

# Daiwa's View

## Can BOJ avoid additional easing?

- BOJ revises forward guidance, intending to conduct policy operations in an accommodative direction

Fixed Income Research Section  
FICC Research Dept.

Chief Market Economist  
**Mari Iwashita**  
(81) 3 5555-8852  
mari.iwashita@daiwa.co.jp



Daiwa Securities Co. Ltd.

**In line with early media reports, the BOJ avoids deepening negative interest rates**

**Decides on new forward guidance on policy interest rates**

### BOJ revises forward guidance

At the 30-31 October Monetary Policy Meeting (MPM), the BOJ decided to keep the short-term and long-term policy interest rate targets (-0.1% and around 0%, respectively) by a 7-2 majority vote. Policy board member Goushi Kataoka dissented for the third time in a row, insisting on lowering the short-term policy interest rate, but his opinion remained the minority. At the BOJ, the number of options available for easing are limited. In line with early media reports, the BOJ avoided deepening negative interest rates, which has strong side effects. I view this as a wise decision. That option should be left until Japan's economy is driven to the wall. Instead, the BOJ decided to adopt new forward guidance for policy interest rates.

This time around, the forward guidance was revised as follows:

As for the policy rates, the Bank expects short- and long-term interest rates to remain at their present **or lower levels** as long as it is necessary to pay close attention to the possibility that the momentum toward achieving the price stability target will be lost.

**“Assessment of the momentum” newly linked with forward guidance**

The BOJ removed the timing (around spring 2020) used in its previous statement, and linked the assessment of “momentum toward achieving the price stability target” with guidance. The only opposition to this was from Mr. Kataoka, who insisted that “it was appropriate for the Bank to revise the forward guidance for the policy rates to make it a powerful one that specifically relates to the price stability target.” We think that he felt that the wording “as long as it is necessary to pay close attention” was vague and its binding force was weak. Nevertheless, the BOJ carefully explained the “assessment of the momentum” in the attachment (Assessment of the Momentum toward Achieving the Price Stability Target). On top of that, the report on background analysis was also released.

**“Assessment of the momentum” based on (1) output gap, (2) medium- to long-term inflation expectations, and (3) developments in global financial markets**

According to these materials, the BOJ judged that, “although there had been no further increase in the possibility that the momentum toward achieving the price stability target would be lost, it was necessary to continue to pay close attention to the possibility.” The items examined are (1) output gap, (2) medium- to long-term inflation expectations, and (3) developments in crude oil prices and global financial markets. First, the central bank said that “the output gap is likely to narrow temporarily within positive territory. However, throughout the projection period, it is expected to remain at around the current level on average.” This implies that the BOJ is assuming the continued narrowing of the output gap in positive territory in the case of negative growth in Oct-Dec real GDP, given the impact of the consumption tax hike. Nevertheless, the conclusion is unchanged from the previous opinion—that the output gap will remain in positive territory on average. Regarding the second item, the bank added an explanation that “medium- to long-term inflation expectations have shown somewhat different developments depending on indicators.” However, the conclusion is the same as the previous one—that “such expectations are likely to follow an increasing trend.” In any case, we think assessment of these two items would not change easily.

**Assessment of (1) and (2) not easily changed**

**Timing of decision on additional easing without hesitation depends on developments in global financial markets**

In which case, changes regarding the third item would be important in the short term. The BOJ stated that “crude oil prices have been more or less flat—albeit with fluctuations—since around this summer...With regard to global financial markets, investors’ risk aversion had continued to be observed...but the markets recently have been calm compared to a while ago.” Even after central bank events in October (ECB Governing Council and FOMC meeting), the currency and stock markets have been stable, so the BOJ had no need to hastily conduct additional easing. If the possibility increases that the Fed’s rate-cut period will shorten, this would serve as a tailwind for the BOJ, which is out of ammunition. It would be better to think that the possibility of deciding on additional easing without hesitation will heighten if we see lower crude oil prices or yen appreciation progresses.

**Change in expression and policy interest rate level in forward guidance indicates stance of conducting policy operations in an accommodative direction**

On the other hand, the target level of the policy interest rate was revised from the previous “current extremely low levels of short- and long-term interest” to “present or lower levels.” This time, the expression “or lower levels” was included like the ECB. The “present” levels appear to mean -0.1% for the short-term rate and around 0% for the long-term rate. At the post-meeting press conference, BOJ governor Haruhiko Kuroda said that “Our new forward guidance is aimed at clarifying our stance that our policy bias is leaning towards additional monetary easing.” Although the long-term rate hit -0.295% in early September beyond the range of about double the range of between -0.1% and +0.1%, the BOJ appears to have accepted the decline. By implying a rate cut in the future, the BOJ is likely to accept a certain degree of yield declines as it assumes a downtrend “as long as it is necessary to pay close attention” to momentum.

**BOJ should pay close attention to Japan-specific factors until autumn 2020**

We are unable to say how long close attention will be needed. However, a wait-and-see stance will be necessary until at least autumn 2020, because the impact of the consumption tax hike should be confirmed (whether recovery will be seen in Jan-Mar 2020 after a drop in Oct-Dec), and a slowdown in Japan after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics is a concern. In addition, we are wondering whether the global economy will pick up in line with the IMF’s October outlook. It is likely to be particularly dependent on the sustainability of the US economy as the presidential election is scheduled for 2020.

**Global economic outlook depends on US economy prior to presidential election**

**Downward revisions to both growth rate and price projections in October *Outlook* report**

In the *Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices* report (*Outlook* report), the main scenario is a moderate economic recovery, although downward revisions were made to growth rate projections due to the delay in recovery of external demand. The BOJ projects growth in FY19-20 in line with the potential growth rate and 1.0% growth in FY21. The figures for FY20-21 seem somewhat optimistic in comparison with the averages for private-sector forecasts (+0.68% in FY19, +0.39% in FY20, and +0.60% in FY21; Oct *ESP Forecast* survey).

**Economic assessment includes comment about solid domestic demand**

Confirming the expression of the current economic assessment, we found that the language “Japan’s economy has been on a moderate expanding trend” has been kept unchanged since April 2019. Regarding exports, the wording was changed to “have continued to show some weakness.” However, the report maintained the wording of “more or less flat” for industrial production and “continued on an increasing trend” for capex, whose solidness was confirmed in the September Tankan. This time around, the assessment of private consumption included “albeit with fluctuations due to such effects as of the consumption tax hike,” but data to judge the impact is still insufficient. The next January 2020 *Outlook* report will provide important information for examining the impact of the consumption tax hike. Recently, the output gap has remained in positive territory, although it has narrowed. It takes time to raise prices. Regarding solid domestic demand, the October report included new wording that “the impact of the slowdown in overseas economies on domestic demand is expected to be limited” in the section assessing the economic outlook.

**January 2020 *Outlook* report will provide important information for examining impact of consumption tax hike**

Chart: Projections by BOJ Policy Board Members (y/y %)

	Real GDP	CPI (all items less fresh food)	(Ref.) Excl. effects of sales tax hike and policies concerning provision of free education
FY19	+0.6 ~ +0.7 [+0.6]	+0.6 ~ +0.8 [+0.7]	+0.4 ~ +0.6 [+0.5]
As of Jul	+0.6 ~ +0.9 [+0.7]	+0.8 ~ +1.1 [+1.0]	+0.6 ~ +0.9 [+0.8]
FY20	+0.6 ~ +0.9 [+0.7]	+0.8 ~ +1.2 [+1.1]	+0.7 ~ +1.1 [+1.0]
As of Jul	+0.8 ~ +1.0 [+0.9]	+1.1 ~ +1.4 [+1.3]	+1.0 ~ +1.3 [+1.2]
FY21	+0.9 ~ +1.2 [+1.0]		+1.2 ~ +1.7 [+1.5]
As of Jul	+0.9 ~ +1.2 [+1.1]		+1.3 ~ +1.7 [+1.6]

Source: BOJ; compiled by Daiwa Securities.

Notes: (1) Figures in brackets indicate the medians of the Policy Board members' forecasts (point estimates).

(2) The forecasts of the majority of the Policy Board members are constructed as follows: each Policy Board member's forecast takes the form of a point estimate—namely, the figure to which he or she attaches the highest probability of realization. These forecasts are then shown as a range, with the highest figure and the lowest figure excluded. The range does not indicate the forecast errors.

(3) Individual Policy Board members make their forecasts taking into account the effects of past policy decisions and with reference to views incorporated in financial markets regarding future policy.

(4) With regard to policies concerning the provision of free education, it is assumed that measures such as free higher education will be introduced in April 2020. Assuming that the rise in the consumption tax is fully passed on to prices of taxable items, the direct effects of the October 2019 tax hike on the CPI for fiscal 2019 and 2020 are estimated to be 0.5 percentage point for each fiscal year. In addition, based on a specific assumption using information available at this point, the direct effects of policies concerning the provision of free education on the CPI for fiscal 2019 and 2020 are estimated to be minus 0.3 percentage point and minus 0.4 percentage point, respectively.

In September industrial production data announced on 31 October, there were two bright factors in the Jul-Sep quarter. First, shipments of capital goods (excl. transport equipment) were solid at +2.8% q/q, leading to expectations of strong capex in the Jul-Sep GDP statistics. Second, in the chart showing the inventory cycle for electronic parts/devices, the cycle shifted from the inventory adjustment stage to a stage of unintended decline in inventories, plotting anticlockwise from 45 degrees. As an end to IT inventory cutbacks is good news, production in Jan-Mar 2020 could recover and post q/q growth if the global economy picks up in late 2019.

### Descriptions of risk balance imply BOJ is less confident about price projections than the economic outlook

Reflecting lower crude oil prices, the BOJ lowered its price projections (y/y change in core CPI including impact of consumption tax hike) by 0.3ppt for FY19 to +0.7% and 0.2ppt for FY20 to 1.1%. The revision to the FY21 projection was limited. As for the price outlook, the wording “despite such effects as of the decline in crude oil prices for the time being” was added. Nevertheless, the 2% price stability target is unlikely to be achieved even in FY21. As the averages for private-sector forecasts are +0.81% in FY19, +0.79% in FY20, and +0.73% in FY21 (Oct ESP Forecast survey), the BOJ's scenario (that core CPI growth rate would rise and exceed 1% from FY20) appears to be based very much on wishful thinking. With regard to the risk balance, the BOJ stated that “risks to economic activity are skewed to the downside, particularly regarding developments in overseas economies.” It also said that “risks to prices are skewed to the downside, mainly due to the downside risks to economic activity and uncertainties over developments in medium- to long-term inflation expectations.” These statements imply that the BOJ remains less confident about price projections than the economic outlook.

### Fiscal policy is main policy tool in Japan's economy; effects from BOJ's easing measures alone are small

If the BOJ is going to give maximum consideration to side effects, it would be best to continue with current easing measures. Therefore, the central bank revised the forward guidance at the October meeting, maintaining its stance of conducting additional easing without hesitation if assessment of momentum changes. When close attention to momentum is required, the BOJ may assume a defensive stance for a long time. In Japan, negative growth in Oct-Dec GDP will be unavoidable due to sluggish external demand coupled with a reactionary decline after last-minute demand due to the consumption tax hike. To cope with the situation, fiscal policy must be the main policy tool. The effects of the BOJ's easing measures alone are small.

**US economy and monetary policy should be carefully watched as factors that may upset the market**

Of greater importance is the need to pay attention to the US economy and monetary policy as factors that may upset the market. At the FOMC meeting on 29-30 October, the Fed decided on the third consecutive rate cut. However, it removed the wording “act as appropriate” from the statement, implying a suspension of the preventive rate cut cycle. Going forward, the Fed’s actions depend on information about the economic outlook. With the shift in the Fed’s monetary policy operations to a risk management approach, the judgment could change if the tightness of the financial environment and downside risks are alleviated. Despite the slowdown in consumption, Jul-Sep real GDP was solid in the US. The biggest near-term key is sales trends during the Christmas season. It will still take time to discern the situation. If US-China trade talks reach an agreement in November, a December rate cut will likely become unnecessary, in our view.

**Economists’ opinions about US economic outlook for 2020 significantly divided**

However, economists’ opinions about the US economic outlook are divided. The “Points to Take into Account” section of the October BOJ statement also states, “In particular, close attention should be paid to the possibility that, in a situation where downside risks concerning overseas economies seem to be increasing, if they materialize, such as in the form of a further delay in the timing of a pick-up or a further deceleration in the growth pace of overseas economies.” In the case of stronger downward pressure, JGB yields would face downward pressure again due to increasing correlation among global yields. In such a trend, if we see rapid appreciation of the yen and lower crude oil prices, that would serve as negative factors for prices in Japan also. This time, the BOJ added “developments in ... global financial markets” as a risk factor. Although we should be nervous about market trends in the near term, I do not see the yen experiencing rapid appreciation.

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