

Australian house prices fall at faster rate in 4Q18

Quarterly house price growth in Australia fell 2.4%QoQ in 4Q18, accelerating the decline from 3Q18 (-1.5%). Although this still looks orderly, it does raise the prospect of a more disorderly decline and shifts the probability further in the direction of some RBA easing.



-2.4%QoQ

Australian house price index

-5.1%YoY

Worse than expected

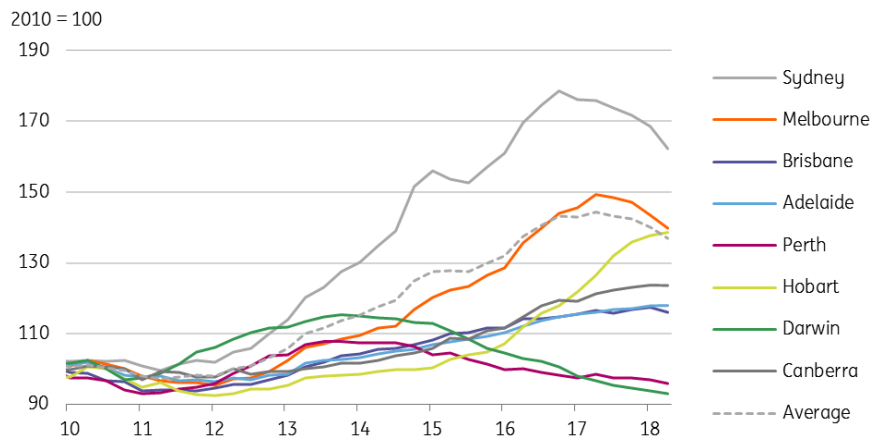
Regional pain

The 2.4% QoQ decline in Australia's house price index is the fastest quarterly rate of decline in the history of this series, including the dip during the 2008/2009 financial crisis. Annual house prices are now falling at more than a 5% rate.

While the rate of decline seems painful, this is still essentially a Sydney and Melbourne story, with

much more moderate declines elsewhere, and some increases or stability in other centres. Of course, Sydney and Melbourne account for a very large chunk of the average index, so dominate the headline figures. But it isn't clear that this is a national issue requiring a national monetary response rather than a regional problem.

Big city house price indices - Australia



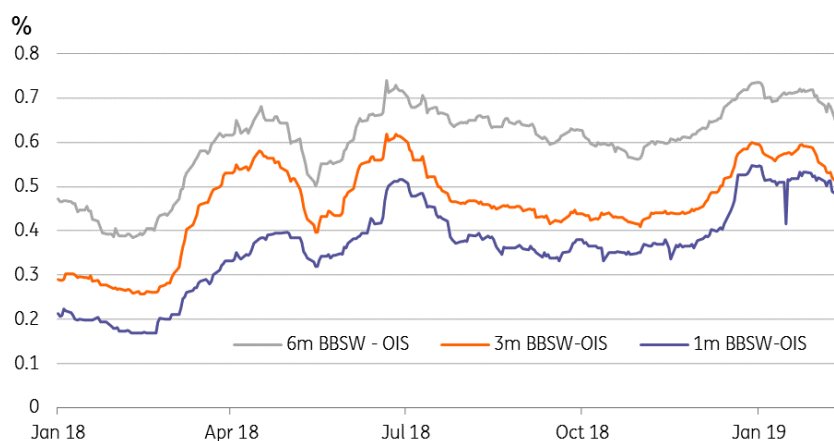
RBA minutes suggest no strong case for near-term adjustment

We aren't forecasting any rate cuts from the RBA. Like them, we feel that the labour market remains one of the most important variables in considering any potential for rate action, and currently, there is no pressing need for a response in either direction.

We might be more concerned about housing if we were to see further signs of weakness spilling through into consumer spending. The latest RBA minutes also seem to share this concern, pointing to the "considerable uncertainty" that surrounds the consumption outlook.

In the meantime, market rates have fallen substantially in the last three months, with bank bill swap spreads over the overnight index swap (OIS - a proxy for the Reserve Bank cash rate) falling sharply. This might also lead to lower lending rates before too long, just as the rise at the end of 2018 led to some rates being increased without the RBA changing rates.

BBSW OIS Spreads



Risks to downside have certainly increased

We don't deny that the downside risks to our economic view of Australia have increased and that therefore the probability of some easing from the RBA have also risen. But for now, we maintain that unless we see confirmation of spillover weakness from housing to the labour market or a further capitulation of the consumer, then the market is doing most of the RBA's work for it, and they can hold pat.

Author

Robert Carnell

Regional Head of Research, Asia-Pacific

robert.carnell@asia.ing.com

Disclaimer

This publication has been prepared by the Economic and Financial Analysis Division of ING Bank N.V. ("ING") solely for information purposes without regard to any particular user's investment objectives, financial situation, or means. *ING forms part of ING Group (being for this purpose ING Group N.V. and its subsidiary and affiliated companies)*. The information in the publication is not an investment recommendation and it is not investment, legal or tax advice or an offer or solicitation to purchase or sell any financial instrument. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure that this publication is not untrue or misleading when published, but ING does not represent that it is accurate or complete. ING does not accept any liability for any direct, indirect or consequential loss arising from any use of this publication. Unless otherwise stated, any views, forecasts, or estimates are solely those of the author(s), as of the date of the publication and are subject to change without notice.

The distribution of this publication may be restricted by law or regulation in different jurisdictions and persons into whose possession this publication comes should inform themselves about, and observe, such restrictions.

Copyright and database rights protection exists in this report and it may not be reproduced, distributed or published by any person for any purpose without the prior express consent of ING. All rights are reserved. ING Bank N.V. is authorised by the Dutch Central Bank and supervised by the European Central Bank (ECB), the Dutch Central Bank (DNB) and the Dutch Authority for the Financial Markets (AFM). ING Bank N.V. is incorporated in the Netherlands (Trade Register no. 33031431 Amsterdam). In the United Kingdom this information is approved and/or communicated by ING Bank N.V., London Branch. ING Bank N.V., London Branch is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and is subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. ING Bank N.V., London branch is registered in England (Registration number BR000341) at 8-10 Moorgate, London EC2 6DA. For US Investors: Any person wishing to discuss this report or effect transactions in any security discussed herein should contact ING Financial Markets LLC, which is a member of the NYSE, FINRA and SIPC and part of ING, and which has accepted responsibility for the distribution of this report in the United States under applicable requirements.

Additional information is available on request. For more information about ING Group, please visit <http://www.ing.com>.