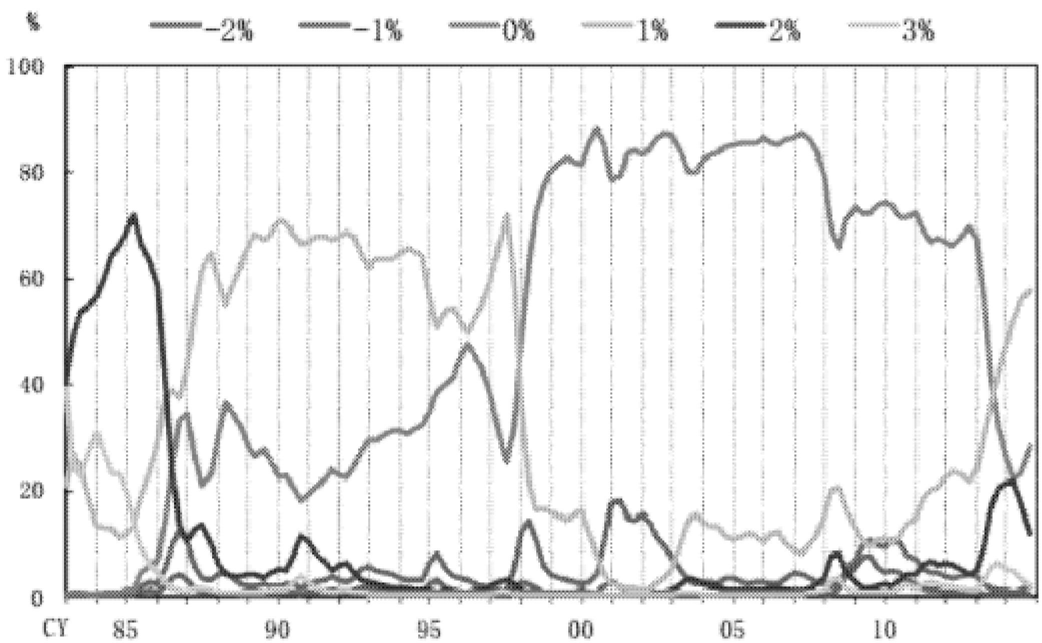
What has changed? This week's semiannual Outlook for Economic Activity and Prices report ('The Bank's View') replaced its assessment that "there are downside risks" for prices with the starker phrase that "risks are skewed to the downside." A research study on the impact of QE thus far, published today, concluded that "in order to achieve the price stability target of 2% in a stable manner, a further increase in inflation expectations is necessary." It also said that while the overall results have been broadly in line with expectations "... [the] demand component data for real GDP -- particularly private consumption -- point to considerably weaker improvements than predicted," even if, on the other hand, actual increases in corporate profits and employee income have noticably exceeded expectations. And an empirical regime-switching model that researchers at the Bank have have developed shows that the likelihood of a switch in inflation to a 2% trend remains very low. In fact, it has turned down from about 20% to 10% more recently, while the probability of the trend being at 1% has risen to about 55% from less than 20% pre-2013 (chart below). That is good in so far as the probability of the trend being at zero has dropped from stably more than 80% to less than 30% today, yet that is clearly not something which Mr Kuroda will settle for.

For his part, the central bank chief is walking a tightrope. He has conceded his much vaunted original 2-year timeframe will be missed due to inflation, but clearly also feels like he cannot give the government any scope to relax on their medium-term fiscal consolidation plan, as this was an explicit precondition for the conduct and support of extraordinary monetary easing in the first place. It warrants some 3-month vol premium on yen assets and a particularly close following of domestic data and news in the interim. Both mark a sharp shift from what was always likely to be a very quiet 4 or 5 months following last December's election.



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