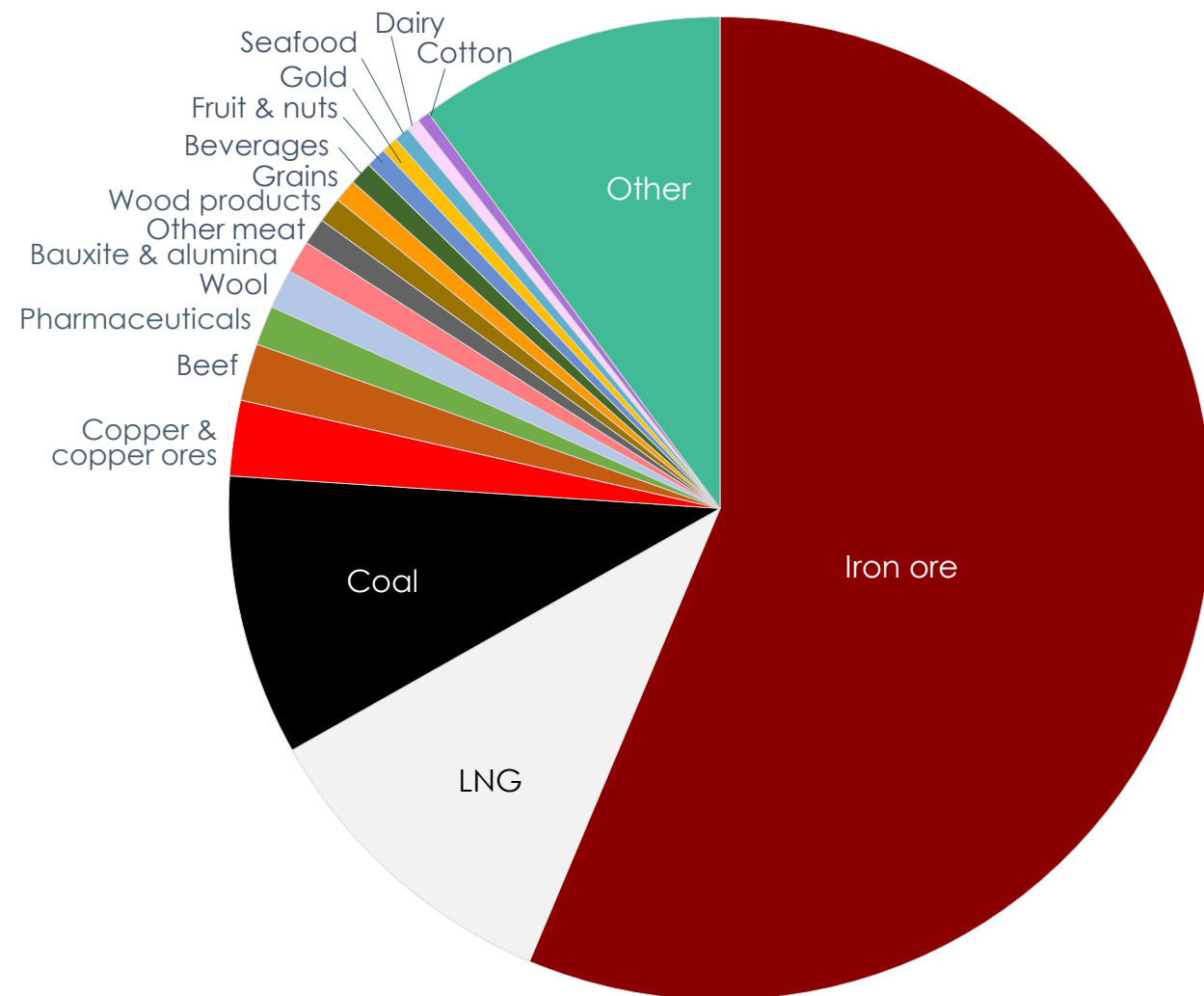


Note: 'Other East Asia' includes Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and ASEAN. 'Europe' includes the EU, UK and Switzerland. 'Other' includes India, New Zealand and the Pacific, Canada, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and others not included in the foregoing. Latest data are for August. Source: ABS, [International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia](#), December 2021. January data will be released on 3rd March. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The bilateral relationship between Australia and its largest trading partner China seems unlikely to improve any time soon and could get worse

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Australia's merchandise exports to China, 2019-20



- ❑ China accounted for 39½% of Australia's merchandise exports in FY 2019-20 (the largest proportion any country has since the mid-1950s when 36% of Australia's exports went to the UK)
 - of which iron ore & concentrates accounts for 56%
- ❑ China also accounted for 19% of Australia's services exports in CY 2019 of which tourism & education accounted for over 90%)
- ❑ China has no real alternatives to Australian iron ore in the near term – but it has been progressively expanding the range of other Australian products subject to discriminatory tariffs, “customs inspections”, quarantine issues or outright bans – including wheat, wool, copper ores, sugar, lobsters, timber, wine and coal
 - Australia's exports of these products to China have dropped from about \$25bn in 2019 to an annualized rate of about \$5½bn since the sanctions were imposed – although in many cases Australian exporters have been able to find alternative markets
- ❑ In July last year China's Foreign Ministry openly acknowledged that it was seeking to ‘punish’ Australia for “groundlessly accusing and smearing China and undermining China's core interests based on ideology” and “acting as a cat's paw” for the United States – a view likely to intensify after the announcement in September 2021 of a new defence pact with the US and UK
- ❑ Last month, however, China's new Ambassador to Australia Xiao Quian signalled an apparent willingness to “push the China-Australia relations back to the right track” – although to date there has been no (public) response from the Australian Government

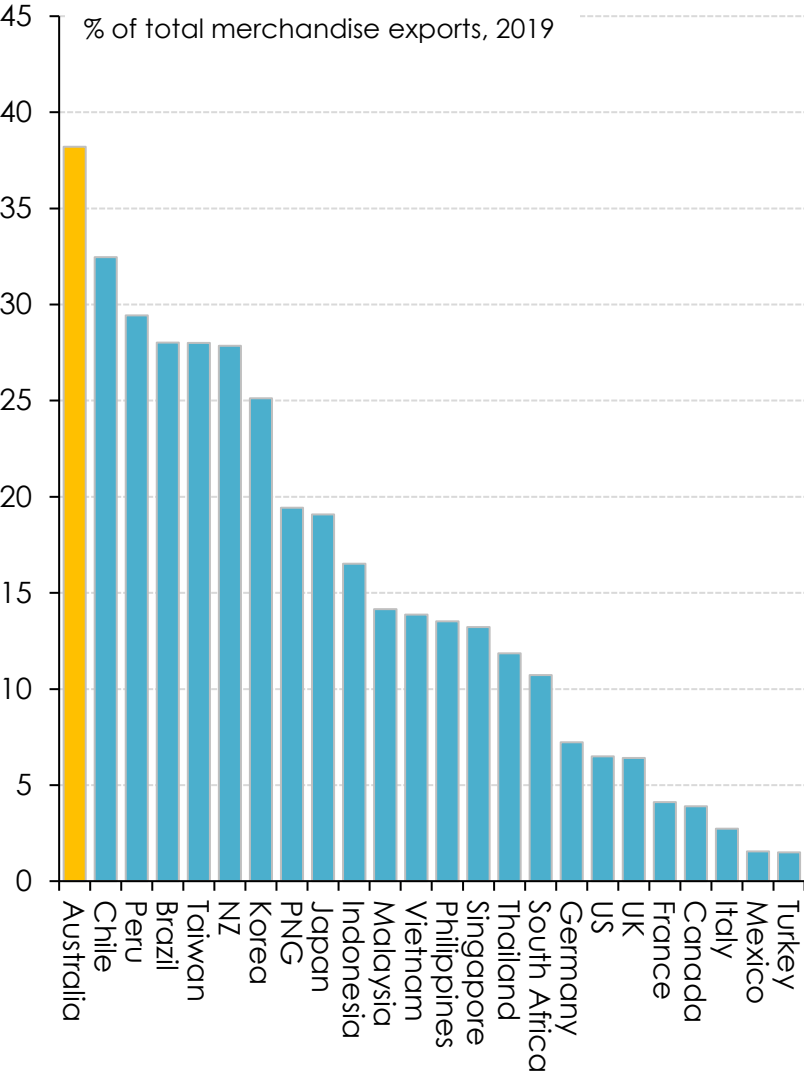
Note: 'Wood' includes wood products; 'dairy' includes milk, cream, butter & cheese; 'seafood' includes crustaceans, fish and processed seafood; 'other' includes confidential items.

Sources: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, [Trade Statistical Pivot Tables](#); Corinna. [Return to "What's New"](#).

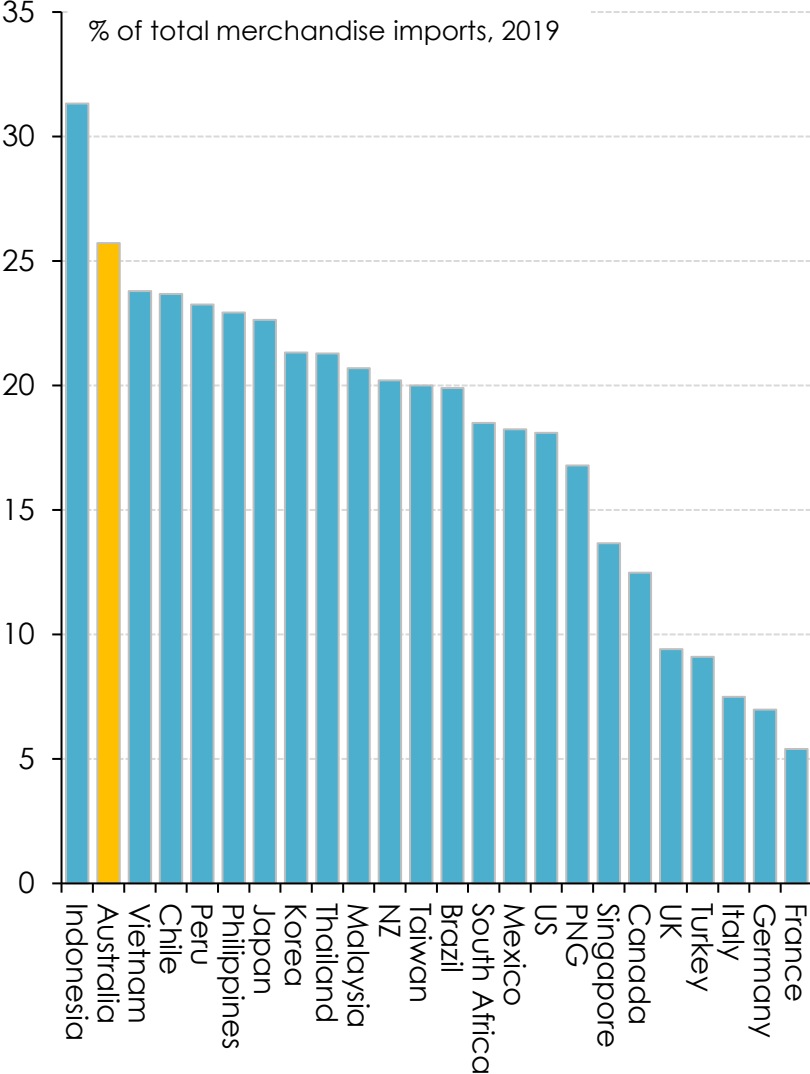
China can cause Australia economic pain because we're very dependent on it, and are one of the few countries with whom China runs a deficit

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

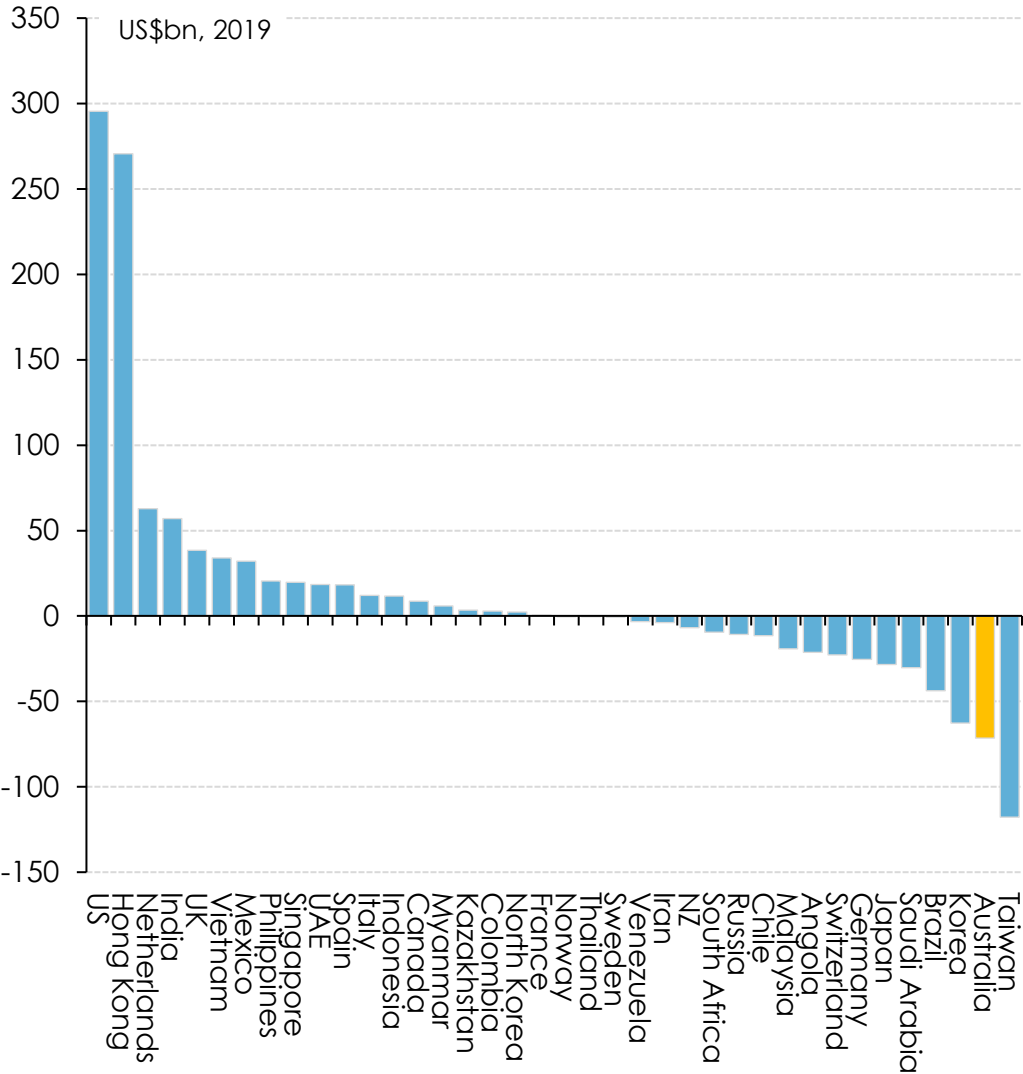
Merchandise exports to China as a pc of total



Merchandise imports from China as a pc of total



China's bilateral merchandise trade balances

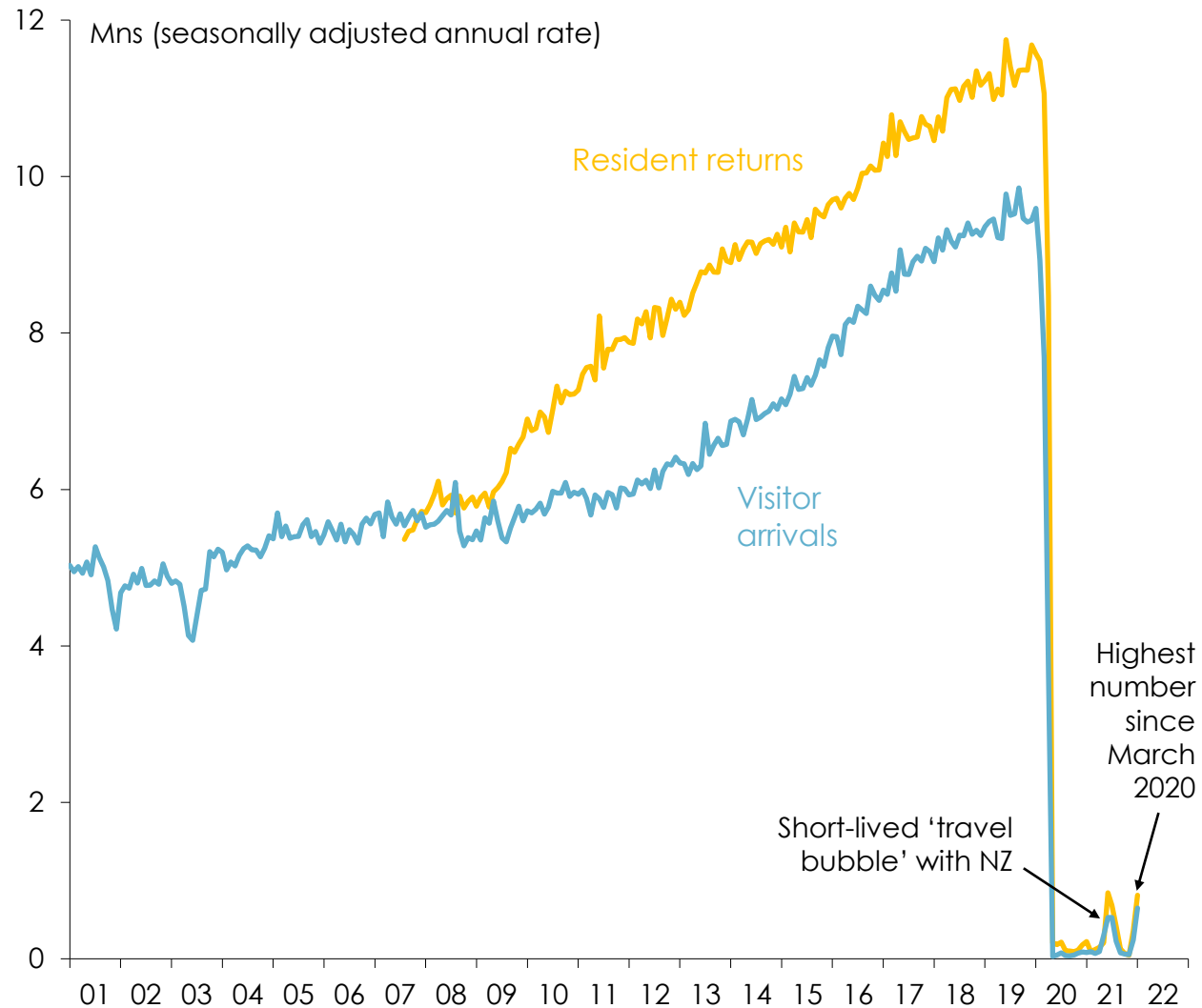


Sources: IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics; Taiwan Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bureau of Foreign Trade. [Return to "What's New"](#).

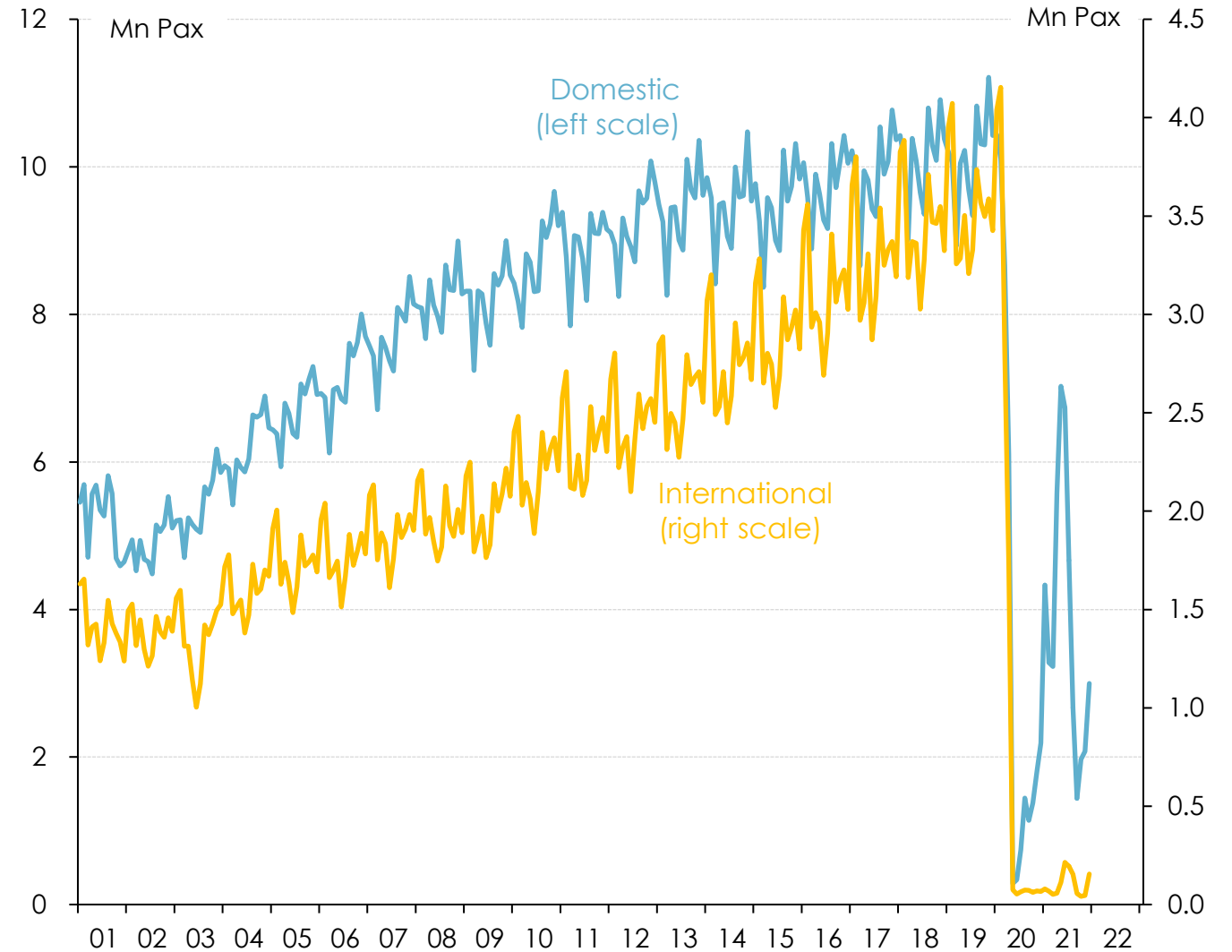
The re-opening of Australia's international borders this Monday, 21st February, should see a faster pick up in arrivals and aviation traffic

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Short-term visitor arrivals and resident returns



Airport passenger movements

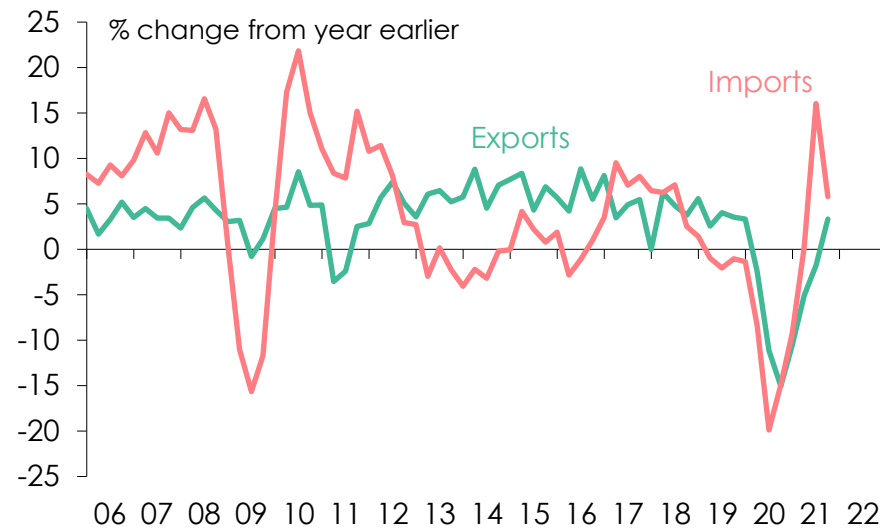


Note: The ABS has suspended publication of seasonally adjusted estimates of short-term visitor arrivals and resident returns, so published original estimates for April 2020 (and beyond) have been seasonally adjusted by Corinna using the same seasonal factors as for the corresponding month of 2019. Latest ABS data on arrivals and departures are for December; BITRE data on airport passenger movements are for November 2021. Sources: [ABS](#); [Bureau of Industry, Transport and Regional Economics \(BITRE\)](#); Corinna. [Return to "What's New"](#).

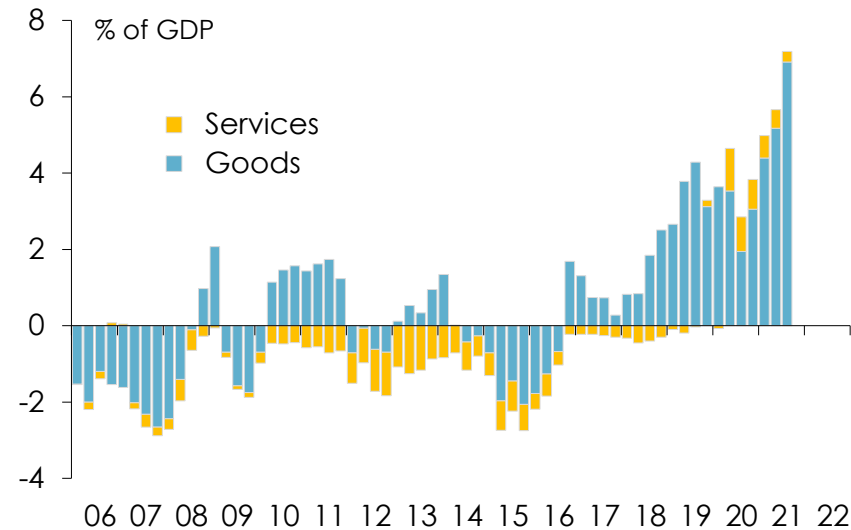
Australia posted another record current account surplus in the Q3, thanks to another large gain in export prices – but that's probably the peak

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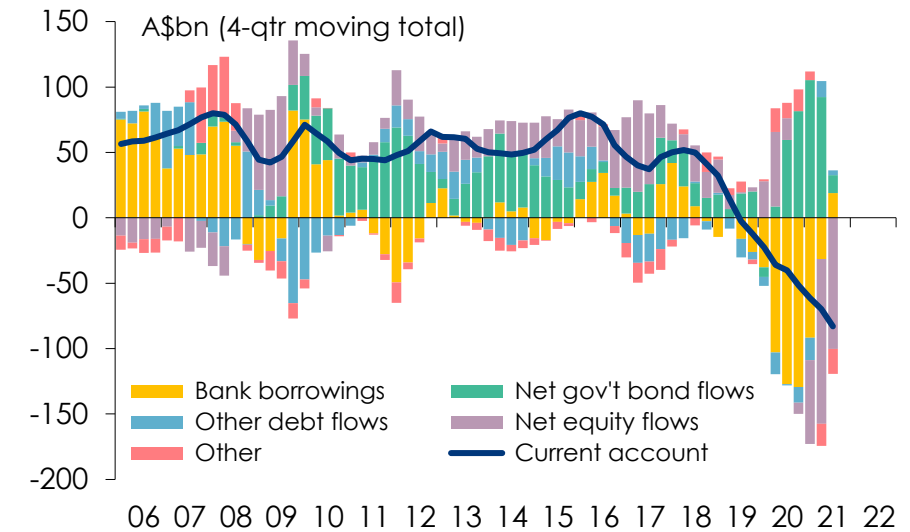
Export and import volumes



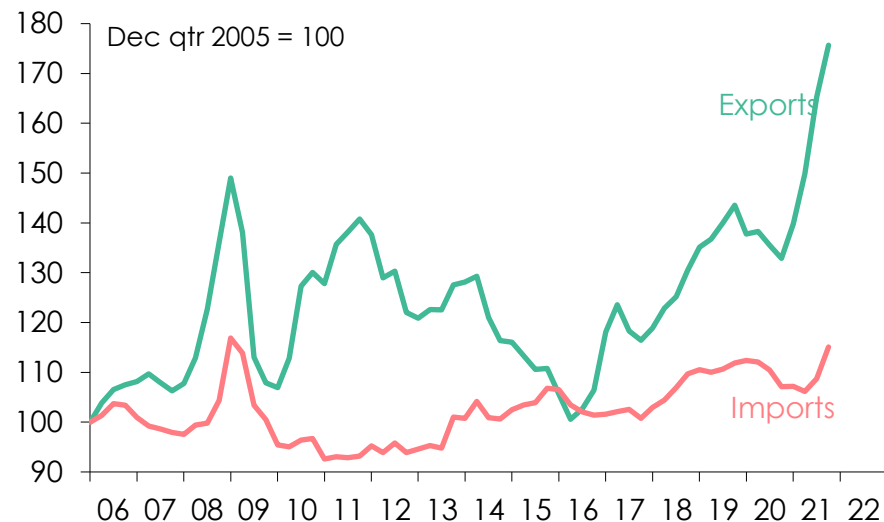
Goods & services trade balances



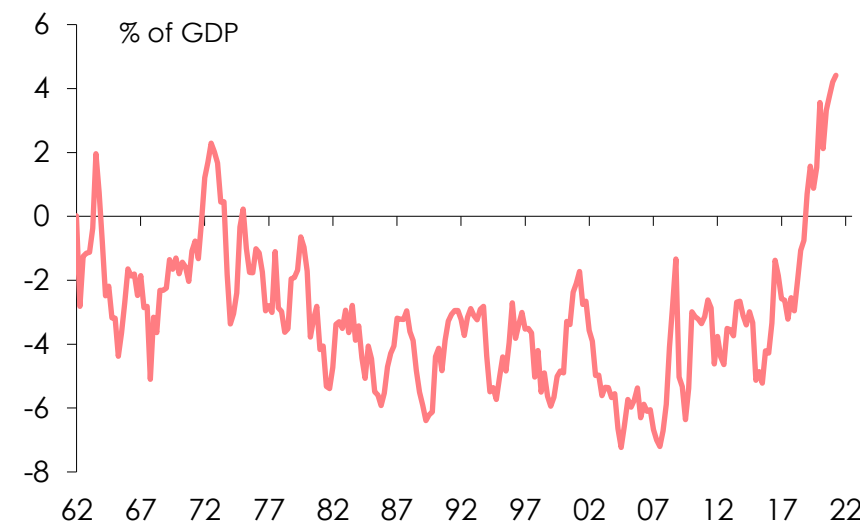
Capital flows



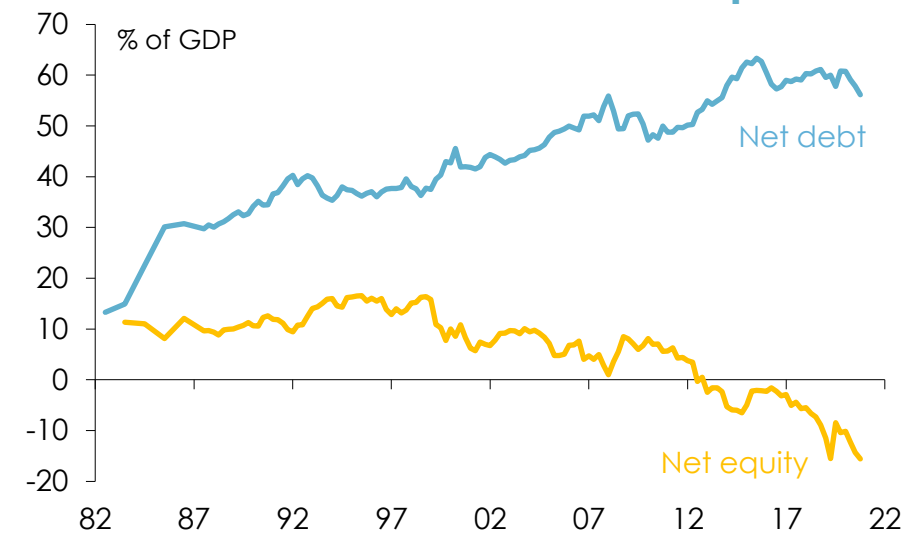
Export and import prices



Current account balance



Net international investment position



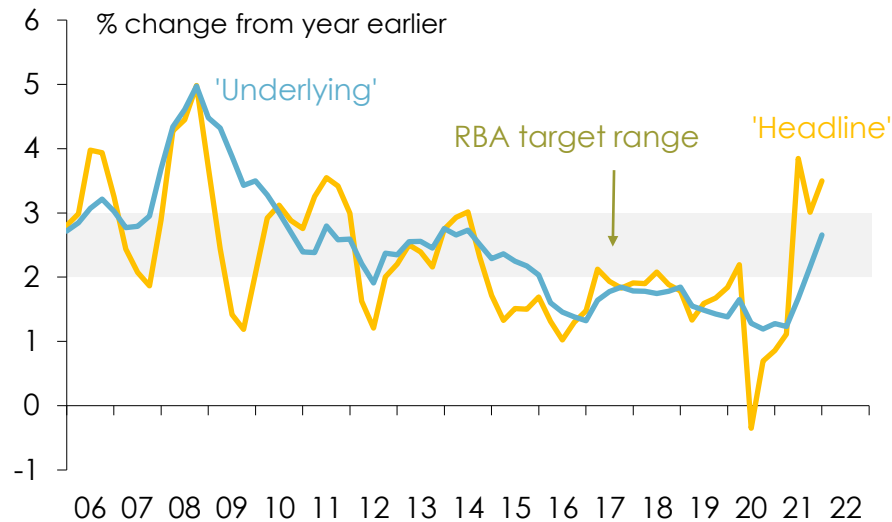
Note: The chart of Australia's international capital flows shows inflows (eg borrowings from abroad) as a positive and outflows (eg repayments of debt, or purchases of foreign equity assets) as a negative. Likewise the chart of Australia's international investment position shows net foreign debt as a positive and net equity assets as a negative. Latest data are for the September quarter 2021; December quarter data will be released on 1st March 2022. Source: ABS, [Balance of Payments and International Investment Position, Australia](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

Inflation

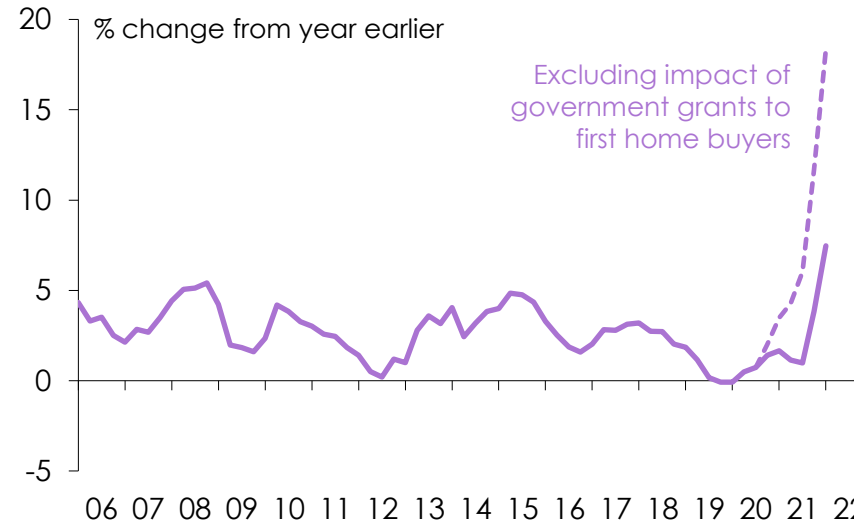
The December quarter CPI was unequivocally higher than expected, and puts some pressure on the RBA to start raising rates this year

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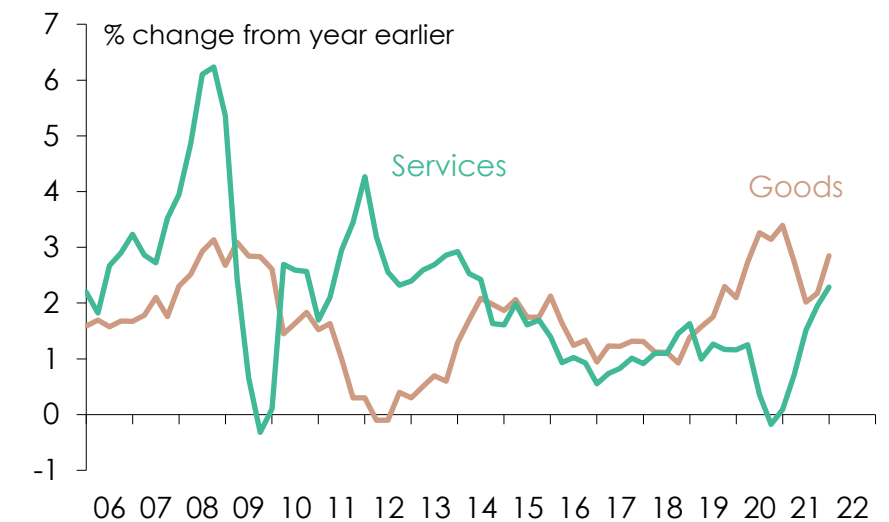
Consumer prices – annual change



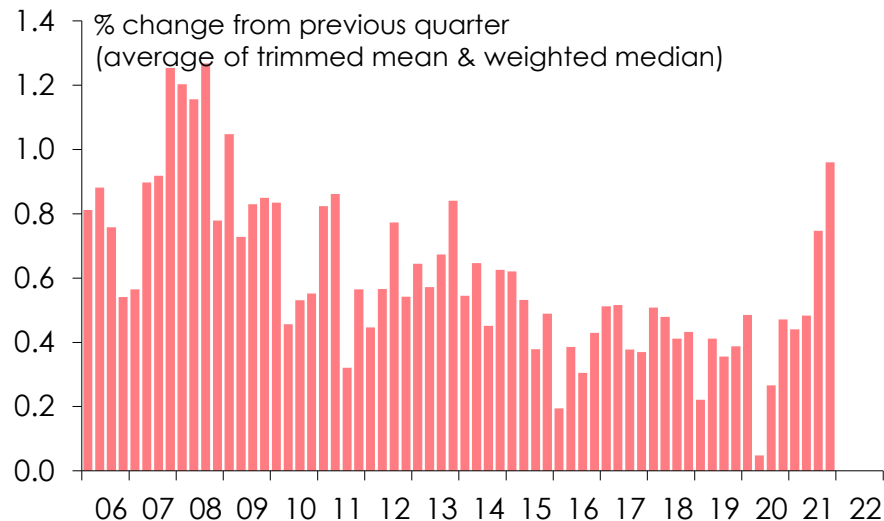
New dwelling purchase costs



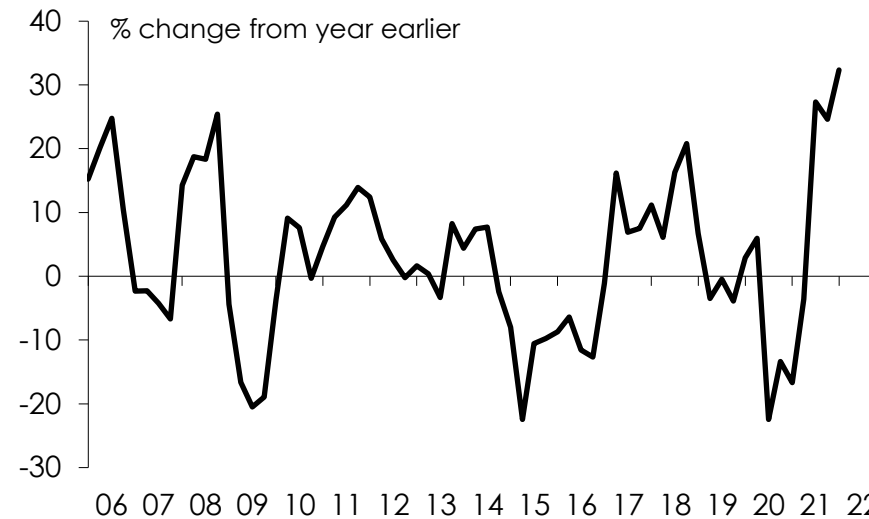
'Market' goods vs services



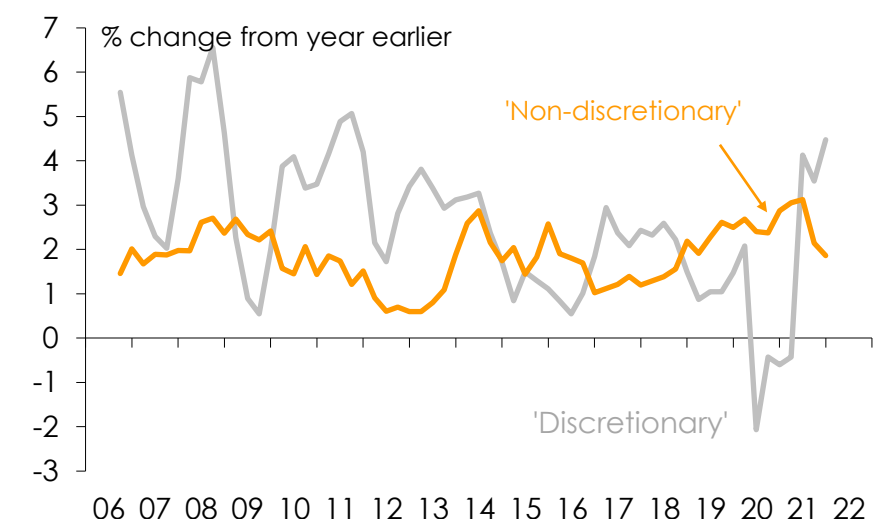
Quarterly 'underlying' inflation



Automotive fuel prices



'Discretionary' vs 'essential' items

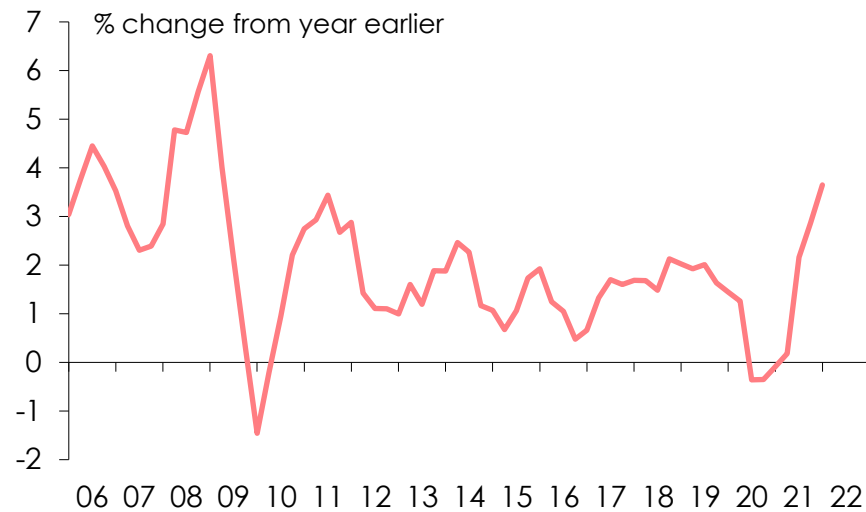


Note: 'Underlying' inflation is the average of the weighted median and trimmed mean CPIs. 'Market' goods and services exclude 'volatile items' (fruit & vegetables, utilities, property rates & charges, automotive fuel, urban transport services, postal services, child care, health, and education). For definitions of 'discretionary' and 'non-discretionary' items see [here](#). Source: ABS, [Consumer Price Index, Australia](#), December. The March quarter CPI will be released on 27th April. [Return to "What's New"](#).

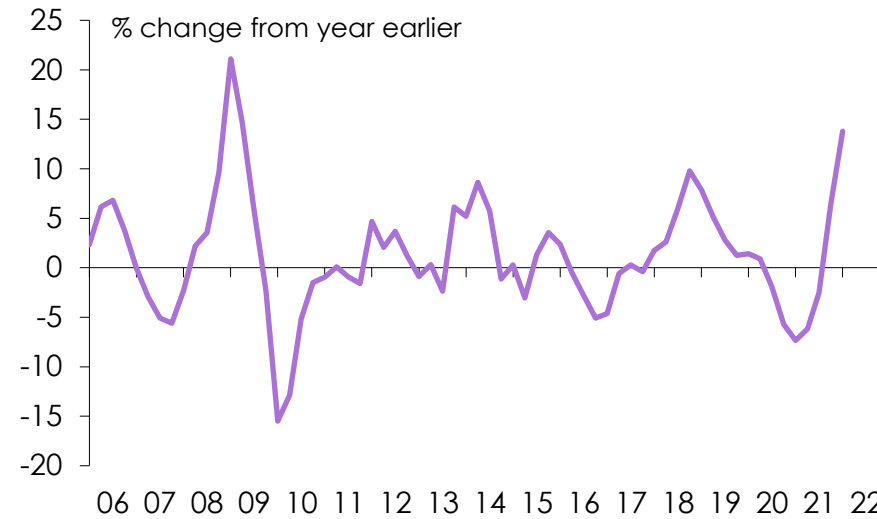
Domestic 'upstream' price pressures haven't been as intense as in other 'advanced' economies, except in the construction sector

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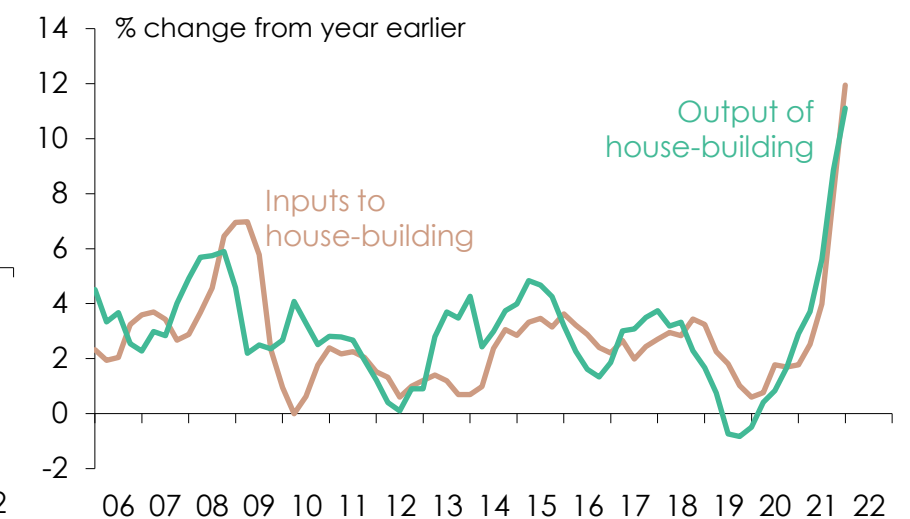
Producer price index



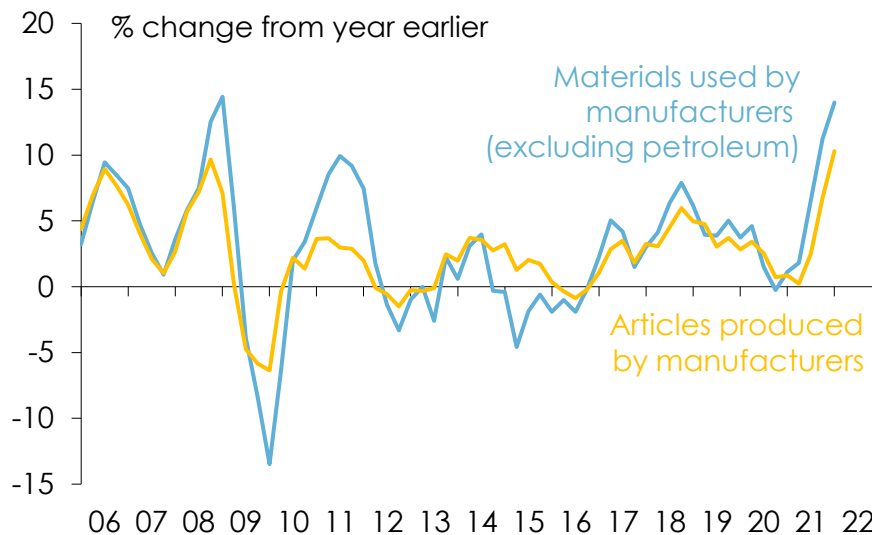
Import price index



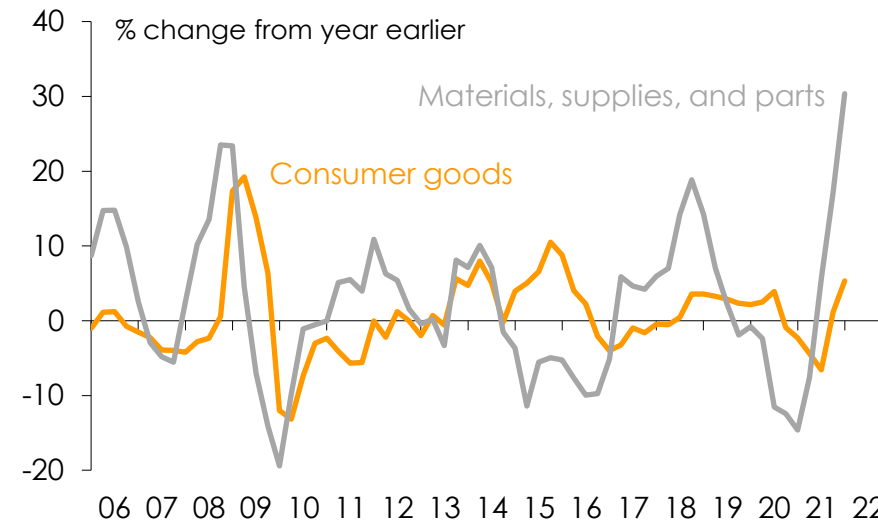
Construction input & output prices



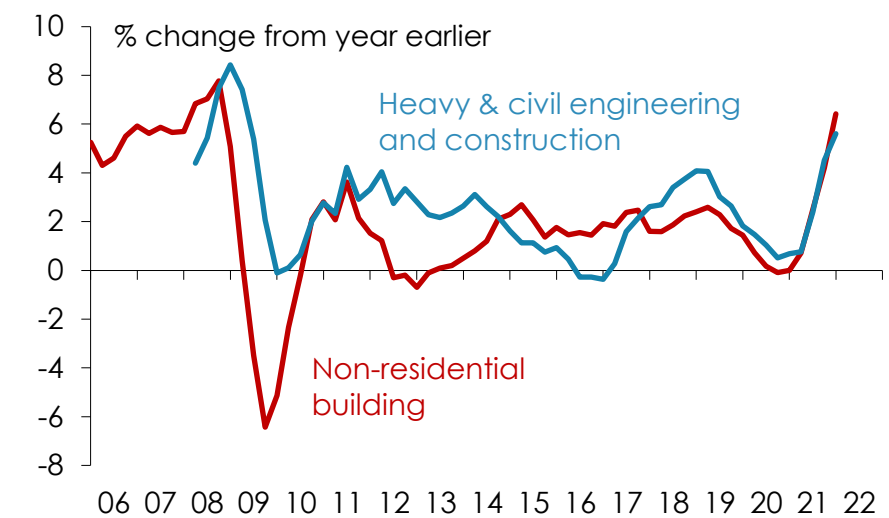
Manufacturing input & output prices



Imported consumer goods prices



Non-residential construction prices

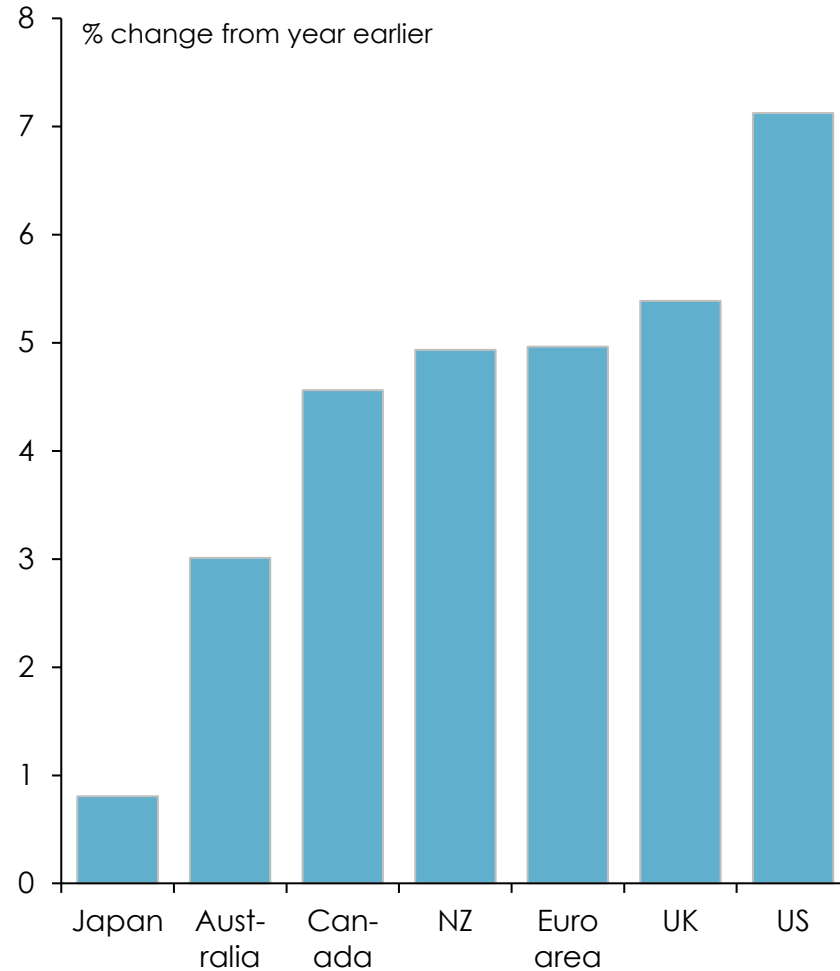


Sources: ABS, [Producer Price Indexes, Australia](#) and [International Trade Price Indexes, Australia](#), December quarter 2021.
[Return to "What's New"](#).

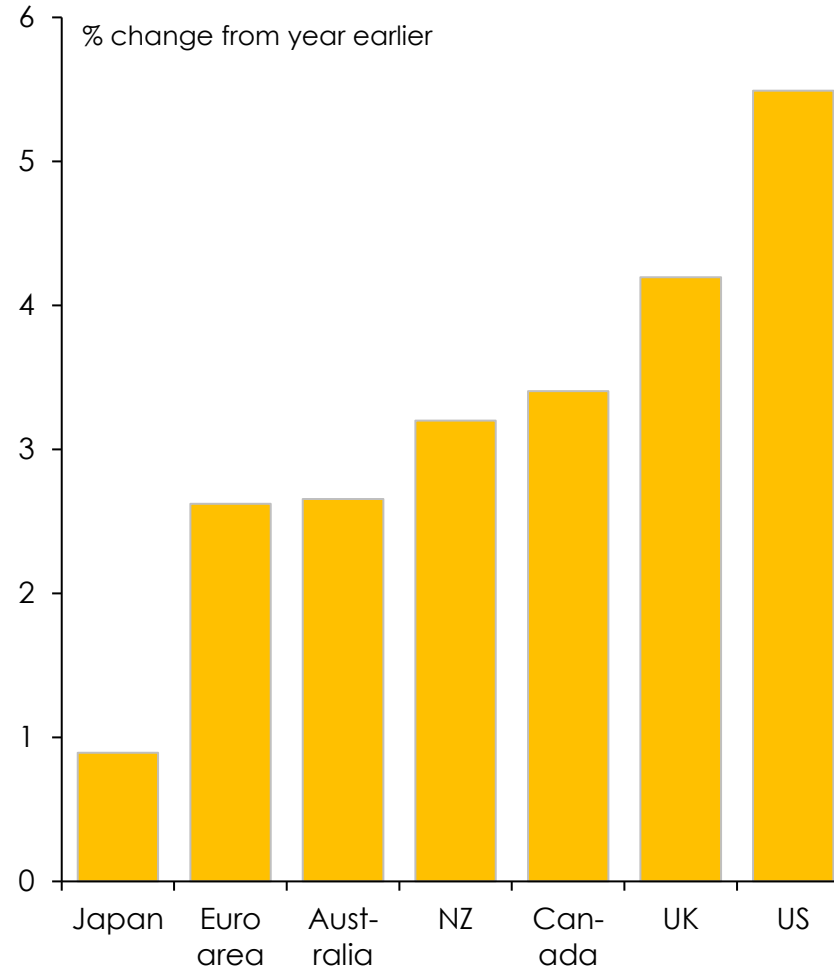
Although it has surprised to the upside, inflation in Australia hasn't risen nearly as much as in the US, the UK, Canada or New Zealand

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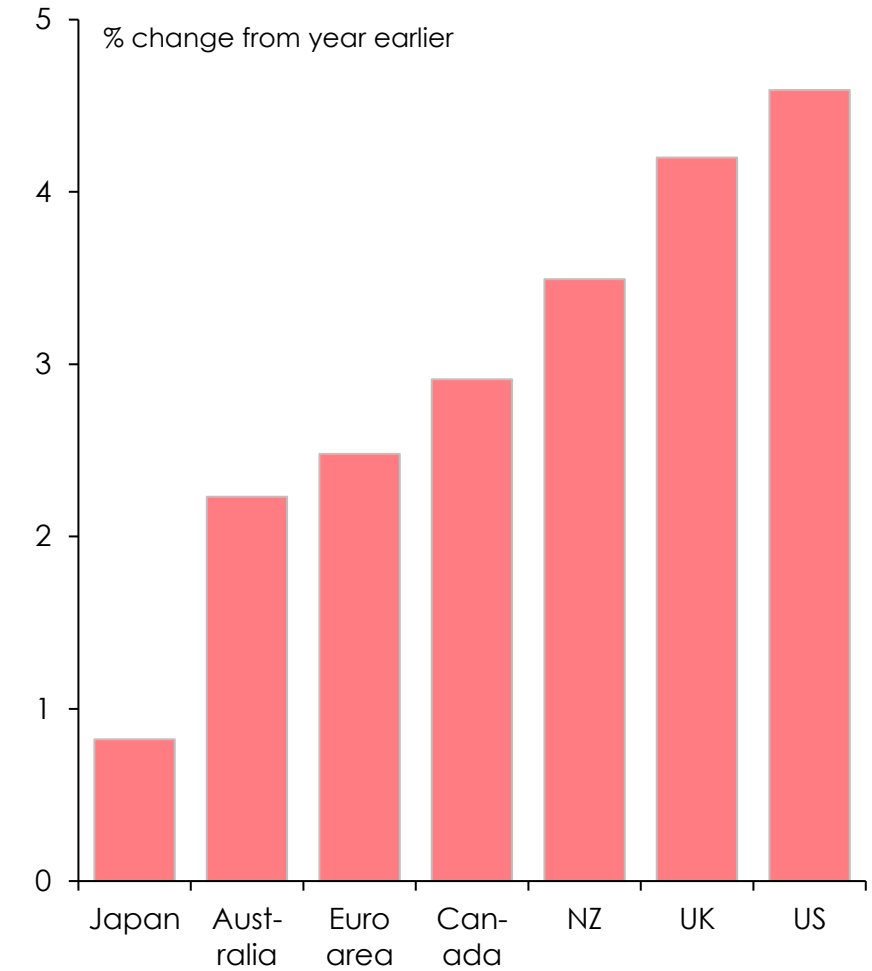
'Headline' consumer price inflation



'Underlying' or 'core' consumer price inflation



Wage inflation



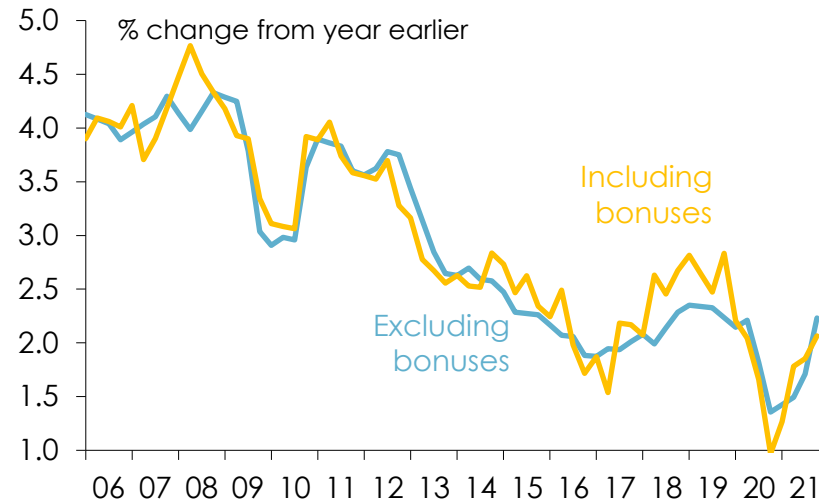
Note: Data are latest available, mostly December or December quarter for CPI inflation, and November of September quarter for wage inflation. 'Core' inflation is CPI excluding food & energy for the US, UK and Canada; trimmed mean for Japan and Australia; and 'sectoral factor model' for NZ. Wage inflation is average hourly earnings for Japan, the UK and Canada (and hence affected by changes in workforce composition), and wage price index or equivalent for the US, euro area and Australia.

Sources: [ABS](#); [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#); [Eurostat](#); [Statistics Bureau of Japan](#) and [Bank of Japan](#); [UK Office for National Statistics](#); [Statistics Canada](#); [Statistics New Zealand](#) and [Reserve Bank of New Zealand](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

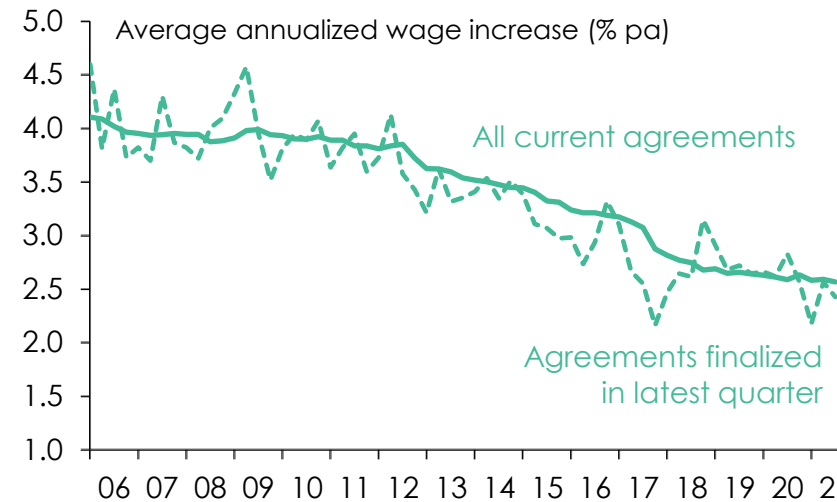
Q4 wages data to be released this coming Tuesday will be keenly watched (including by the RBA) for signs of a pick-up in wages growth

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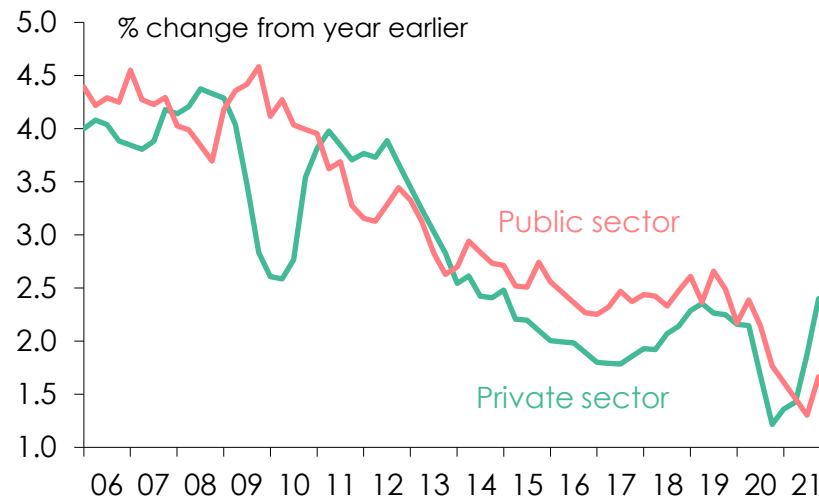
Wage price index – all sectors



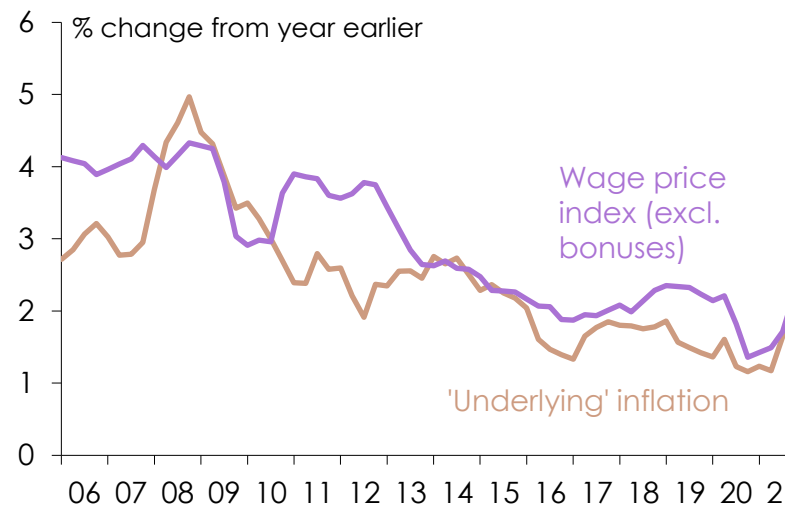
Enterprise bargaining agreements



WPI – private vs public sectors



WPI and 'underlying' CPI inflation

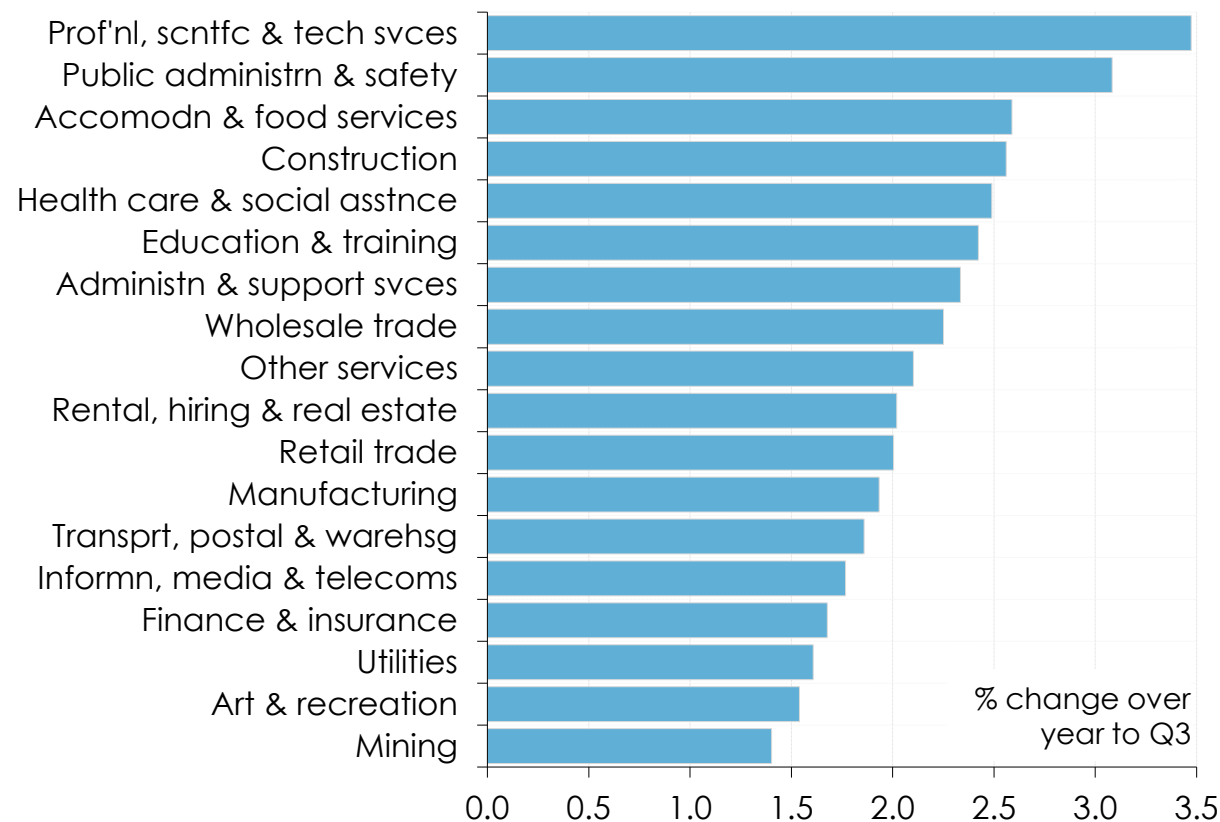


- ❑ The wage price index (excl. bonuses) rose 0.6% in Q3, up from 0.4% in Q2 but in line with Q1 and Q4 last year, pushing the annual rate back up to 2.2%, where it was in Q1 last year
- ❑ In other words, wages growth has now reverted to its (fairly weak) pre-Covid trend
 - it remains well short of the “3 point something percent” which RBA Governor Philip Lowe last month again identified as “likely will need to be growing at 3 point something per cent to sustain inflation around the middle of the target band”
- ❑ The main contributors to the Q3 increase were an end to ‘wage freezes’ in parts of the public sector, pay rises averaging more than 1% in a small number of sectors experiencing labour shortages, and partial implementation of the most recent increase in the minimum wage awarded by the Fair Work Commission in June

The slight pick up in wages growth in Q3 largely reflects individual agreements in a few sectors, plus an end to public sector 'wage freezes'

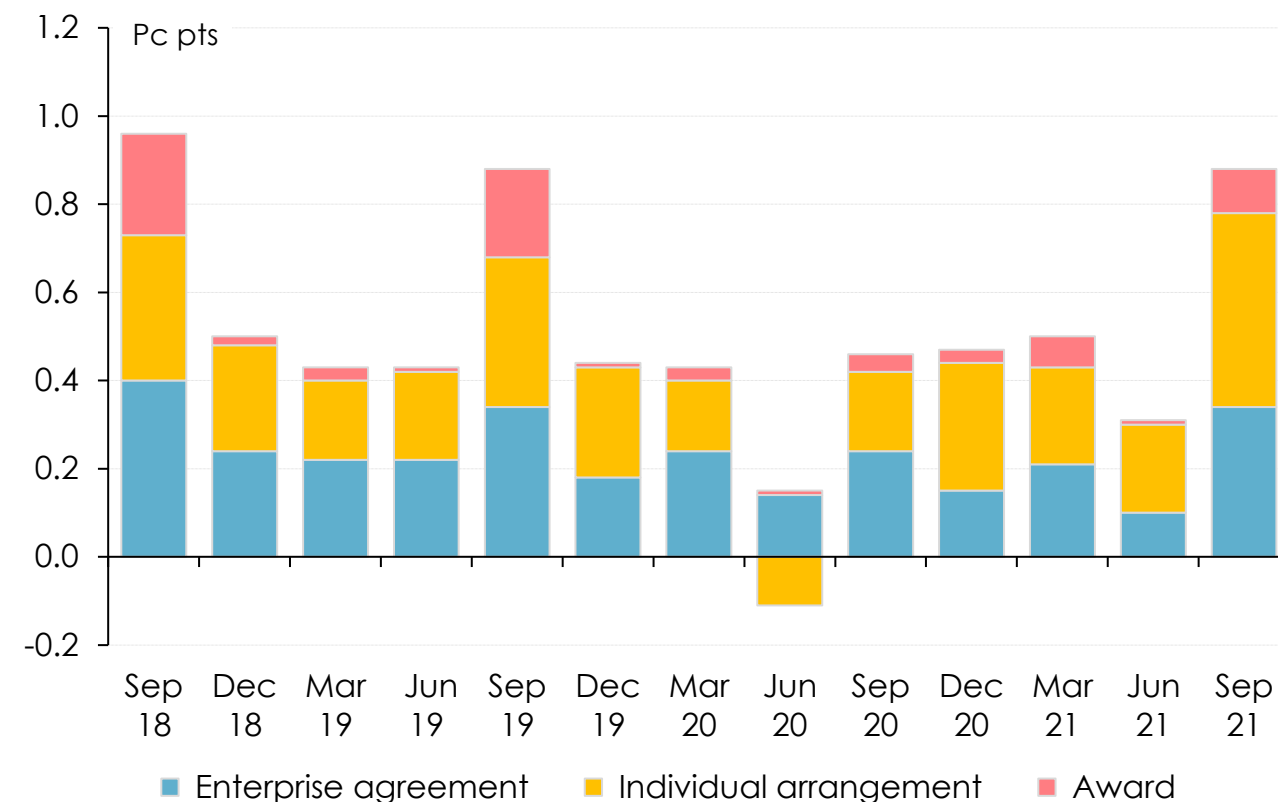
THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Increase in wage price index over year to Q3 by sector



- ❑ To date, wages growth has only picked up in a few sectors – professional, scientific & technical services, and public administration & defence

Contribution to quarterly changes in wage price index, by method of setting pay



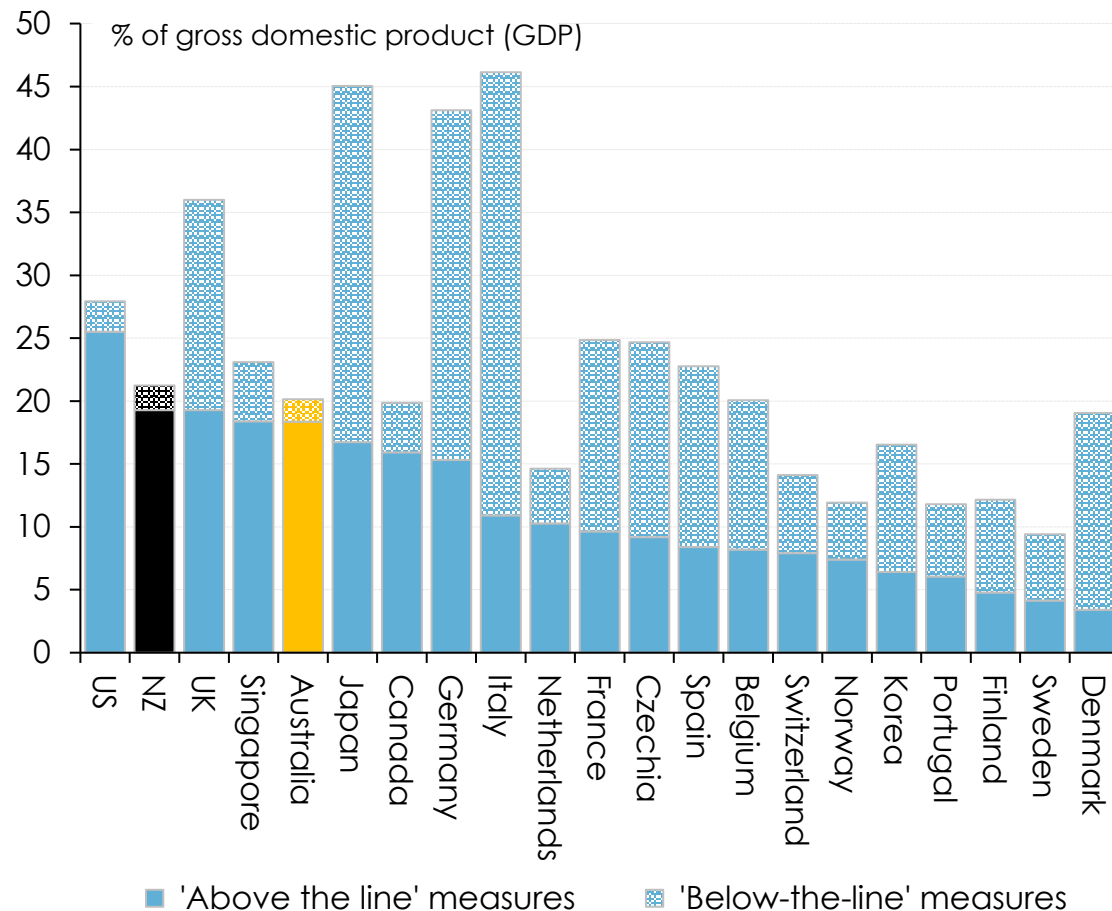
- ❑ Pay settings by individual arrangements (which are more sensitive to labour market conditions) made a larger contribution to wages growth in Q3

Fiscal policy

The Government's fiscal policy response to Covid-19 now exceeds 18% of GDP – compared with the 'advanced' economy average of 11¼%

THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

Fiscal policy responses to Covid-19 – selected 'advanced' economies



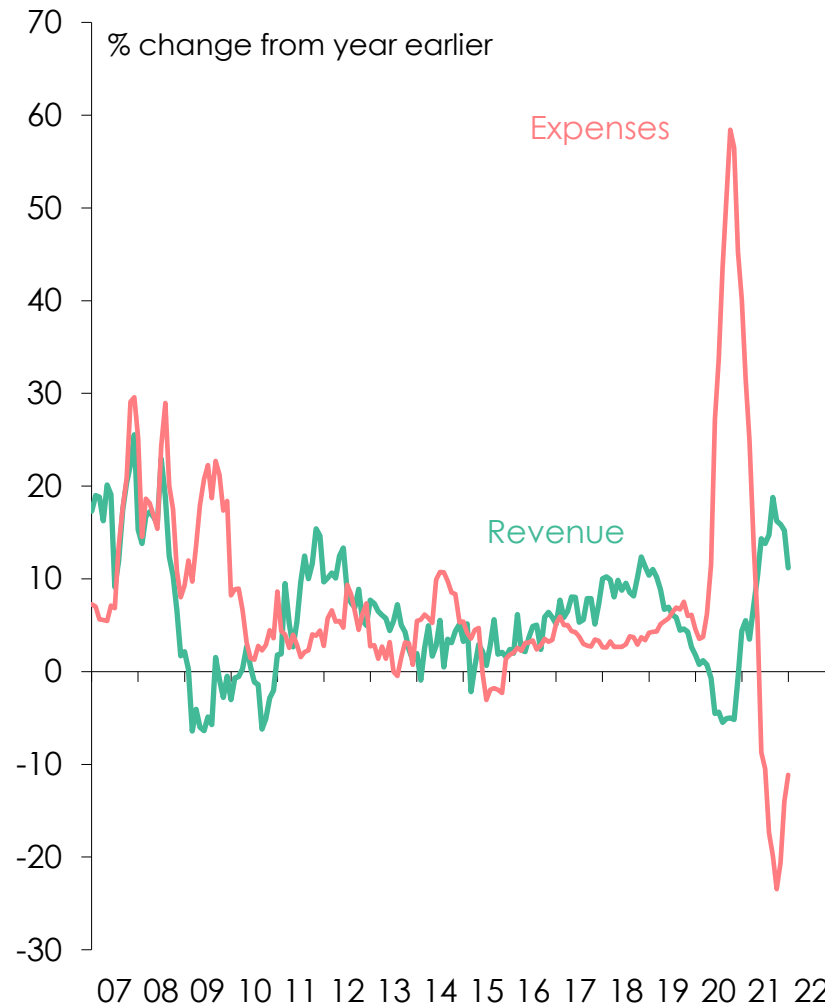
Note: 'Above the line' measures comprise additional or accelerated spending and deferred or foregone revenue. 'Below the line' measures comprise equity injections, loans, asset purchases and debt assumptions, but do not include loan guarantees or other contingent liabilities. 'DMs' means 'developed markets' (or 'advanced economies'). Data includes measures announced up until 27th September 2021. Source: IMF, [Fiscal Monitor Database of Country Fiscal Measures in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), October 2021. [Return to "What's New"](#).

- ❑ Policy measures announced by the Australian and state/territory governments in response to Covid-19 (up to end-September this year) have been equivalent to more than 18% of GDP – the fifth highest of any 'advanced' economy, according to IMF estimates released in October
 - December's Mid-Year Economic & Fiscal Outlook put total federal government measures since the onset of the pandemic at \$337bn (16.3% of GDP)
- ❑ In response to the protracted lockdowns in NSW, Victoria and the ACT (and shorter ones in the NT, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania), the Federal Government paid out \$13.1bn to 2.4mn people displaced from employment by restrictions, or forced into quarantine or self-isolation
 - of which \$7.48bn was paid to people in NSW, \$4.45bn to people in Victoria, and \$345mn to people in the ACT
 - state and territory governments also made payments to businesses and individuals affected by health restrictions
- ❑ These payments have now largely ceased
 - only \$390mn was paid out in November, cf. \$3.2bn in October, \$4.4bn in September and \$5.1bn in July-August

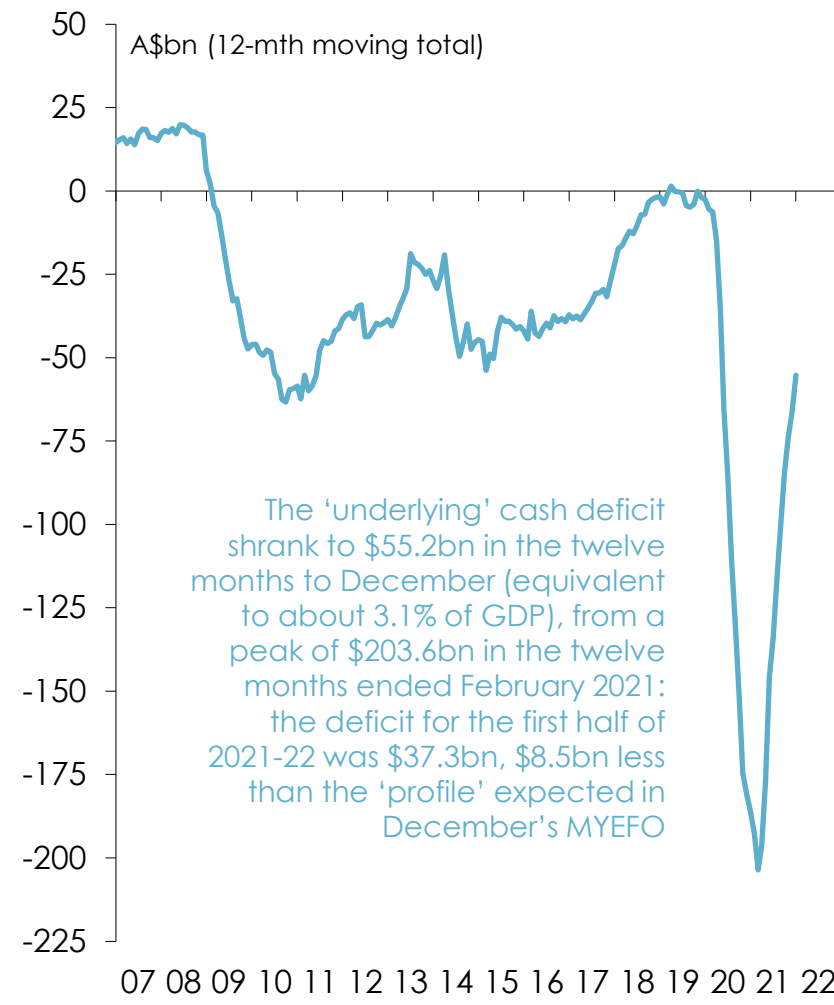
The Federal budget deficit is declining rapidly, thanks largely to buoyant tax revenues, and net debt appears to have stabilized

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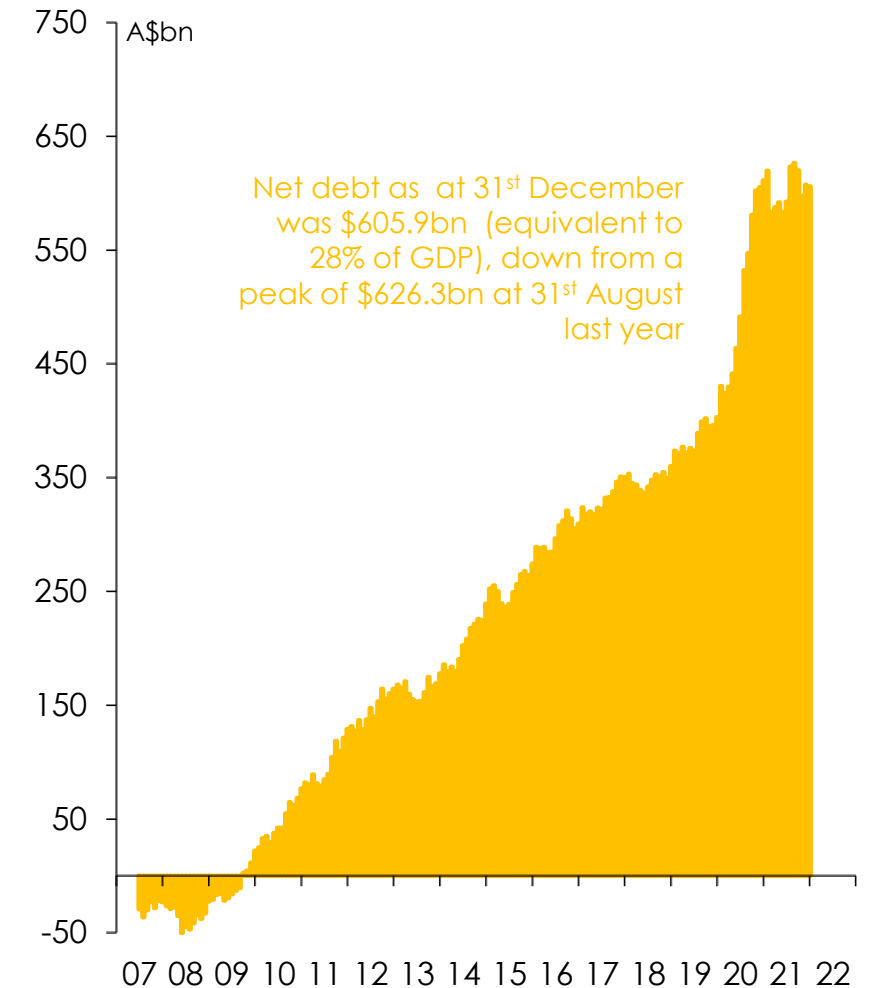
Australian Government revenue and expenses



Australian Government 'underlying' cash balance



Australian Government net debt



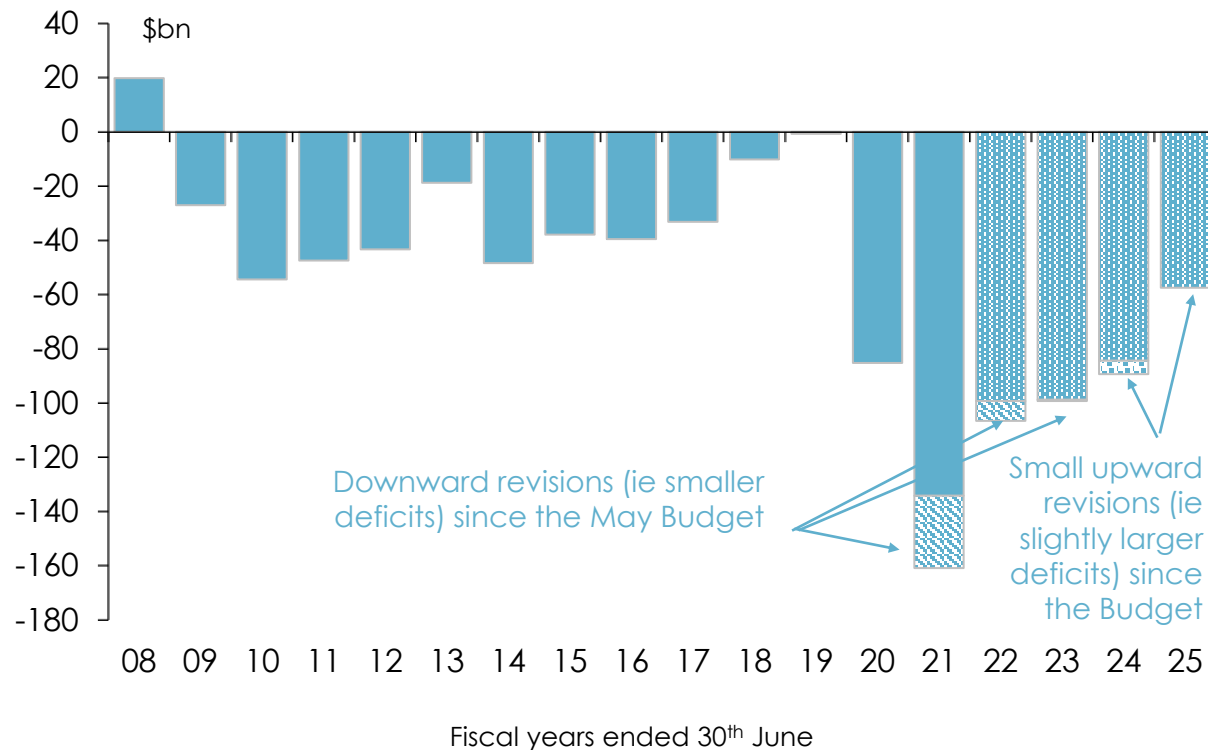
Note: Revenue and expenses are accrual accounting items. The 'underlying' cash balance is (cash) receipts minus payments, excluding transactions in financial assets for policy purposes and net earnings of the Future Fund. Net debt is total interest-bearing liabilities (government securities, deposits, loans and other borrowing) minus cash and deposits, advances paid, and (interest-bearing) loans, placements and investments. Source: Australian Government, [Final Budget Outcome 2020-21](#); Department of Finance, [Commonwealth Monthly Financial Statements](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

The 2021-22 Mid-Year Economic & Fiscal Outlook lowered the forecast deficits for 2021-22 and 2022-23 but raised them for 2023-24 and 2024-25

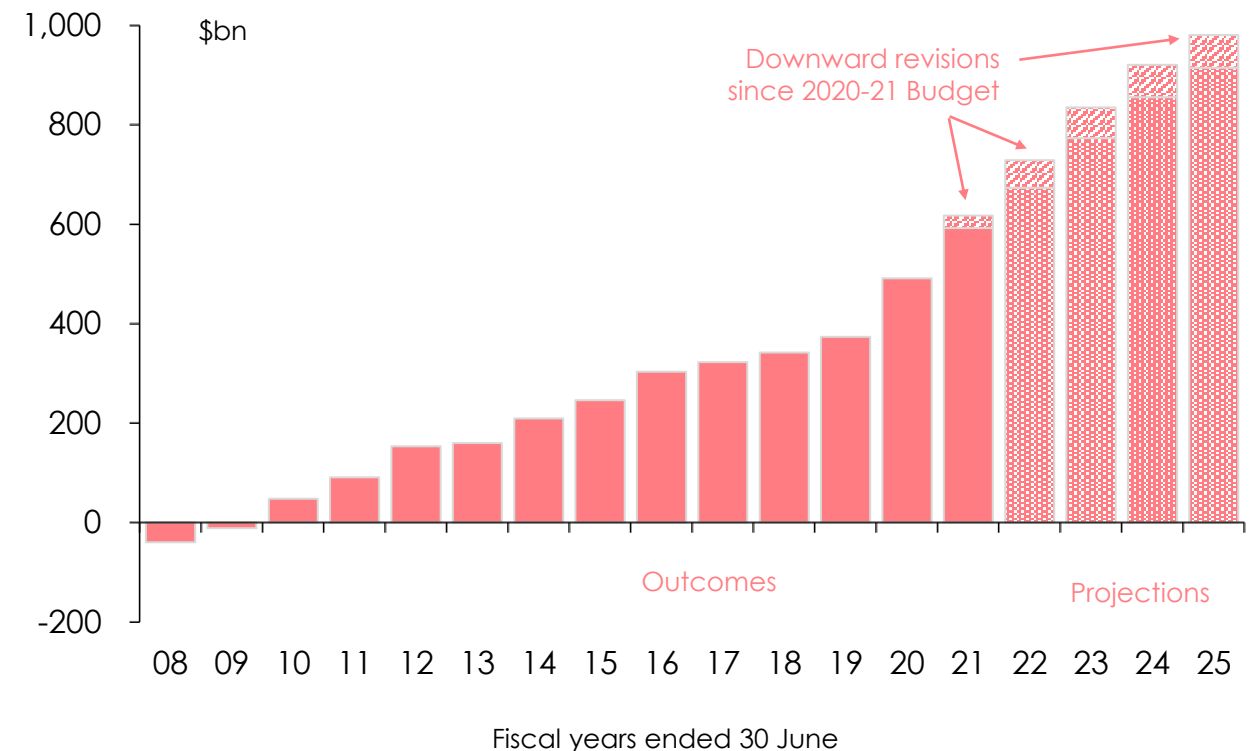
THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

2021-22 MYEFO forward estimates of the 'underlying' cash balance and net debt

'Underlying' cash balance



Net debt



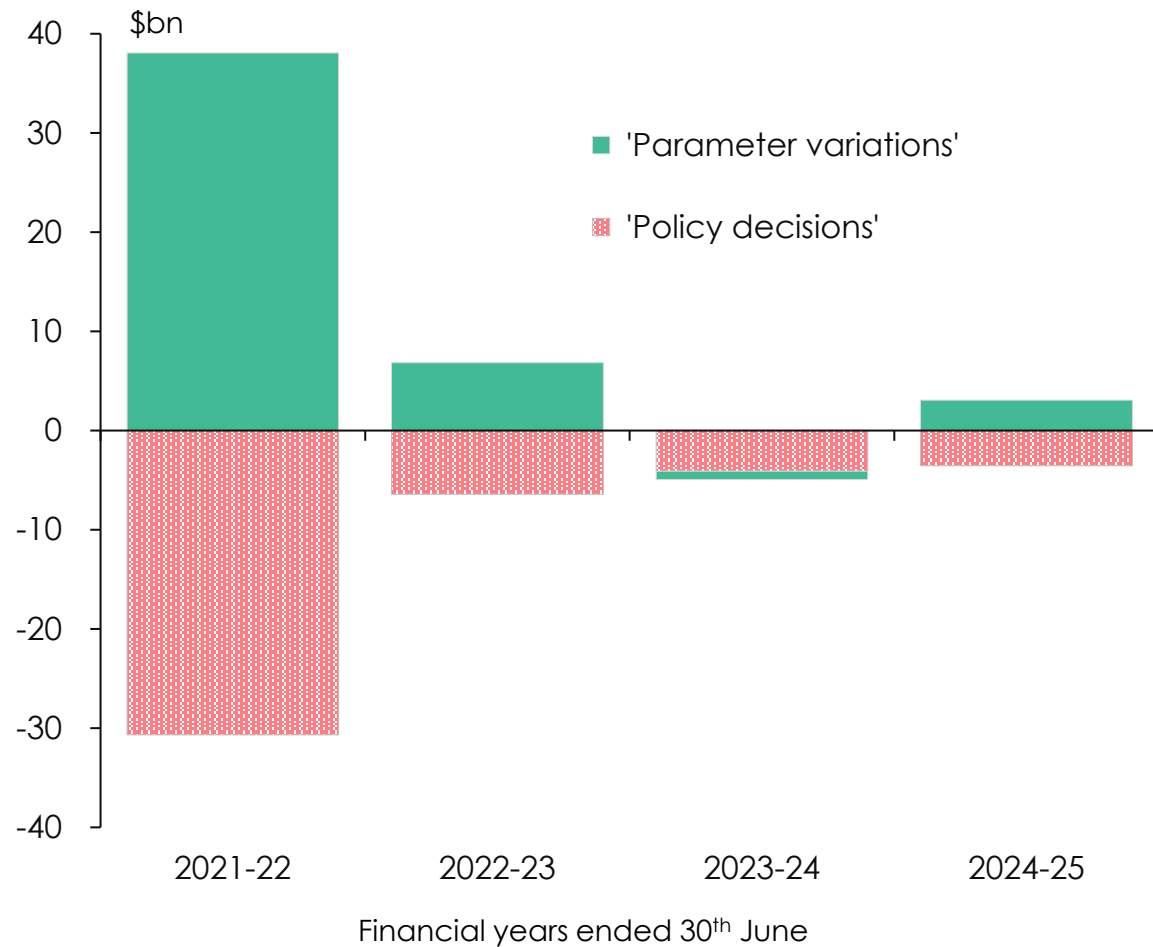
- ❑ The deficit for 2020-21 of \$134.2bn (6.5% of GDP) was \$27bn less than had been forecast in the May Budget – the deficits for 2021-22 and 2022-23 were revised down by \$7.4bn and \$0.4bn, respectively, while the deficits for 2023-24 and 2024-25 were revised up by \$5bn and \$0.5bn

- ❑ Net debt as at 30th June 2021 was \$25bn less than had been forecast in May – and the forecast for net debt as at 30th June 2025 has been revised down by \$66bn, to \$915bn (37.4% of GDP)

The Government spent almost all of the \$47bn net 'windfall gain' to the budget since May, leaving a net improvement in the deficit of just \$2¼bn

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Sources of the changes in forward estimates of the 'underlying cash balance' between the 2021-22 Budget and the 2021-22 MYEFO



- ❑ 'Parameter variations' – revisions to projections of receipts and payments due to changes in economic and other forecasting assumptions – since the May Budget improved the projected budget 'bottom line' by a total of \$47bn over the four years to 2024-25
 - upward revisions to forward estimates of receipts totalling \$106bn (mostly higher personal and company income tax collections) were partly offset by upward revisions to forward estimates of payments totalling \$59bn (of which more than half, \$26bn, was due to increased National Disability Insurance Scheme costs)
- ❑ However 'policy decisions' taken since the Budget absorbed \$45bn of those 'windfall gains'
 - spending decisions added \$48bn to forecast cash deficits – of which \$20bn was for payments to individuals and businesses affected by recent lockdowns – while revenue decisions reduced forecast deficits by \$3bn
 - 'policy decisions' also include \$16bn of spending decisions 'taken but not yet announced', which includes 'commercial-in-confidence' vaccine deals but also suggests a significant 'war-chest' for pre-election announcements
- ❑ As a result, the net improvement in the budget deficit over the four years to 2024-25 is a mere \$2.3bn

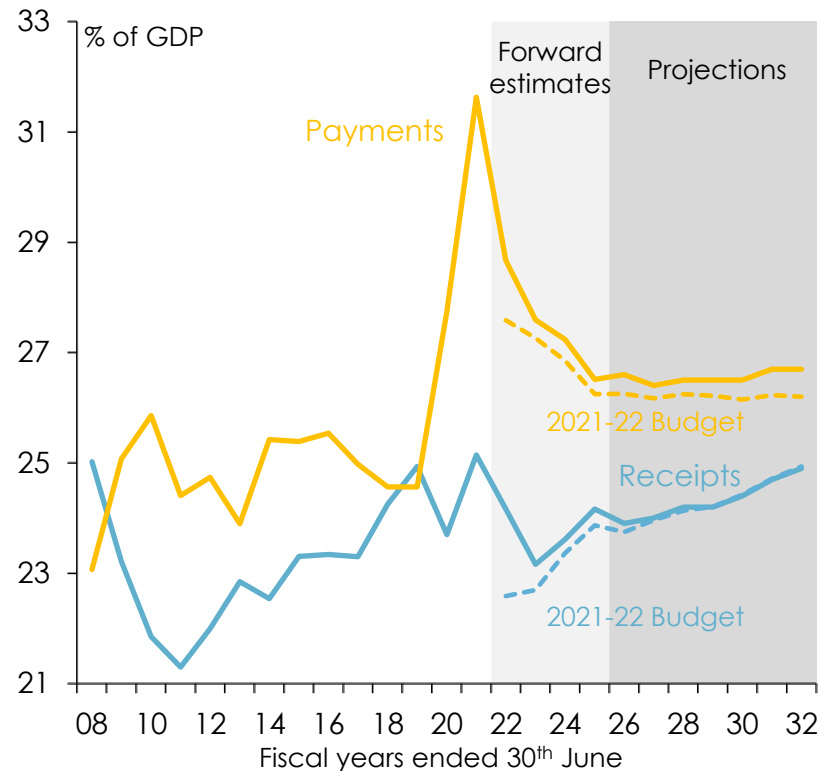
Source: Australian Government, 2021-22 [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#), 16th December 2021. The 2022-23 Budget will be presented on 29th March.
[Return to "What's New"](#).

Longer-term MYEFO projections suggest higher spending and revenues with surpluses nowhere in sight for as long as revenues are arbitrarily 'capped'

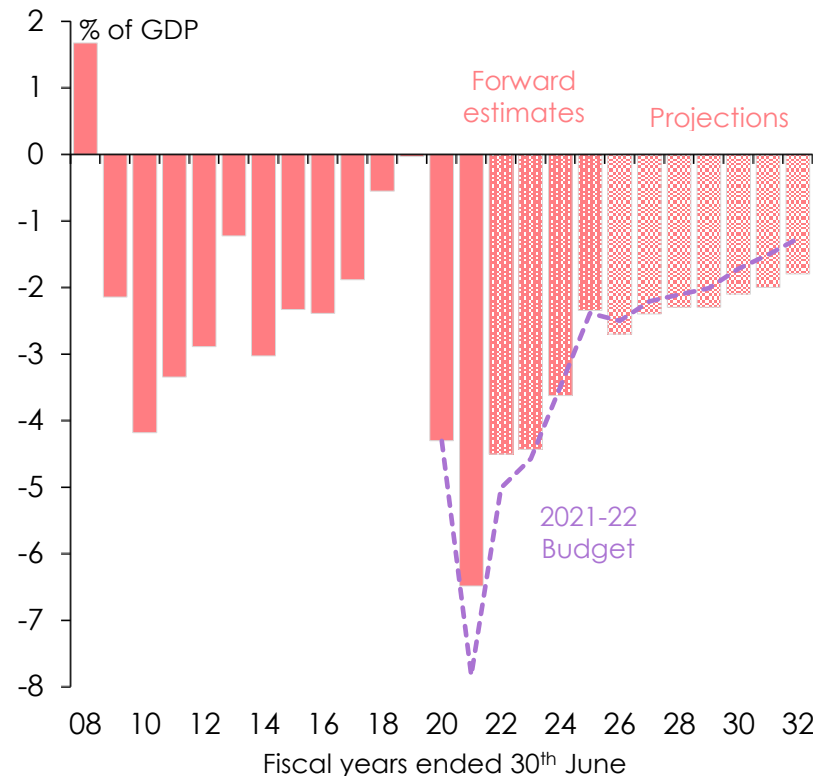
THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY THIS WEEK – 18TH FEBRUARY 2022

2021-22 Budget and MYEFO Forward estimates and medium-term projections compared

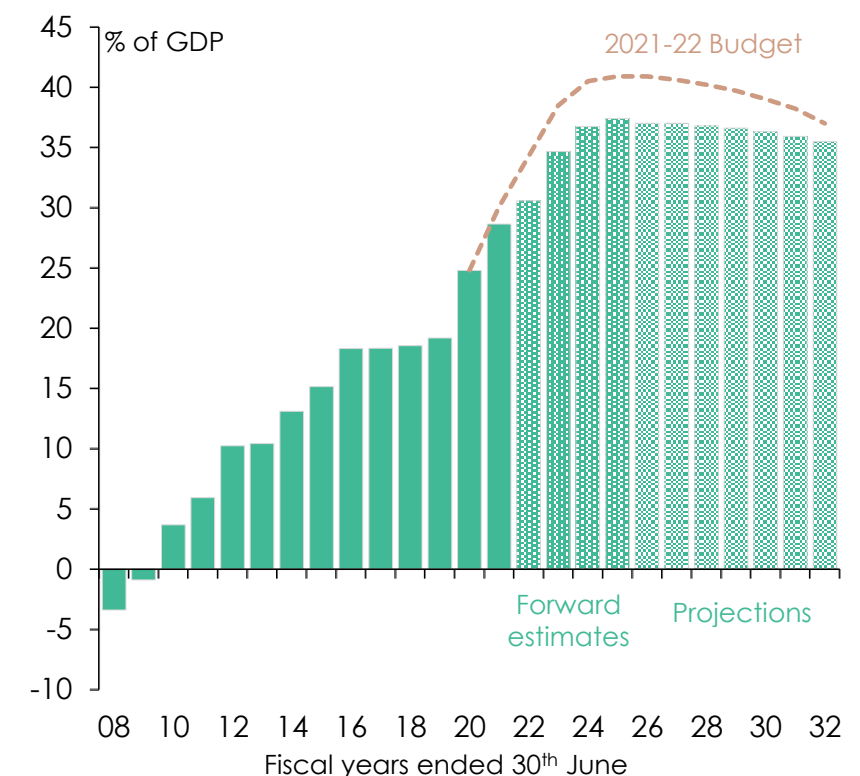
Receipts & payments



'Underlying' cash deficit



Net debt



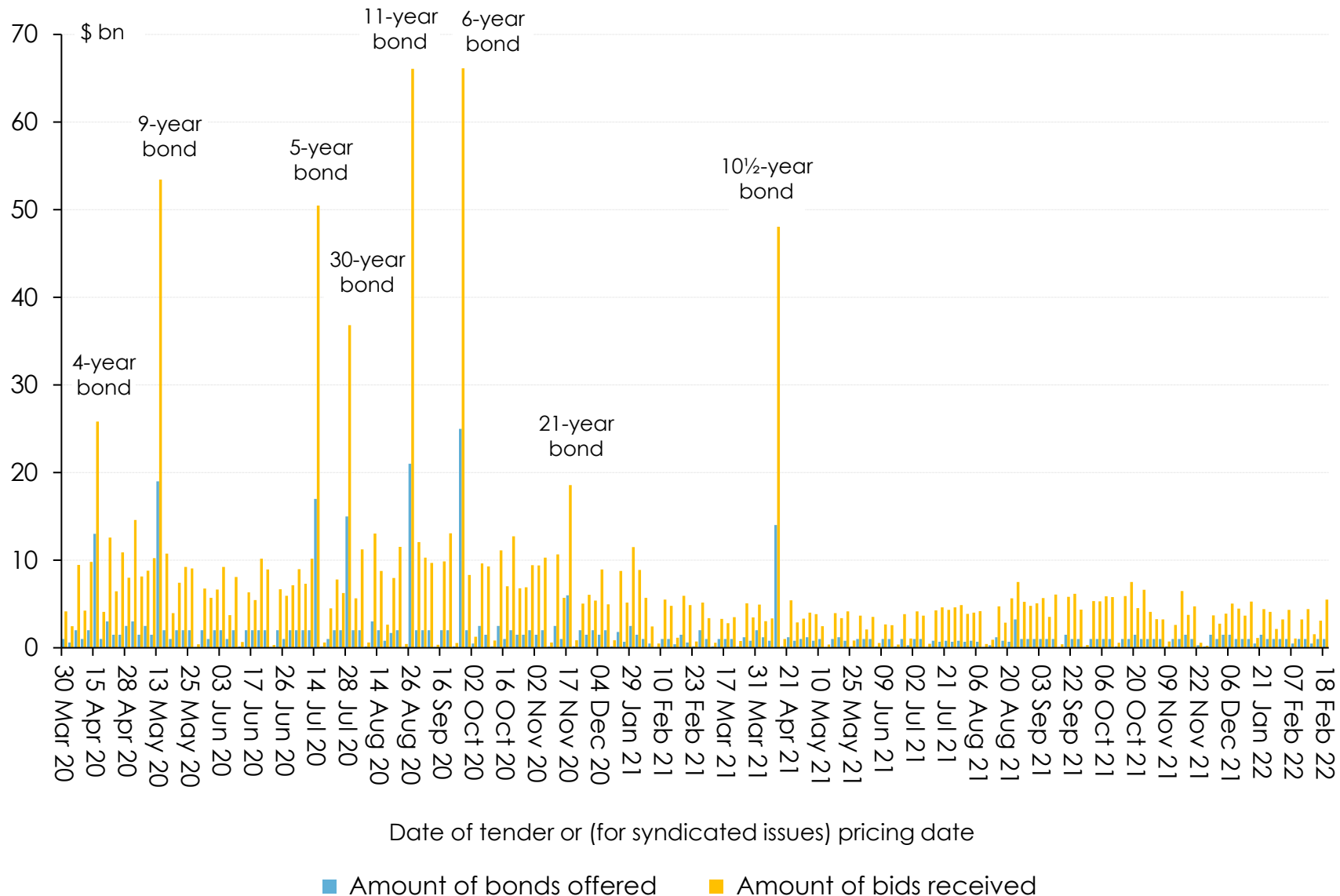
- ❑ MYEFO projects higher spending and revenues over the medium term than in the May Budget (and in the case of spending, significantly higher than in the pre-Covid era) – leading to persistent budget deficits (higher over the medium term than projected in the May Budget) – unless the quite arbitrary 23.9% of GDP 'cap' on tax revenues is amended or abandoned
- ❑ While interest rates remain low by historical standards the government can 'afford' to run deficits averaging 2¼% of GDP – but at the expense of not building 'buffers' to use in response to the next 'shock', whenever it comes

Source: Australian Government, 2021-22 [Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#), 16th December 2021. The 2022-23 Budget will be presented on 29th March.
[Return to "What's New"](#).

The Government continues to find a ready appetite for its bond issuance – in the past four weeks it has received bids of \$47.2bn for \$13bn of bonds

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Australian government bond issuance since March 2020



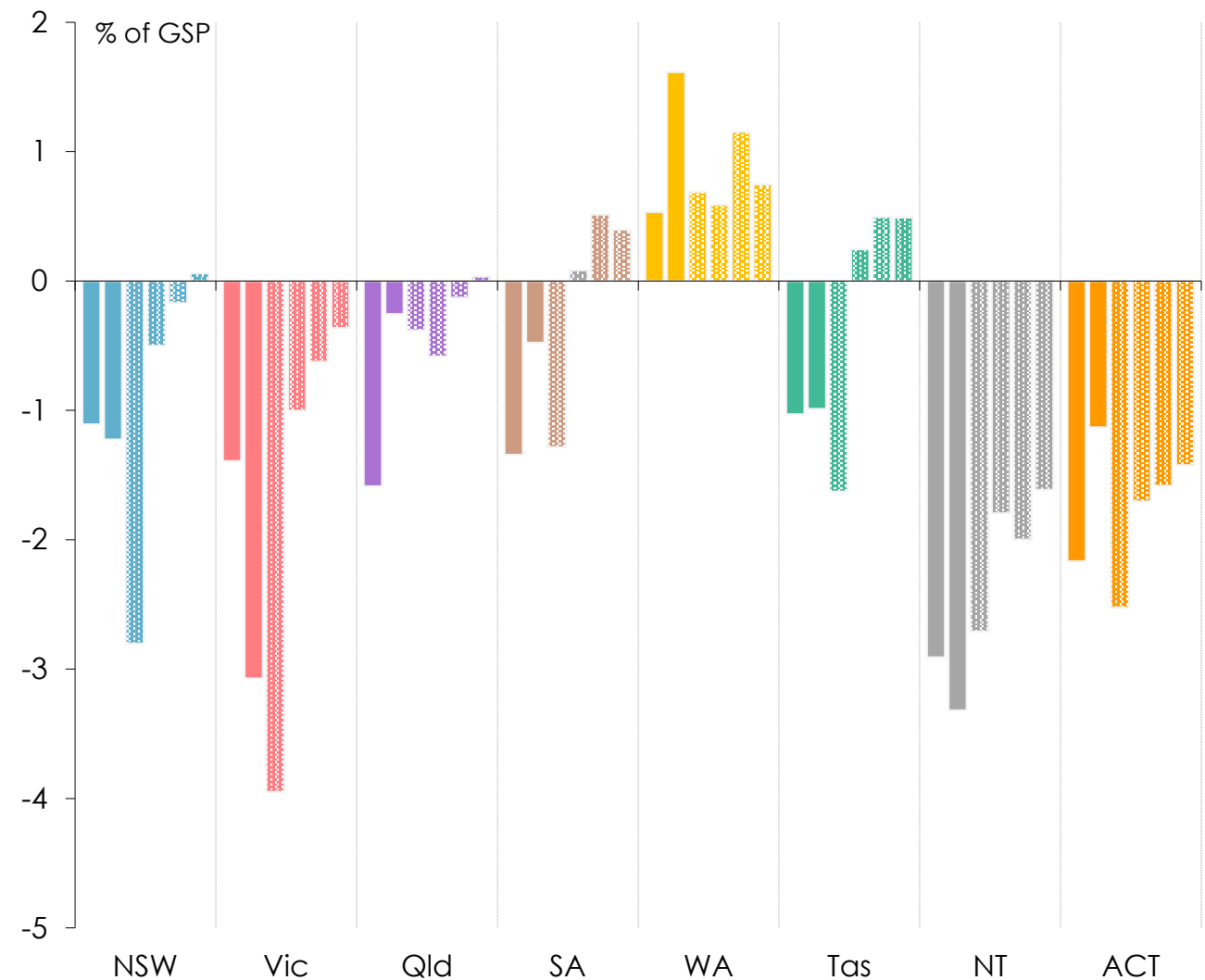
- On 7th January AOFM indicated it would issue about \$61bn of Treasury bonds, and \$5-5½bn of indexed bonds, over the six months to June
- Since resuming auctions on 12th January, the AOFM has sold \$13bn of bonds – including this week \$500mn of Nov 2028s, and \$1bn each of April 2025s and April 2033s, for which it received bids exceeding \$10 billion
- So far this financial year, the AOFM has received bids totalling almost \$257bn for the \$60.4bn of bonds it has offered for sale – a ‘coverage ratio’ of 4.3 times, cf. 3¾ times during the 2020-21 financial year
- Since 30th March 2020, the Australian Office of Financial Management has issued \$357bn of Treasury bonds – based on the volume of bids received it could have borrowed \$1.35 trn with yields at most 4 bp above the highest yields actually accepted

Source: Australian Office of Financial Management [data hub](#); Corinna. [Return to "What's New"](#).

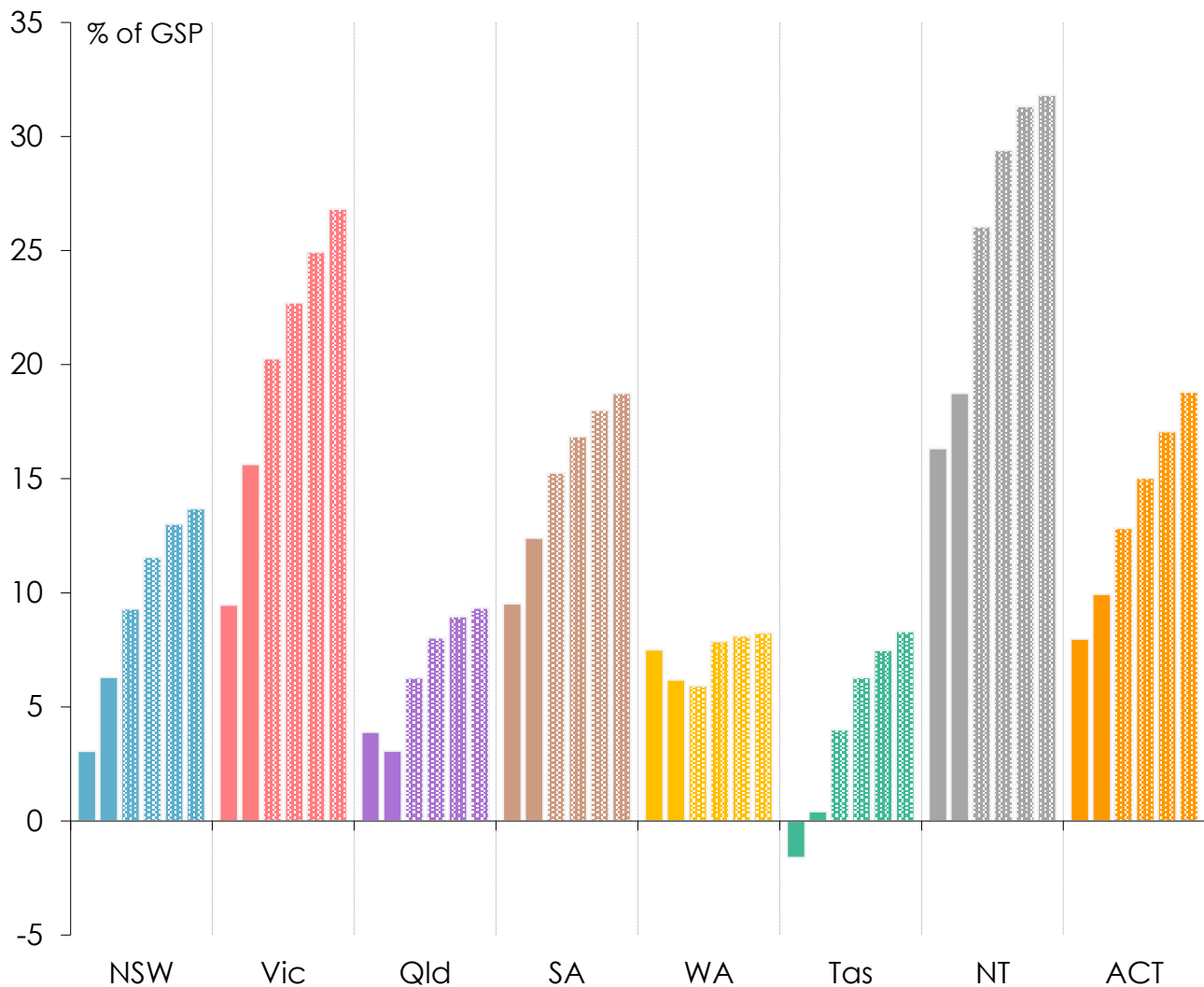
Some states and territories – especially Victoria and the Northern Territory – also have significant budgetary challenges ahead of them

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States and territories – ‘net operating balances’



States and territories – net debt



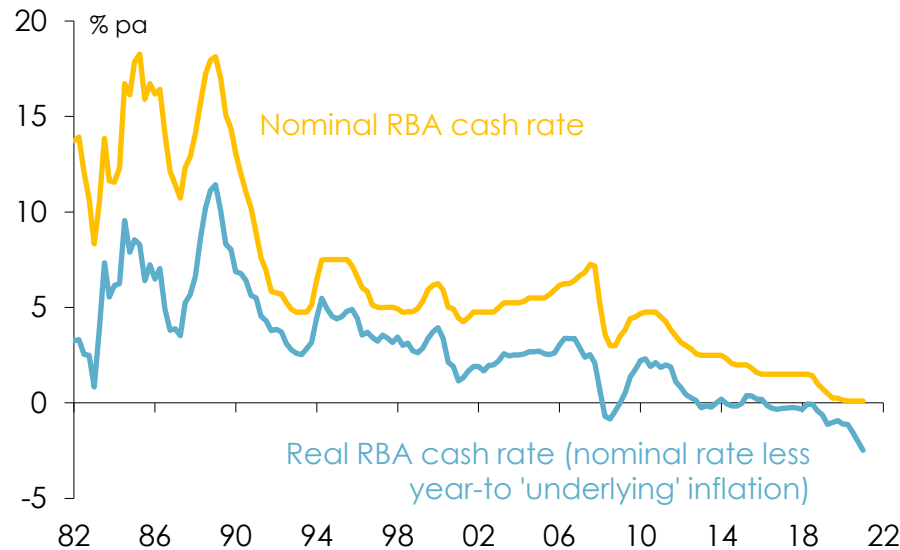
Note: Estimates are for the ‘general government’ sector, ie excluding GBEs, etc. ‘Net operating balance’ is the difference between ‘operating expenses’ (ie excluding net purchases or leases of non-financial assets). Estimates of nominal gross state product (GSP) for states and territories other than NSW and Victoria are derived from State or Treasury estimates of real GSP growth combined with Federal Treasury estimates of the (national) GDP price deflator. Sources: State and Territory 2021-22 Mid-Year Reviews.

Monetary policy and the RBA

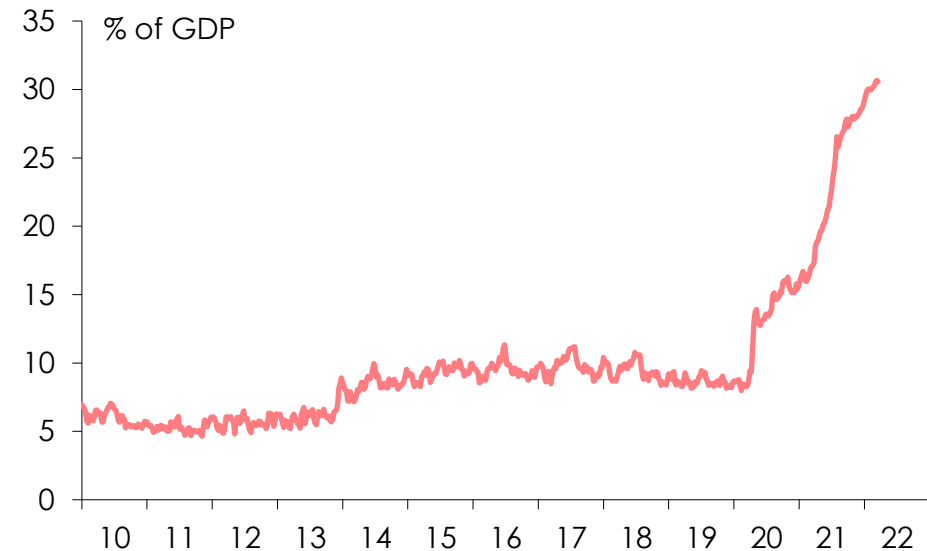
RBA Governor Philip Lowe last week again re-iterated the RBA's intention to “wait and see” whether inflation was “sustainably” back in its target range

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Reserve Bank cash rate



Reserve Bank assets as a pc of GDP



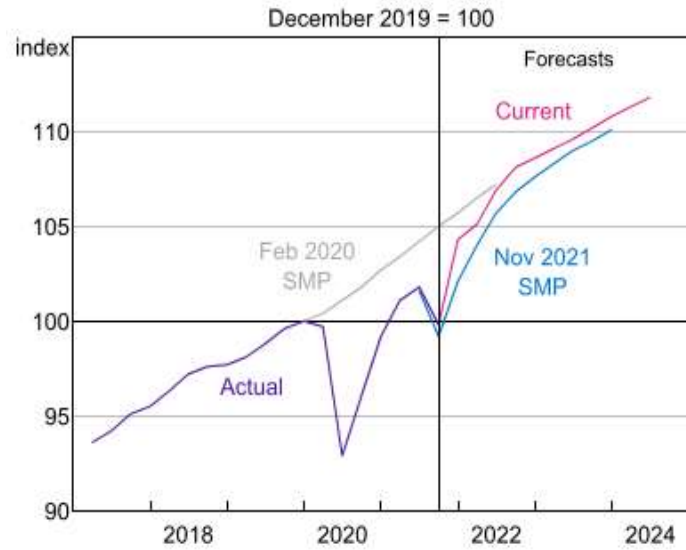
Source: Reserve Bank of Australia, [Statistical Tables](#) A3 and F1.1; ABS, [Consumer Price Index, Australia](#). [Return to "What's New"](#).

- ❑ As expected, the RBA decided to terminate its bond purchase program, with effect from 10th February, at Tuesday's board meeting, and left its cash rate unchanged at 0.10%
- ❑ In his [post-meeting statement](#) Governor Philip Lowe emphasized that the decision to end its bond purchases “does not imply a near-term increase in interest rates”, but rather reflects the “faster-than-expected progress” made towards the RBA's inflation and employment goals, and the fact that many other central banks have ended, or will soon end, their ‘QE’
 - the Board will consider whether to continue re-investing the proceeds of maturing bonds in its portfolio at its May meeting
- ❑ [Speaking](#) to the House of Representatives Economics Committee last Friday, Dr Lowe again emphasized it was “too early” to conclude that inflation was “sustainably in the target range”, especially given that “aggregate wages growth is no higher than before the pandemic”
 - he argued that the RBA had more scope “to wait and see how the data develop and how some of the uncertainties [around the inflation outlook] are resolved”, than its counterparts in “countries with higher inflation rates”
- ❑ Whilst acknowledging that there were “risks to waiting” before raising rates, the Governor asserted that “there is also a risk to moving too early”, namely, putting at risk “the opportunity to secure a lower rate of unemployment than was thought possible just a short while ago”

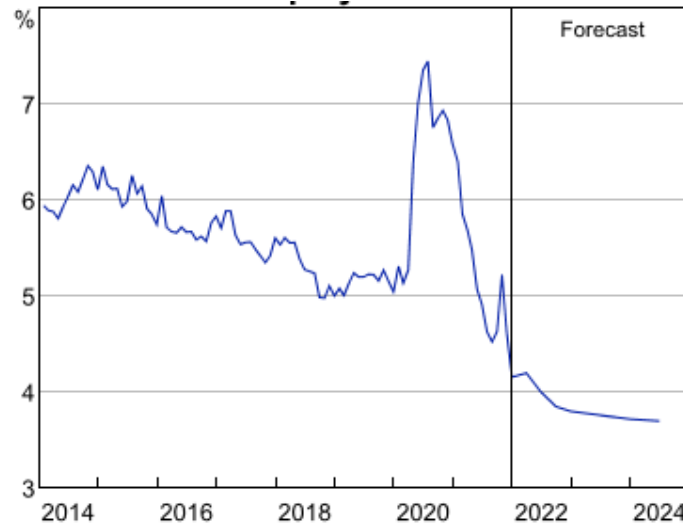
The RBA upgraded its forecasts for near-term economic growth, lowered its forecasts for unemployment, and raised its forecasts for inflation

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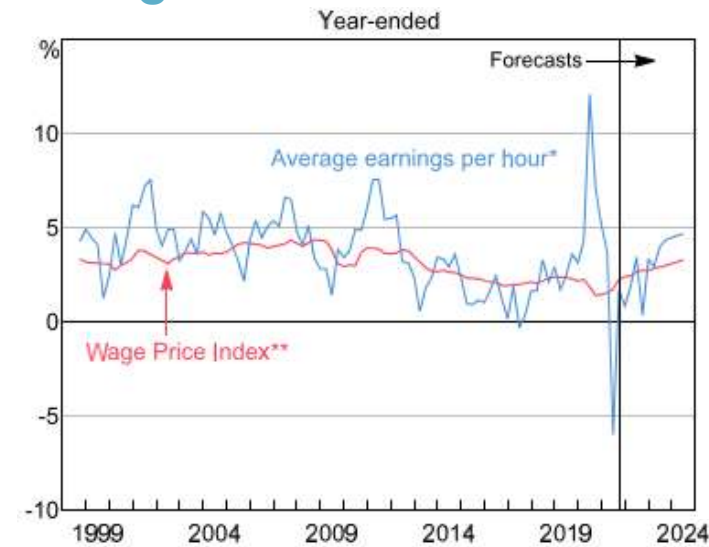
GDP



Unemployment



Wages



'Underlying' inflation



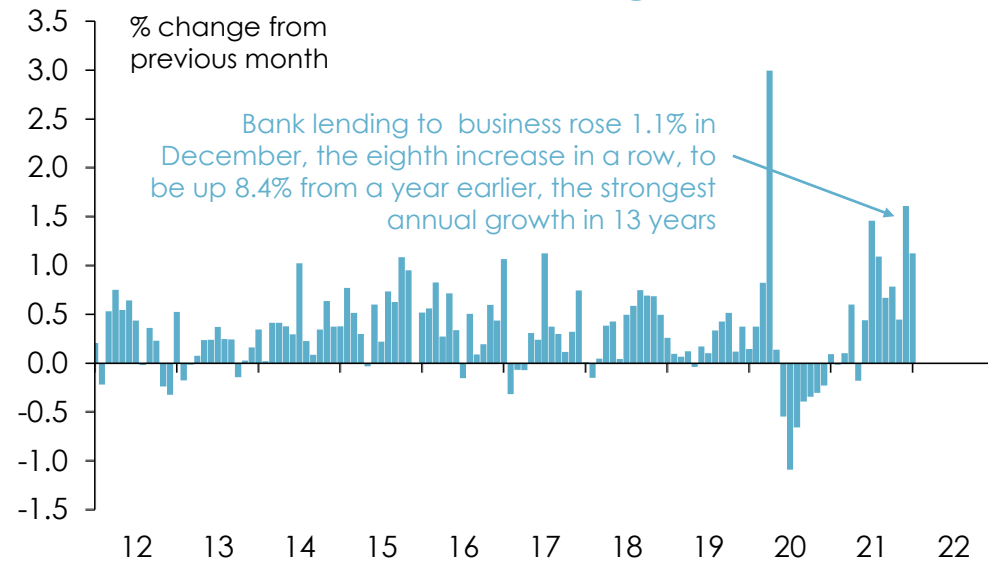
- ❑ In its latest [Statement on Monetary Policy](#), released Friday, the RBA has upwardly revised its near-term real GDP growth forecast – from 4% to 5% over the year to Q2 2022 – but lowered forecast for the year to Q2 2023 to 2½% (from 3¼%), with growth to slow further to 2% over the year to Q2 2024
- ❑ The RBA expects the unemployment rate to fall to 3¾% by Q4 this year (cf. its November forecast of 4¼%), and remain at that level through Q2 2024
- ❑ Despite this, wages growth is still expected to pick up only “gradually”, reflecting the impact of “more muted growth” in public and private enterprise agreements, and “the multi-year duration” of private sector agreements: annual growth in the WPI is forecast to increase only marginally to 2½% by the end of this year, and then to 3¼% by mid-2024
- ❑ ‘Headline’ inflation is expected to peak at 3¾% in Q2 (up from 2¾% previously) reflecting further pass-through of upstream cost pressures in durable goods and dwelling construction, before easing back to 2¾% from Q2 2023 on
- ❑ The RBA expects the same factors to lift ‘underlying’ inflation to a peak of 3¼% in Q2 this year, but then to fall back to 2¾% by Q4 this year and remain at that level thereafter (an upward revision from 2¼-2½% previously) underpinned by “the absorption of remaining spare capacity in the labour market”

Source: Reserve Bank of Australia, [Statement on Monetary Policy](#), 4th February. The RBA's next set of forecasts will be published on 6th May. [Return to "What's New"](#).

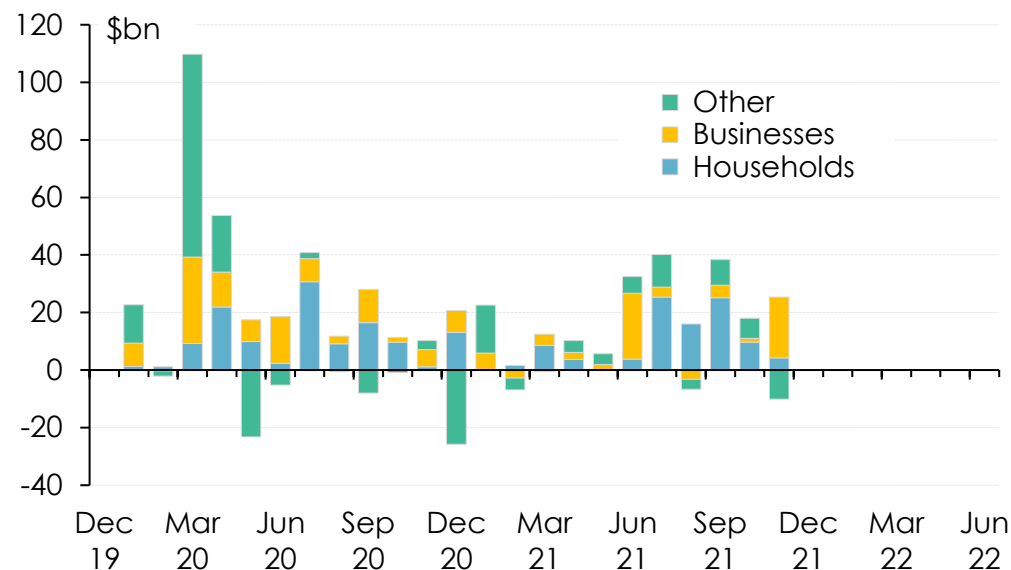
Banks have played an important role in assisting borrowers cope with shutdowns, and have been swamped with deposits

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Business credit outstanding



Monthly change in bank deposits



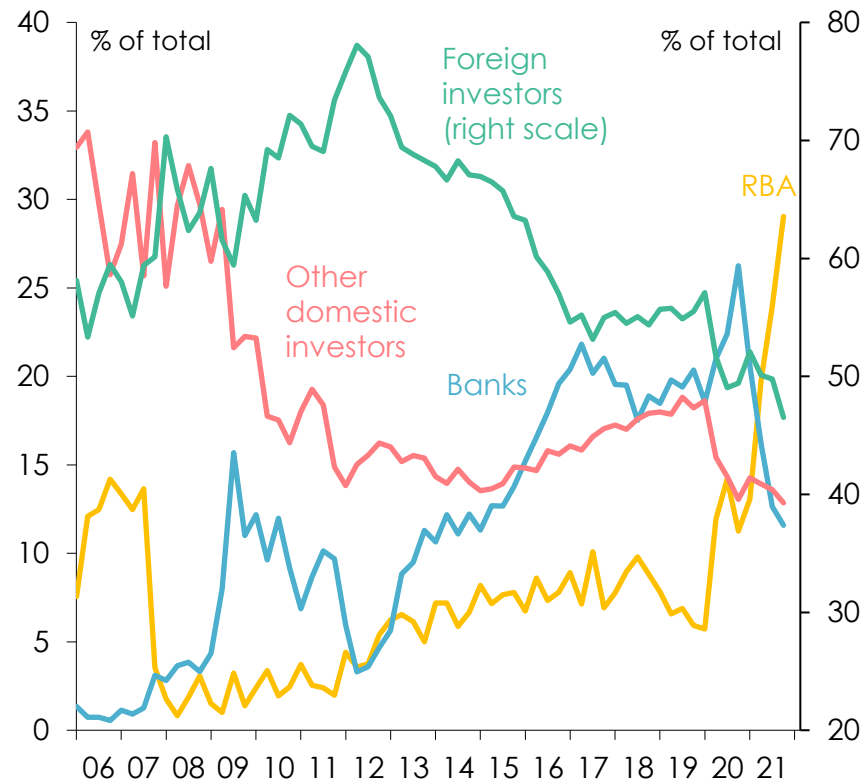
- ❑ Banks have cut interest rates on small business loans by more than the official cash rate since June 2019 (when the RBA started cutting rates again)
- ❑ Banks have made credit readily available when needed – in the early stages of the pandemic and during last year's lockdowns
 - over the 12 months to December 2021, bank lending to business grew at its fastest rate since 2008
- ❑ Banks extended 'repayment holidays' to business and home mortgage borrowers who requested it
- ❑ Bank deposits have swelled by \$475bn (22%) since February 2019 as customers have 'parked' precautionary loan drawings, additional savings and withdrawals from superannuation funds
 - almost all of this has gone into transaction deposits which don't pay interest – so banks haven't drawn as much as might otherwise have been expected from the RBA's Term Funding Facility
- ❑ Household deposits have risen by \$242bn (24½%) since February 2019 – including by \$81bn between July and November most of which NSW and Victoria spent in lockdown – while business deposits have risen by \$171bn (28¾%)

Sources: Reserve Bank of Australia; APRA. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The RBA has (indirectly) absorbed 70% of the increase in government debt since the end of 2019, foreign investors 24% and banks 7%

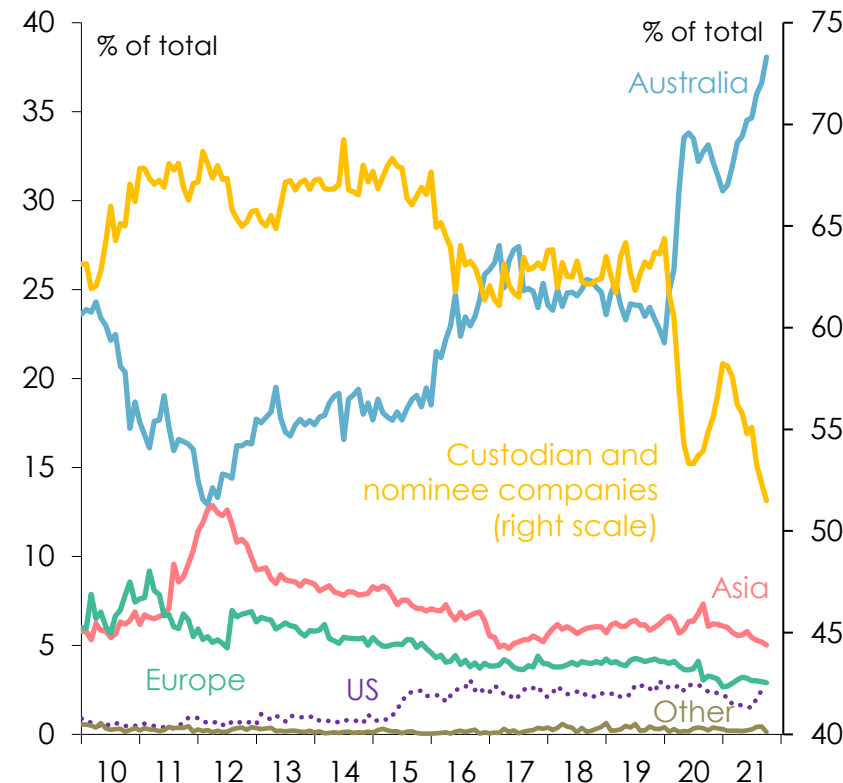
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Holder of Australian Government bonds



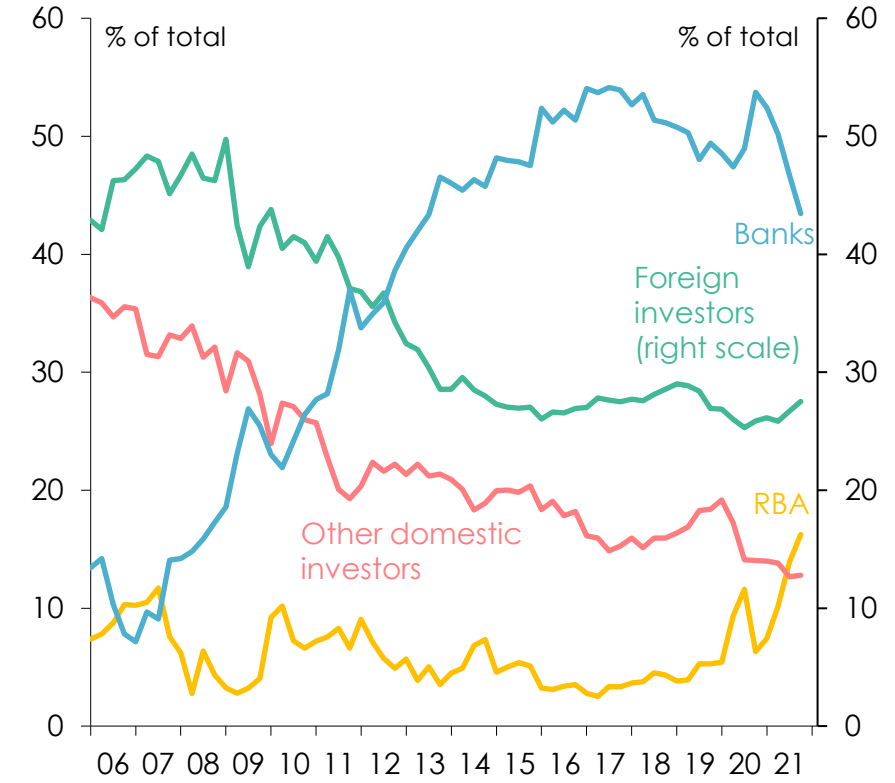
Australian Gov't bonds on issue have increased by \$266bn since the end of 2019 – of which \$225bn (85%) have been absorbed by the RBA, and \$56bn by foreigners, while banks have reduced their holdings by \$13bn

Nationality of Australian Government bond holders



Domestic holdings of Australian Gov't bonds (including RBA) rose by \$53bn over the 12 months to September while identified foreign holdings fell \$8½bn – and unidentified holdings (which include many foreigners) fell by \$9bn

Holder of State and Territory Government bonds



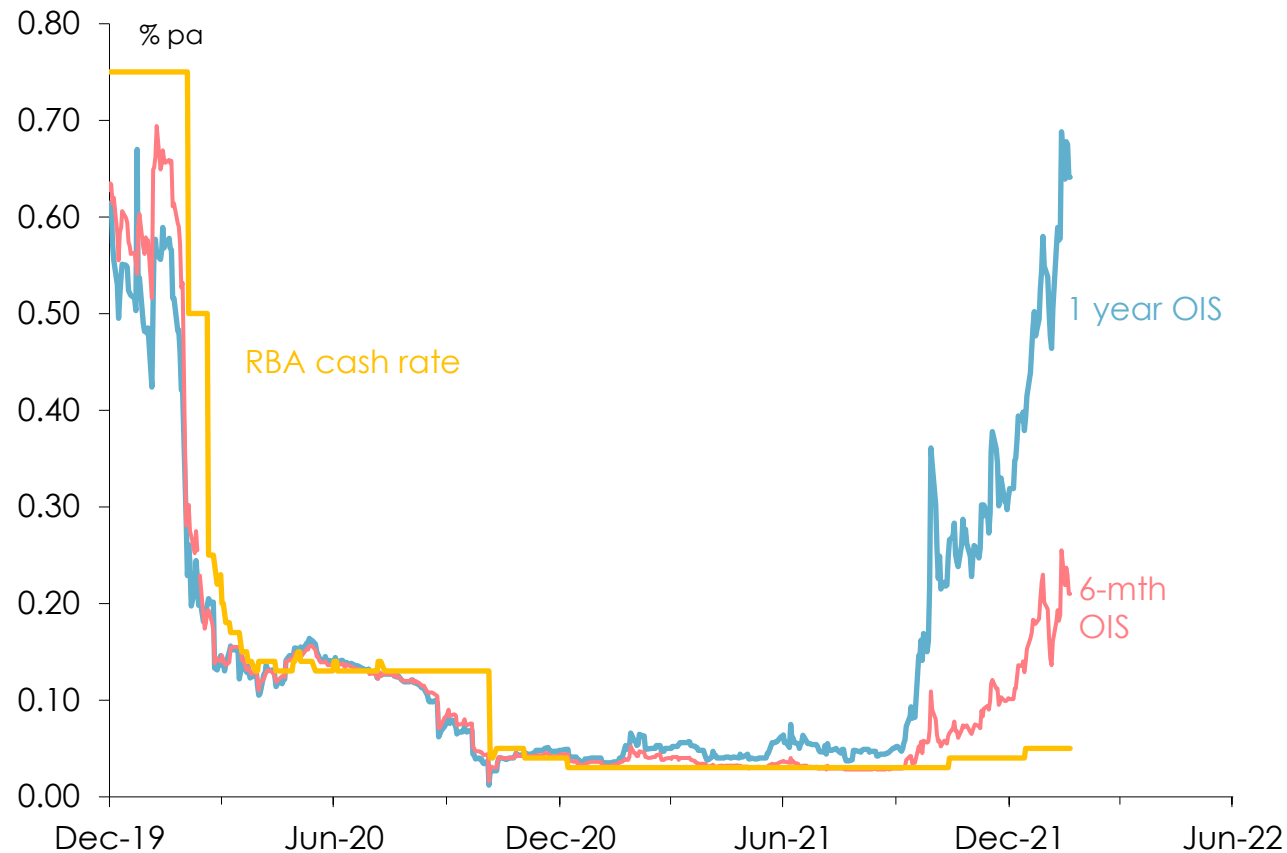
State & Territory Gov't bonds on issue increased have increased by \$129bn since the end of 2019, of which \$53bn have been absorbed by the RBA, \$41bn by banks and \$37bn by foreigners

Australian financial markets

Financial markets this week continued to raise the probabilities attaching to RBA rate hikes in the second half of this year

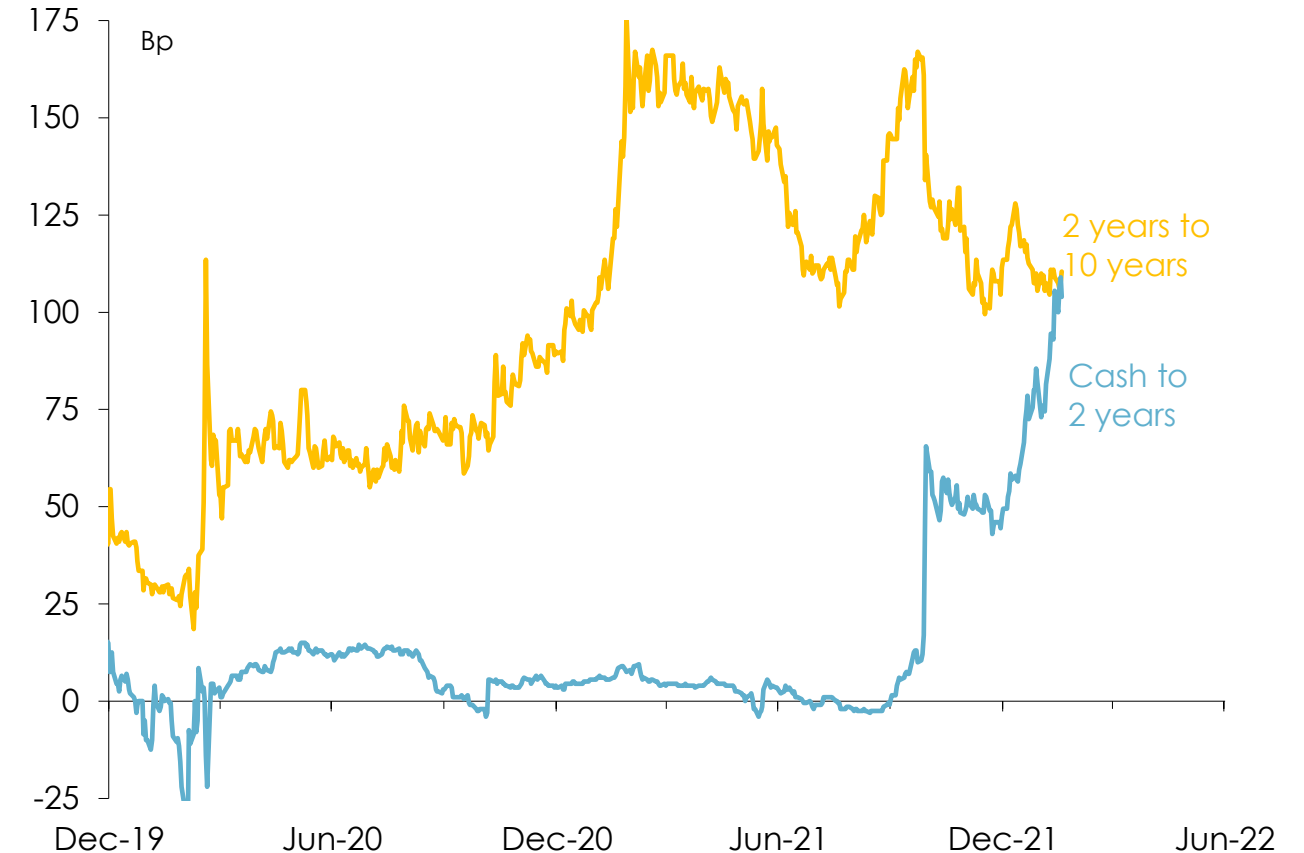
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Overnight index swap rates



- ❑ Short-term money markets this week further increased the probabilities attaching to the RBA starting to raise rates in the second half of this year – despite the RBA Governor again re-affirming it was in no hurry to raise rates ([slide 79](#))

Yield curves

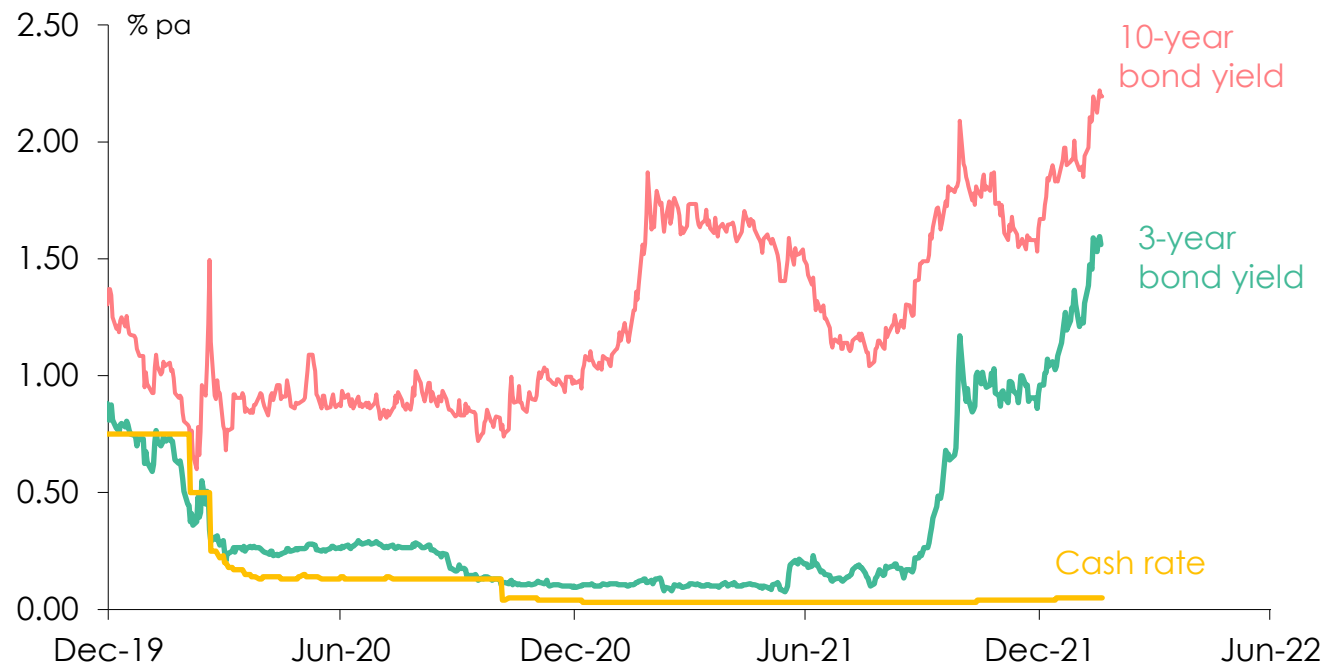


- ❑ The yield curve steepened further this week as the market continued to revise upwards the probabilities it attaches to the RBA raising rates in the second half of this year

Longer-term bond yields reached a two-year high this week, rising in line with overseas trends and growing expectations of RBA rate hikes this year

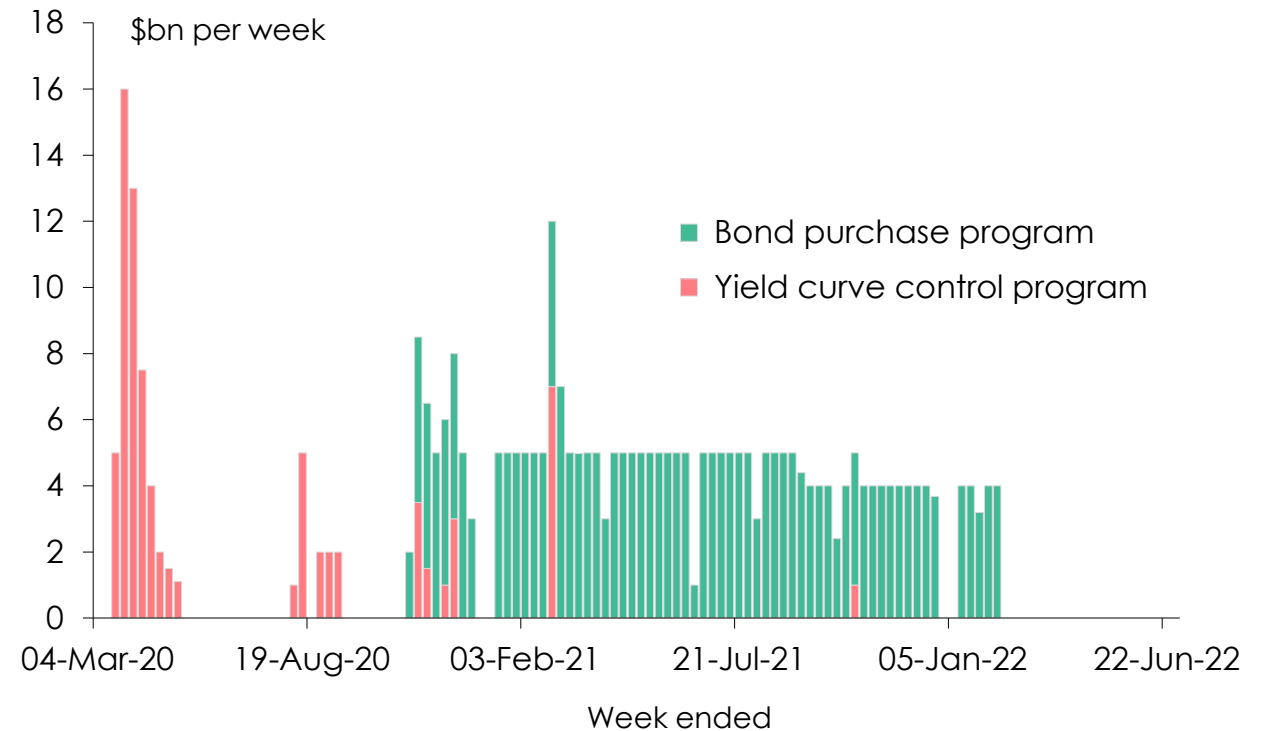
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Interest rates



- ❑ Short-term bond yields rose further this week with market participants continuing to discount the RBA's insistence that it would be 'patient' in waiting for confirmation that inflation was 'sustainably' within its target band ([slide 79](#))
- ❑ The 10-year yield also rose in line with global markets, reaching 2.20%, its highest level since the first week of February 2019

RBA open market bond purchases

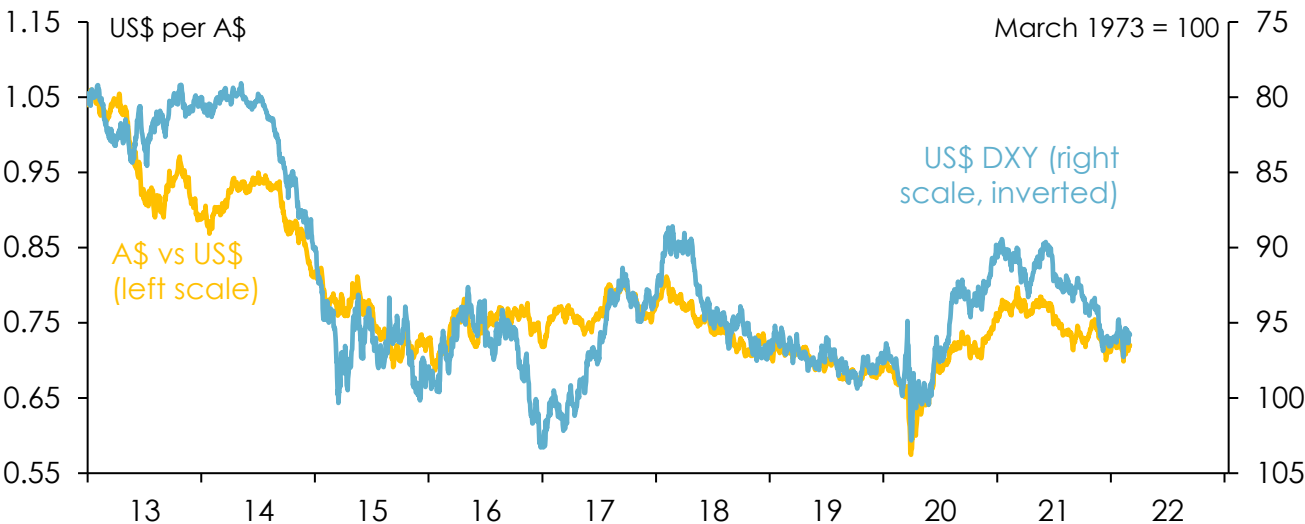


- ❑ The RBA last week purchased its final \$4bn of bonds under its now-terminated Bond Purchase Program, bringing the total amount of purchases under it to just under \$281bn, which together with purchases totalling \$80bn under the 3-year yield curve target program which was discontinued at the end of October last year means that, in all, the RBA purchased almost \$359bn of bonds, equivalent to about 17% of GDP

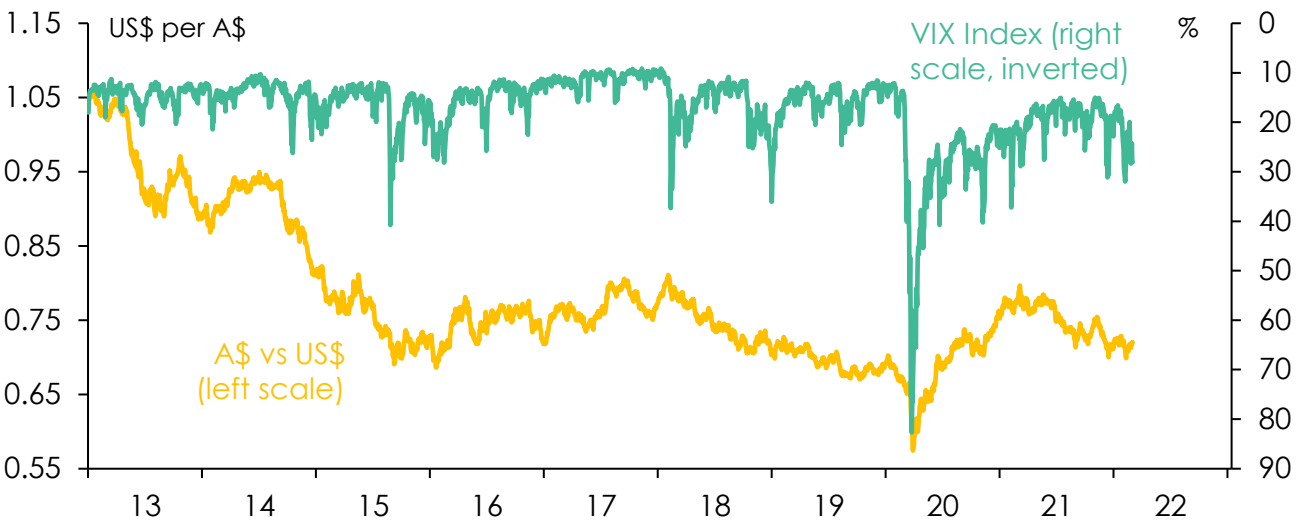
The A\$ rose back above US72¢ this week, despite a 10%+ fall in the iron ore price, reflecting a slightly softer US\$ and wider interest rate spreads

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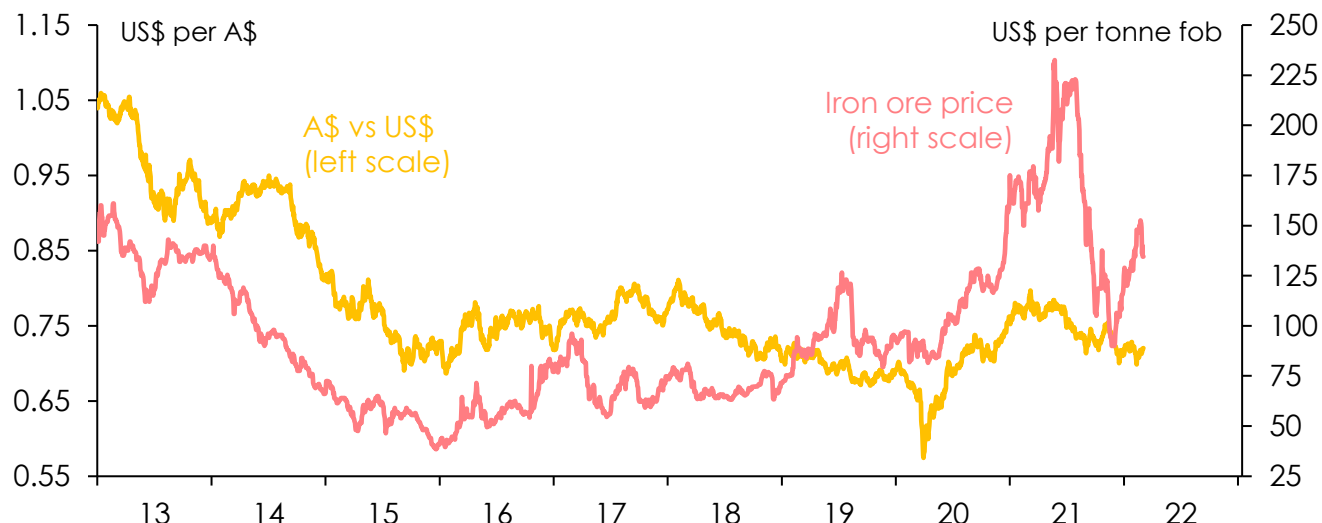
A\$-US\$ and US\$ trade-weighted index



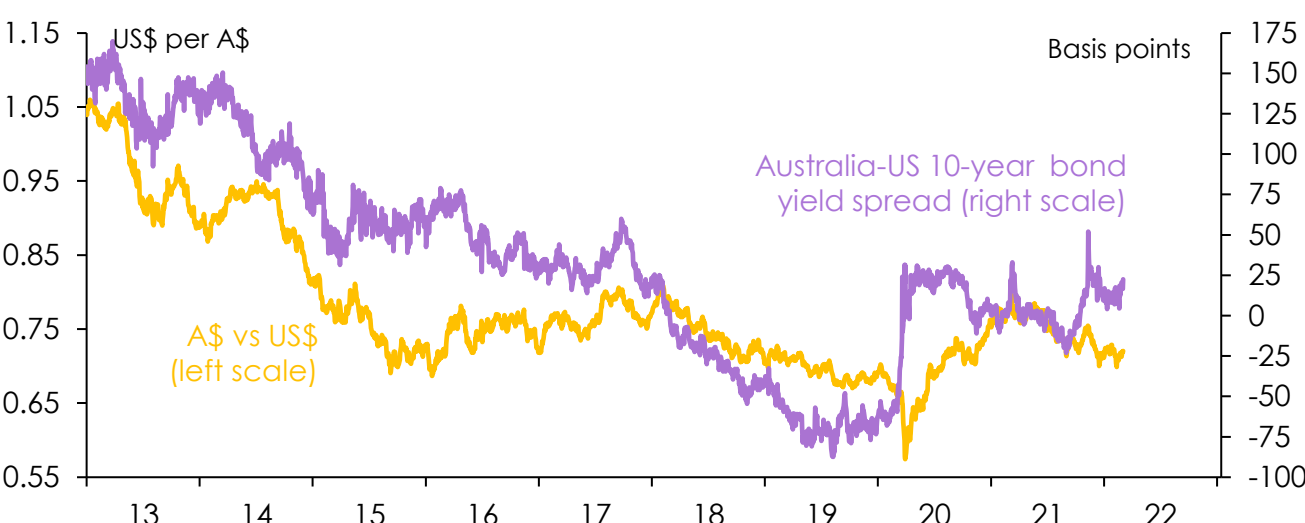
A\$-US\$ and US equity market volatility



A\$-US\$ and spot iron ore prices



A\$-US\$ and Australia-US 10-year bond yield spread

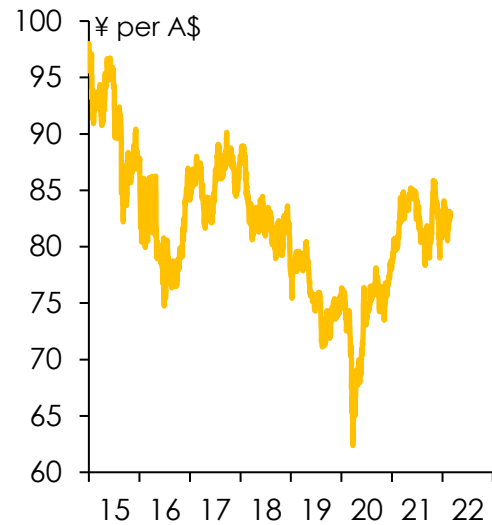


Note: The DXY is an index of the value of the US dollar against 6 other currencies (the euro, yen, pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc). The VIX index is a measure of the implied volatility of S&P500 options and is widely interpreted as an indicator of investor risk appetite or aversion. Source: Refinitiv Datastream. Data up to 18th February. [Return to "What's New"](#).

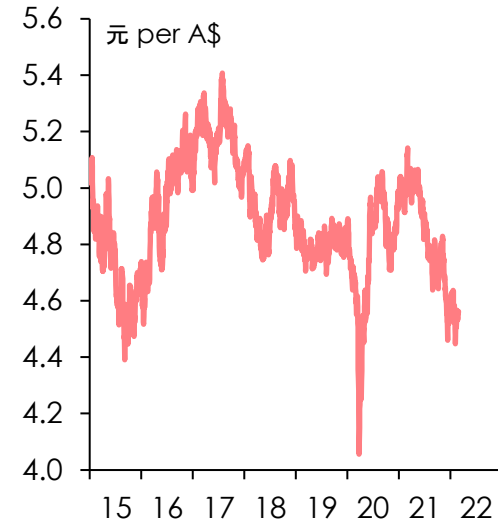
The A\$ also gained ground against most third currencies, rising 1¼% against the euro, and around ¾% vs the yen, won, rupiah, and C\$

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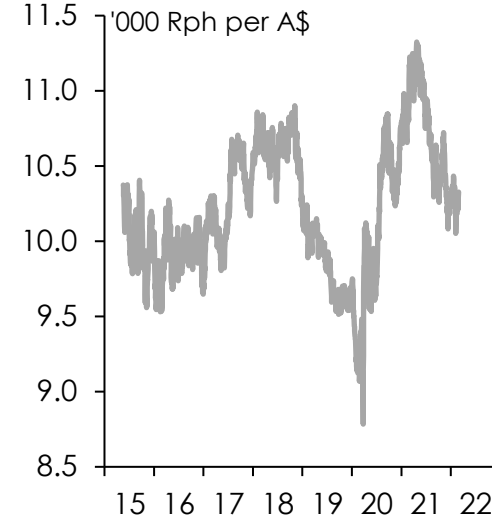
A\$ vs Japanese yen



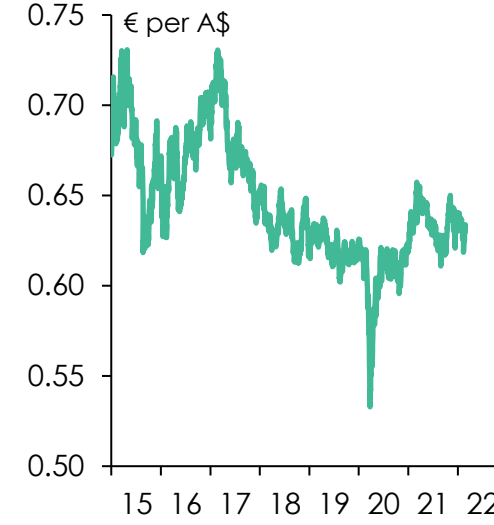
A\$ vs Chinese yuan



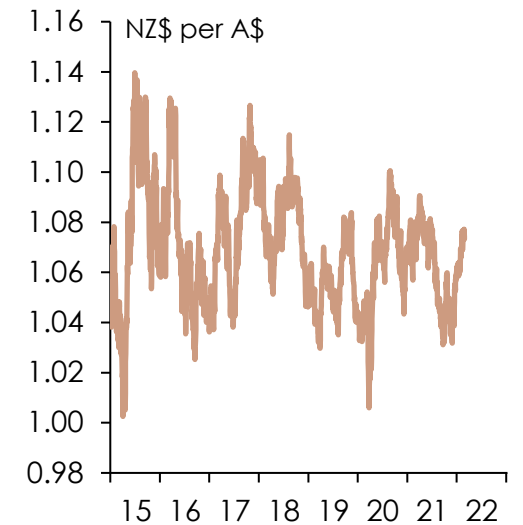
A\$ vs Indo rupiah



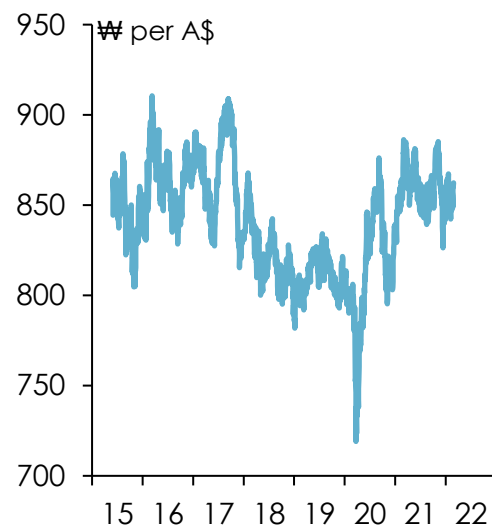
A\$ vs Euro



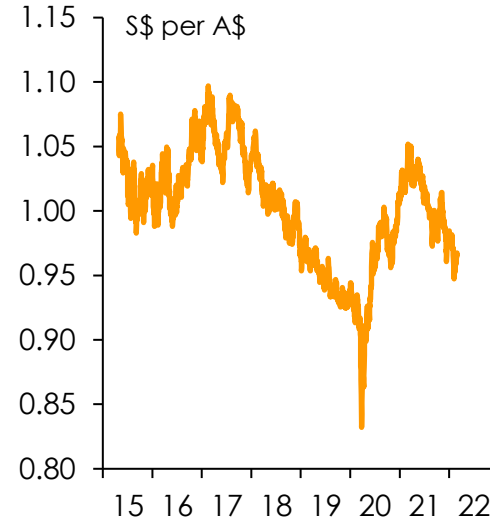
A\$ vs NZ\$



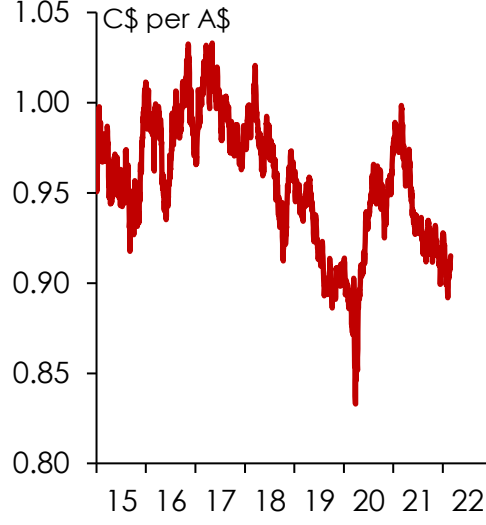
A\$ vs Korean won



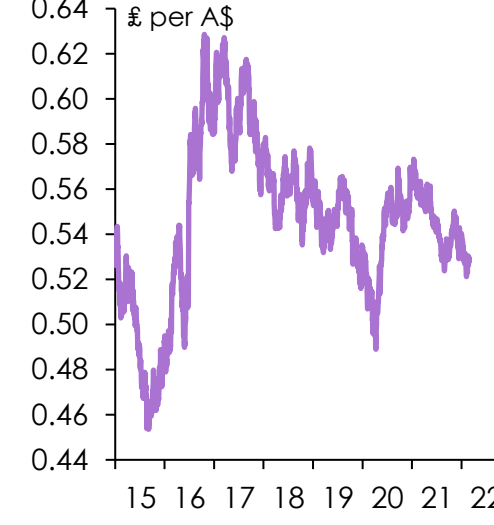
A\$ vs Singapore \$



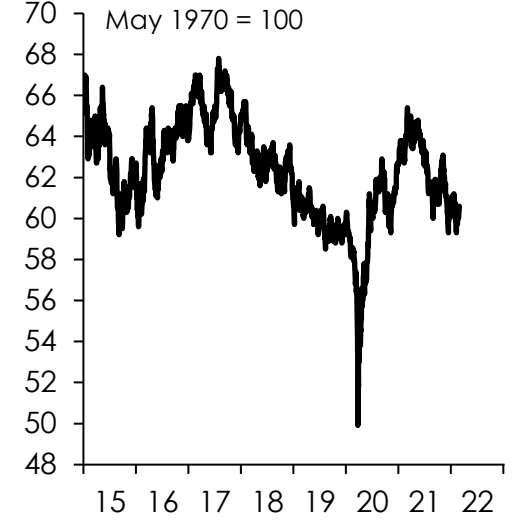
A\$ vs Canadian \$



A\$ vs British pound



A\$ TWI

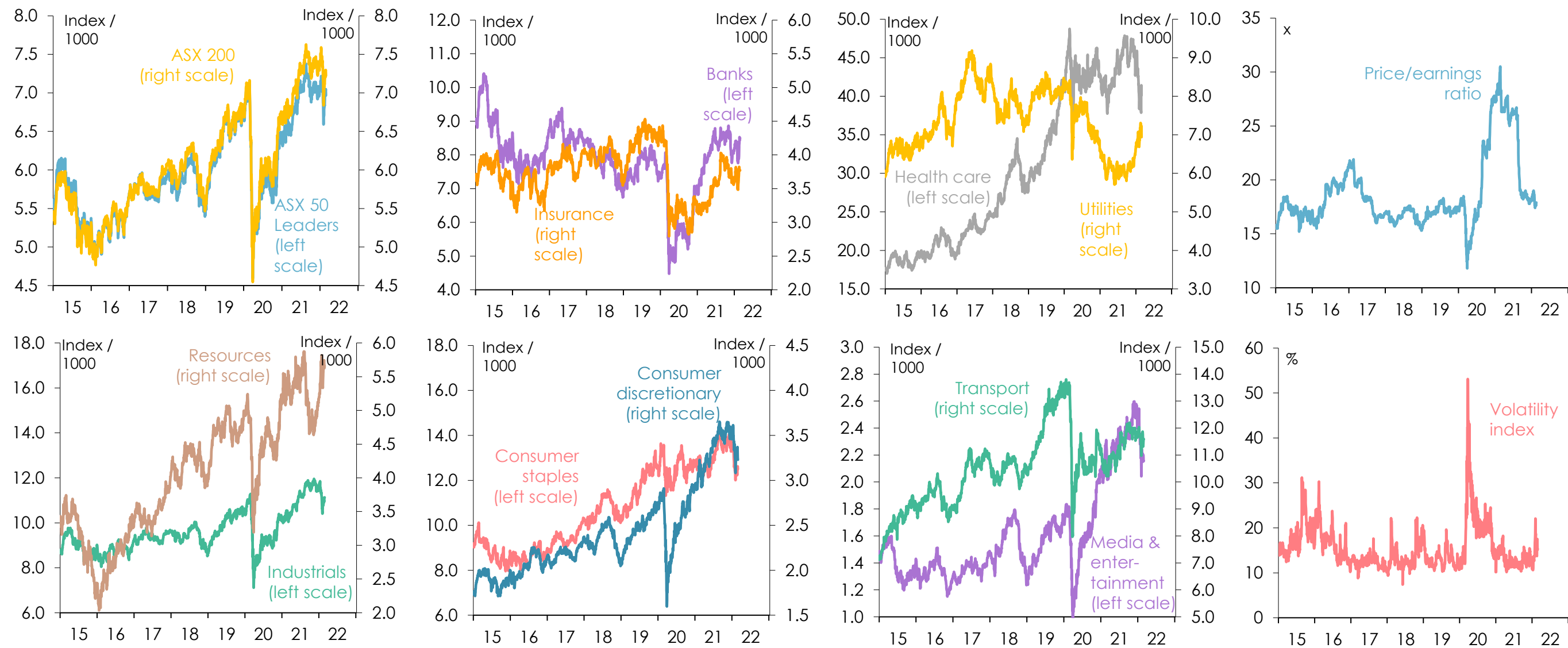


Note: The 'TWI' is the RBA's [trade-weighted index](#) of the A\$. Source: Refinitiv Datastream. Data up to 18th February. [Return to "What's New"](#).

The ASX ended the week little changed from a week earlier, with falls in resources stocks offsetting gains in most other areas

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ASX indices



Important information

This document has been prepared by Saul Eslake on behalf of Corinna Economic Advisory Pty Ltd, ABN 165 668 058 69, whose registered office is located at Level 11, 114 William Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000 Australia.

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