

2017 PNG Economic Survey

Rohan Fox (ANU), Stephen Howes (ANU), Nelson Atip Nema (UPNG),
Marcel Schröder (UPNG and ANU)

The
University of
Papua
New
Guinea



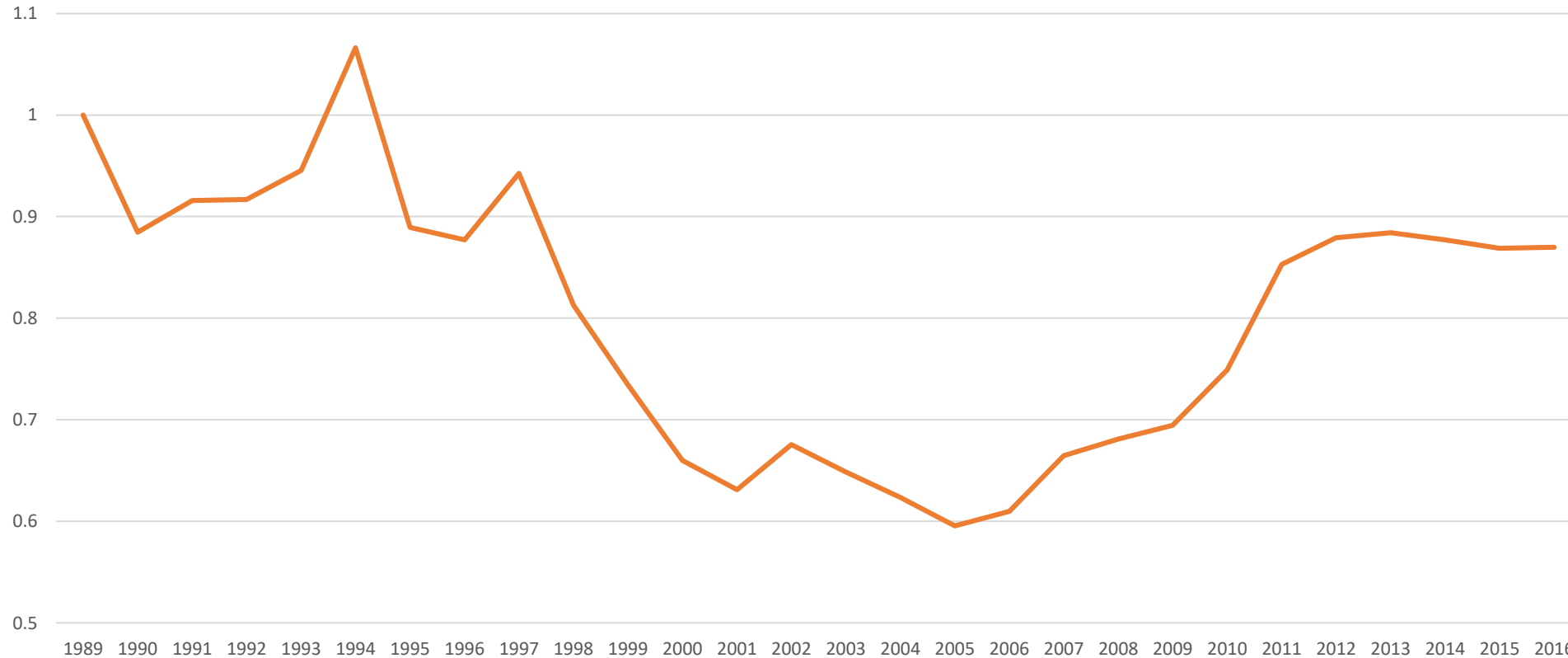
Australian
National
University

Introduction

- Survey is written at the time of a new government and new 100-day plan
- Short-term challenges: recession, falling government revenue, foreign exchange shortages
- Long term challenges: low growth of economy and of government revenue
- How can PNG respond to current economic difficulties **AND** get on a higher growth path?

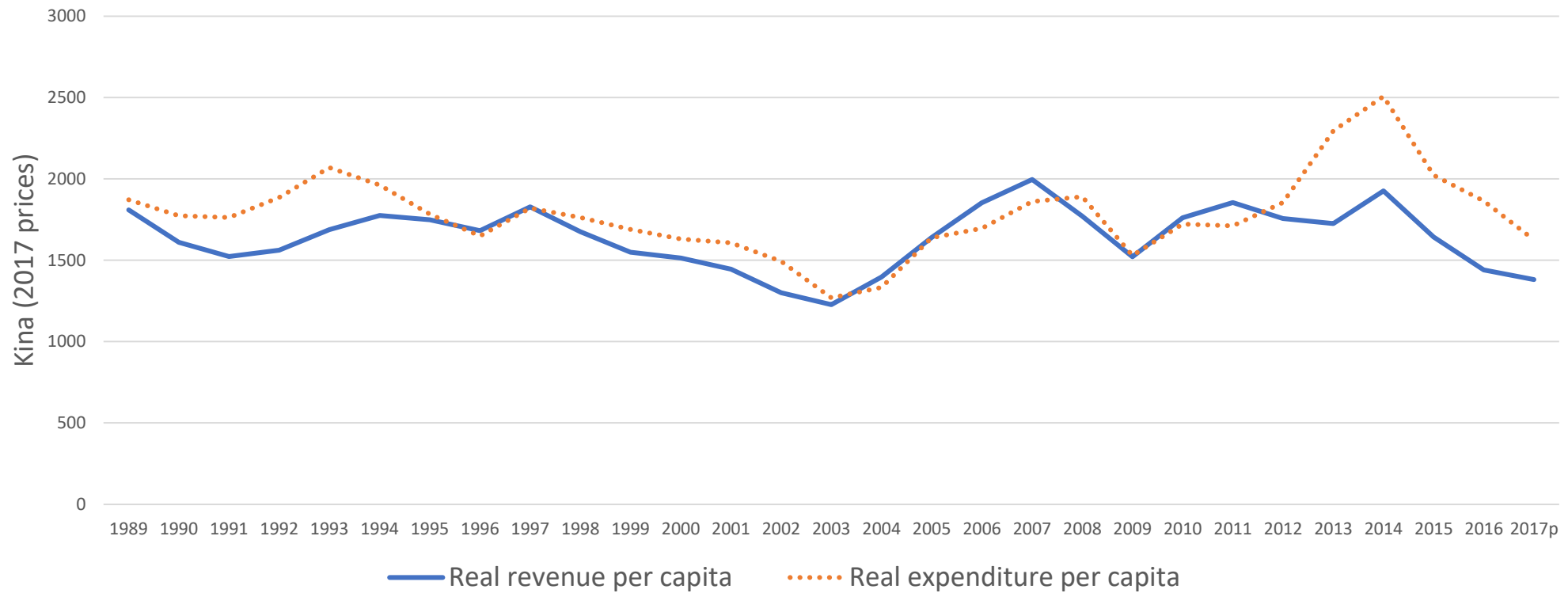
The long-term view of the economy

Non-resource GDP per capita (adjusted for inflation; 1980=1)



The long-term view of government

Revenue and expenditure per person (adjusted for inflation)



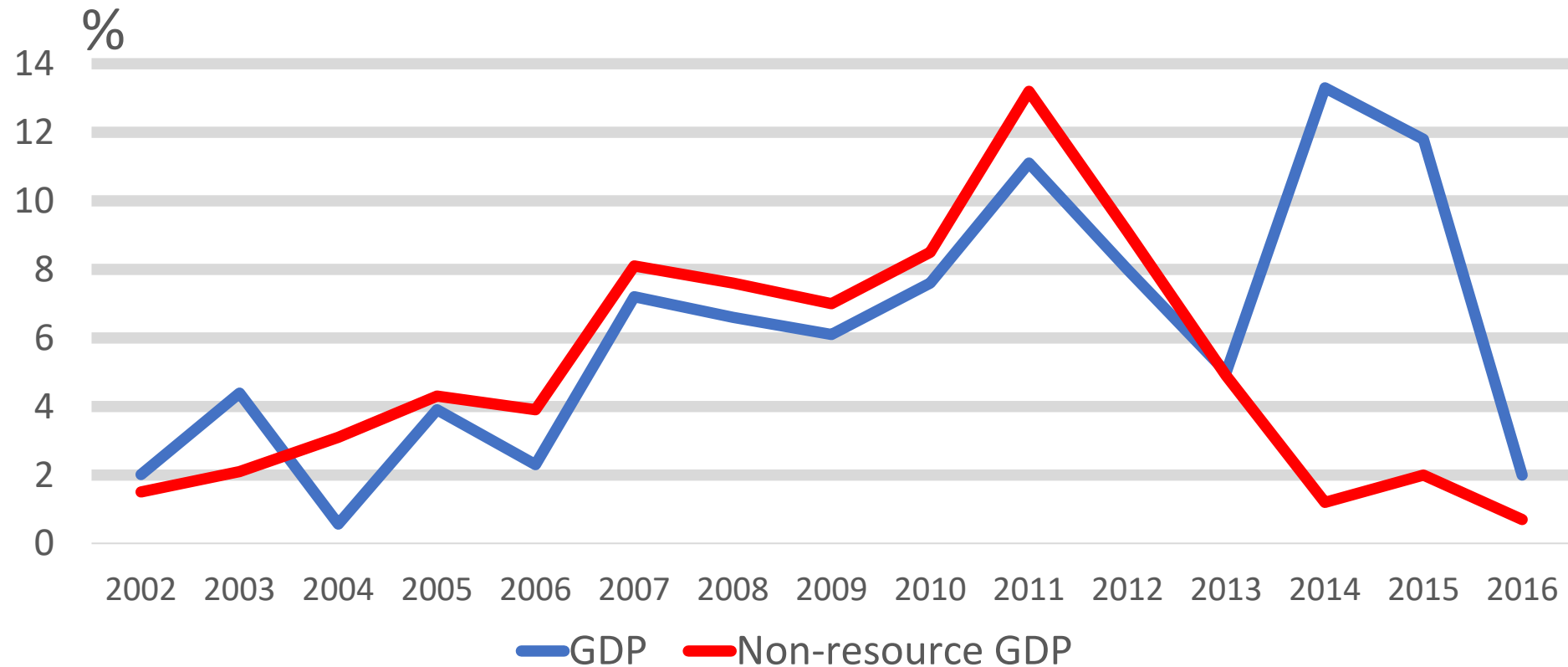
Structure

- Introduction
- Section 2 – Growth
- Section 3 – Fiscal
- Section 4 – Macro (exchange rate and inflation)
- Conclusion

Economic growth

The official growth slowdown

Real GDP and non-resource GDP growth (%)

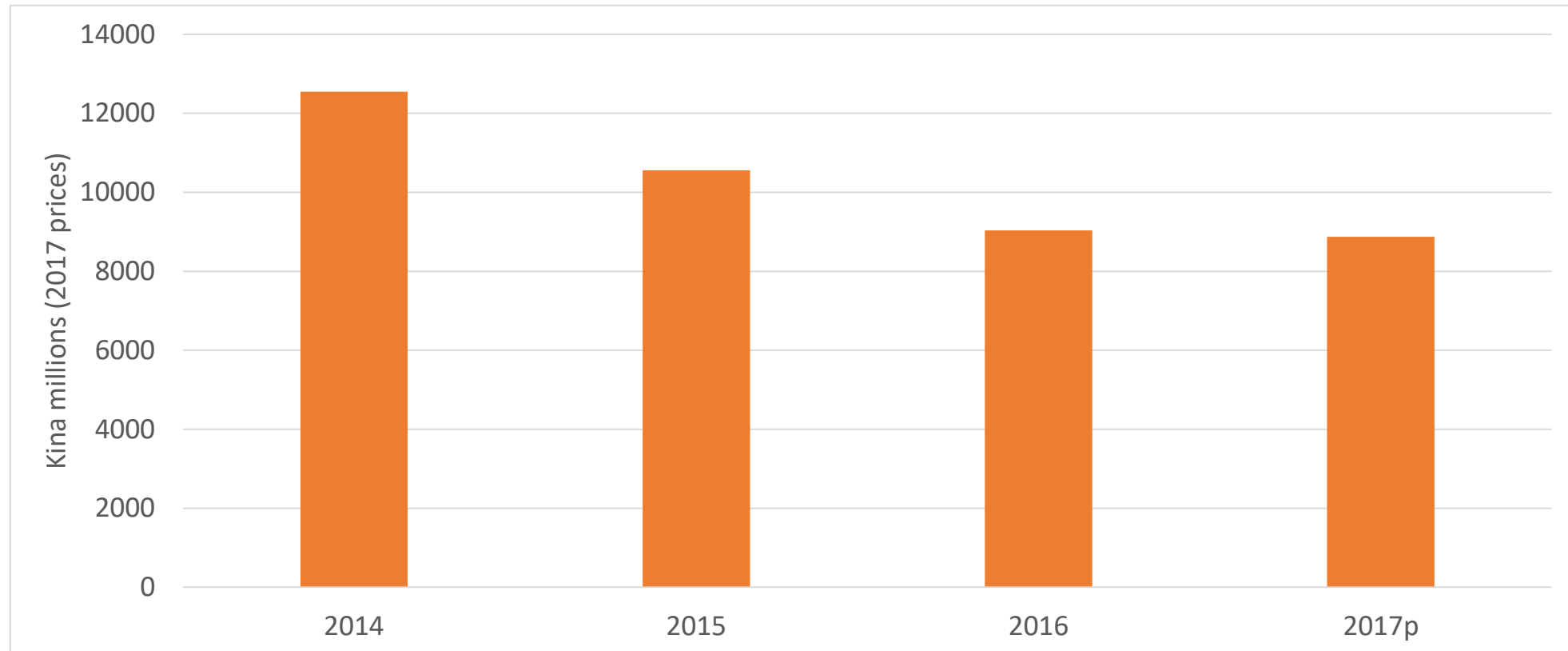


Has there actually been a recession?

- Official government data shows growth slowdown, but has there actually been a recession?
- Evidence of recession
 - Views of business: Drop in output and sales of 20-35% from the peak.
 - Negative growth in *economy-wide* tax revenue every year since 2014 (25% after inflation for GST, income tax and non-resource corporate tax).
 - Sharp contraction in imports since 2014.
 - Small fall in number of formal workers, and of foreign workers, both since 2013.
- Graphs following provide the data

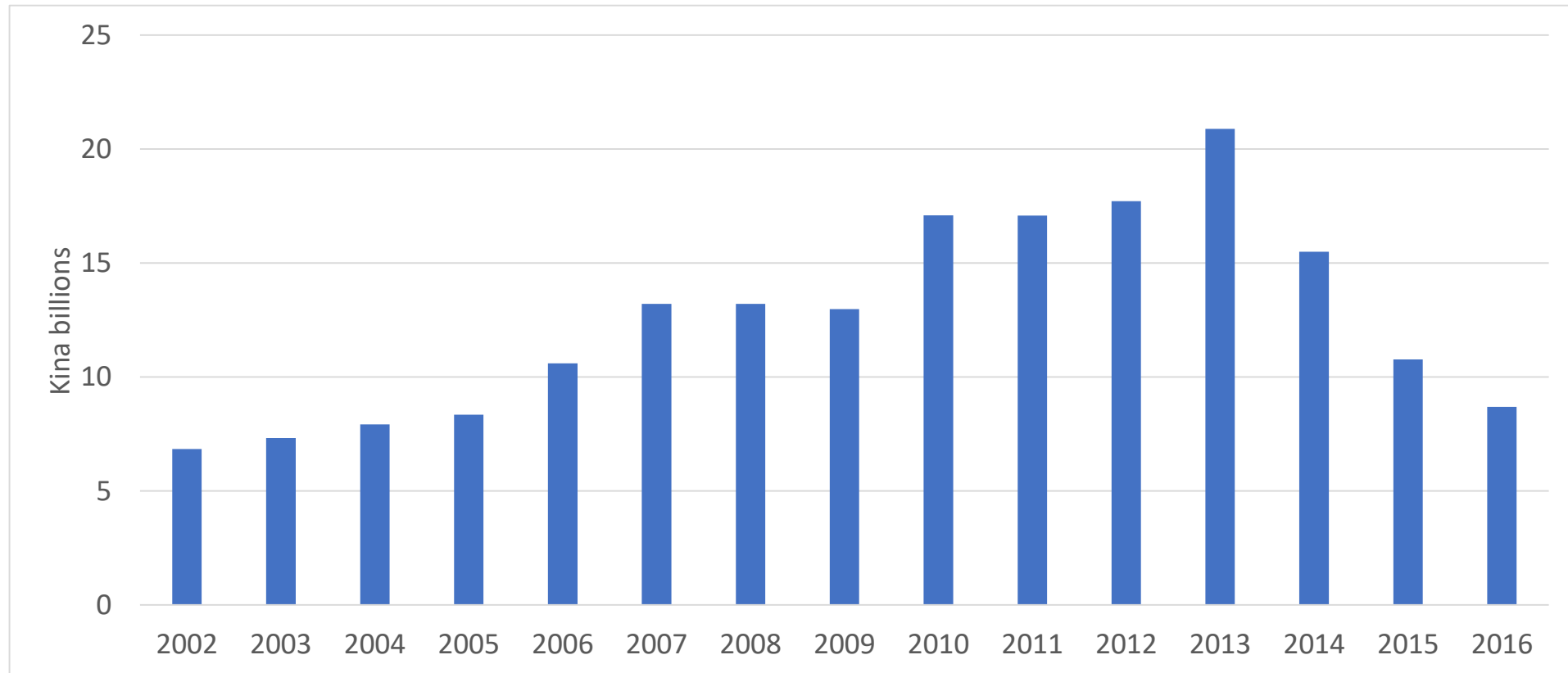
Falling revenue from non-resource sector

Revenue from economy-wide taxes, 2014-2017 (adjusted for inflation)



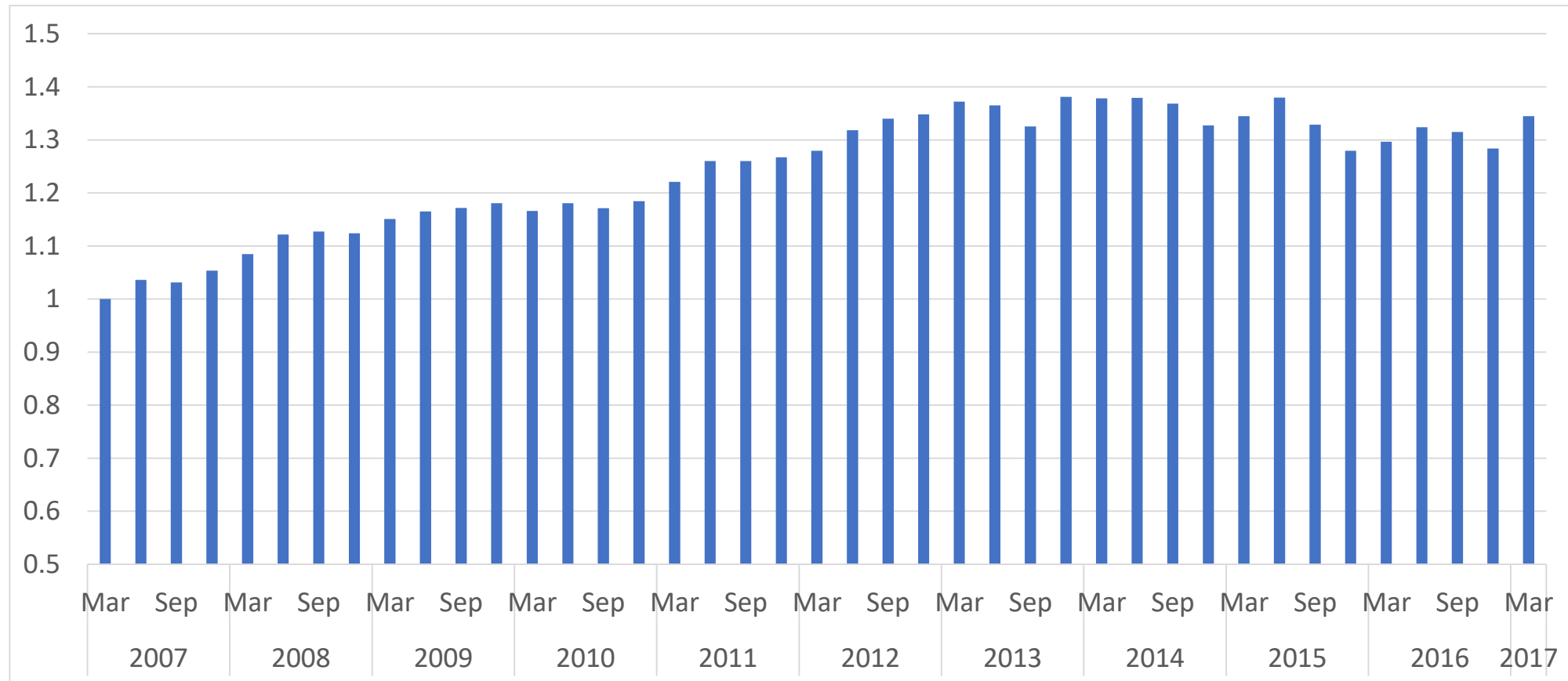
Historic contraction in imports

Imports of goods and services



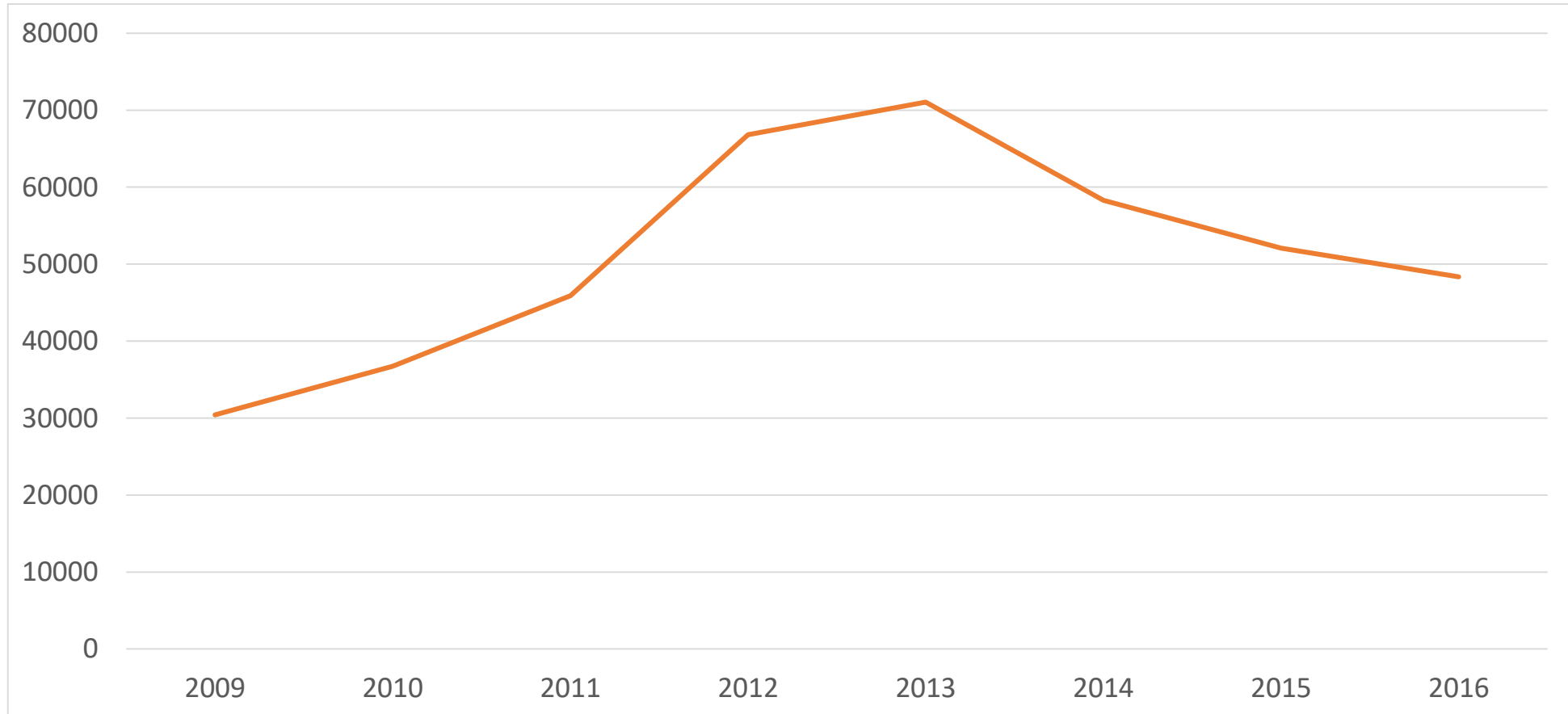
Moderate fall in formal sector employment

Formal sector employment (March 2007=1)



Sharp fall in foreign employment

Foreign workers arriving in PNG



Reasons for the recession?

- 1. End of stimulus caused by PNG LNG project
- 2. Sharp and sustained fall in commodity prices
- 3. Foreign exchange rationing and overvalued exchange rate have discouraged economic activity

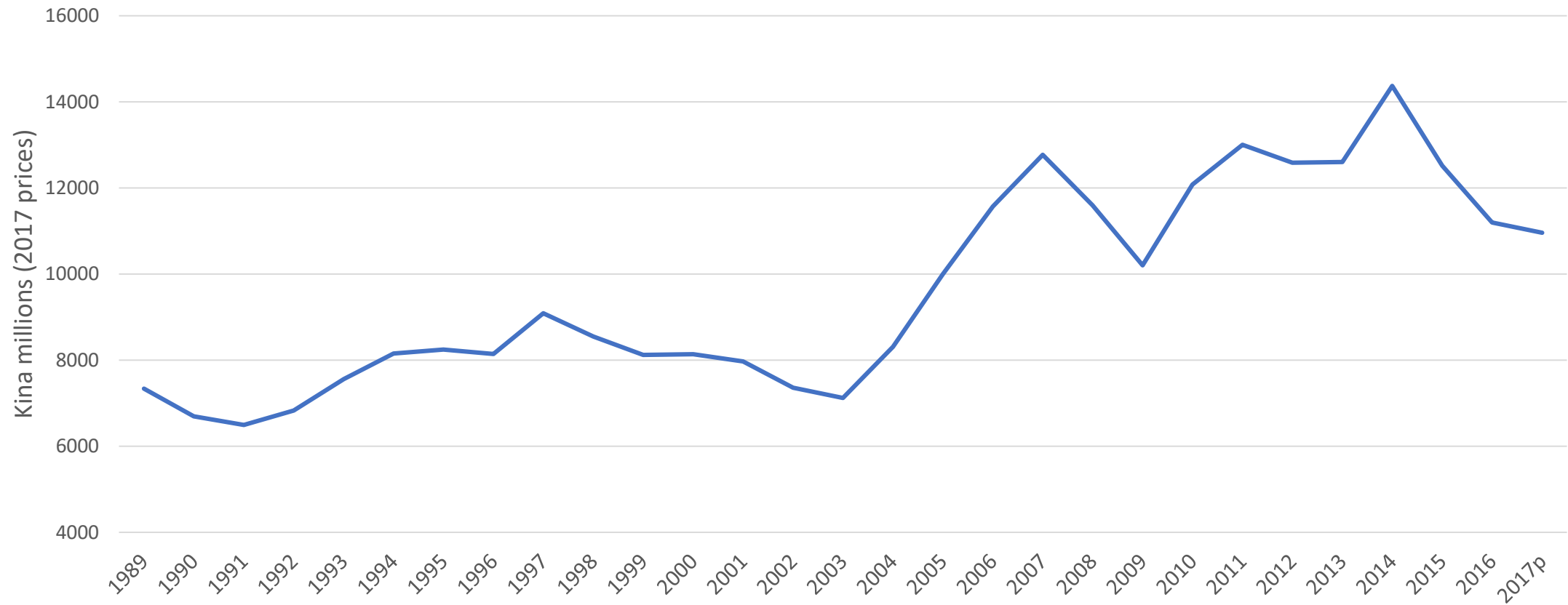
Growth outlook

- Feedback from business that the recession is now bottoming out.
- Confidence going forward from future resource projects, but nothing in the next year (or two?), and mistake to wait for the next project.

Fiscal

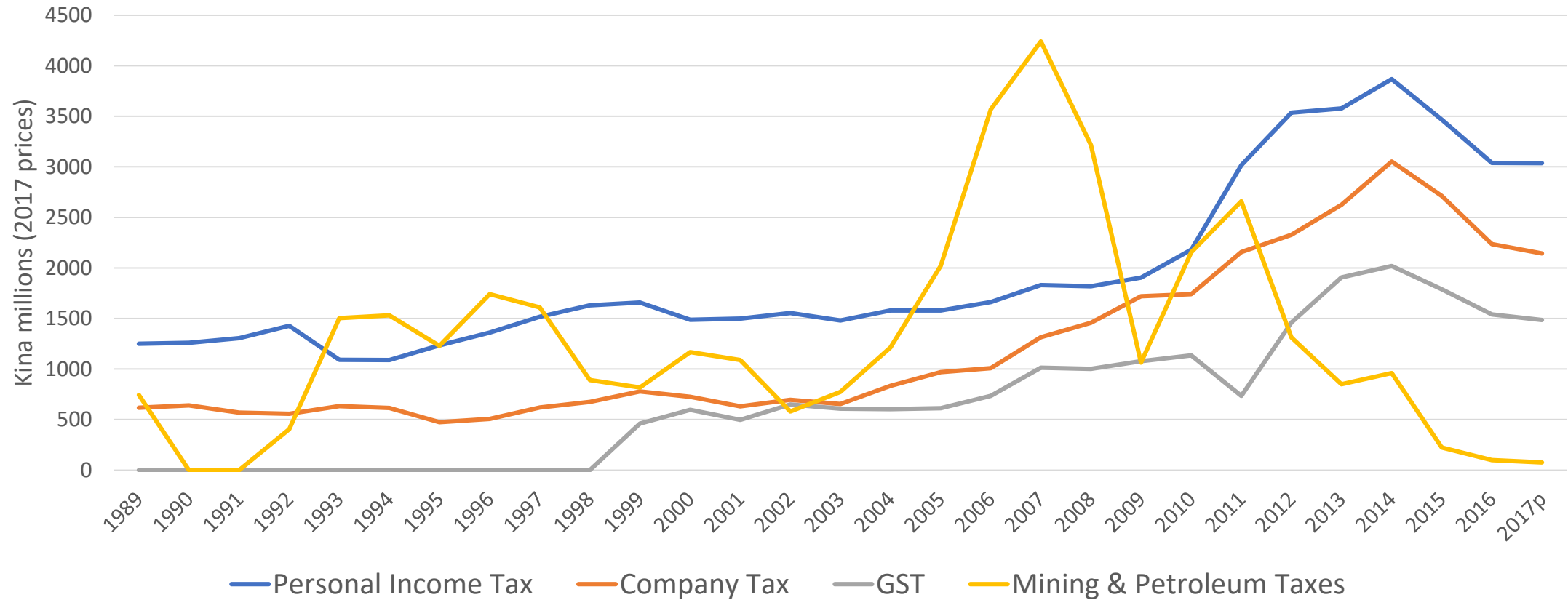
Falling revenue; back to 2006 levels

Government revenue, adjusted for inflation



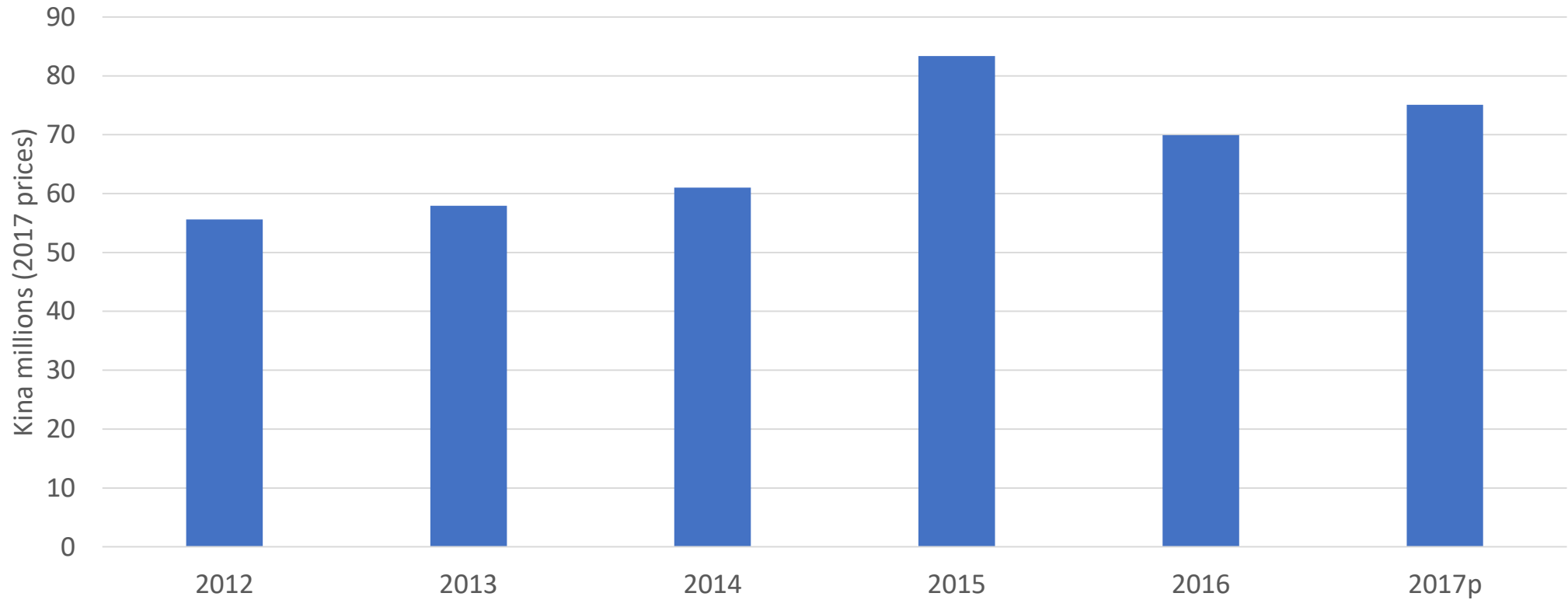
Since 2014, falls in economy-wide taxes

Tax revenue by source (adjusted for inflation)



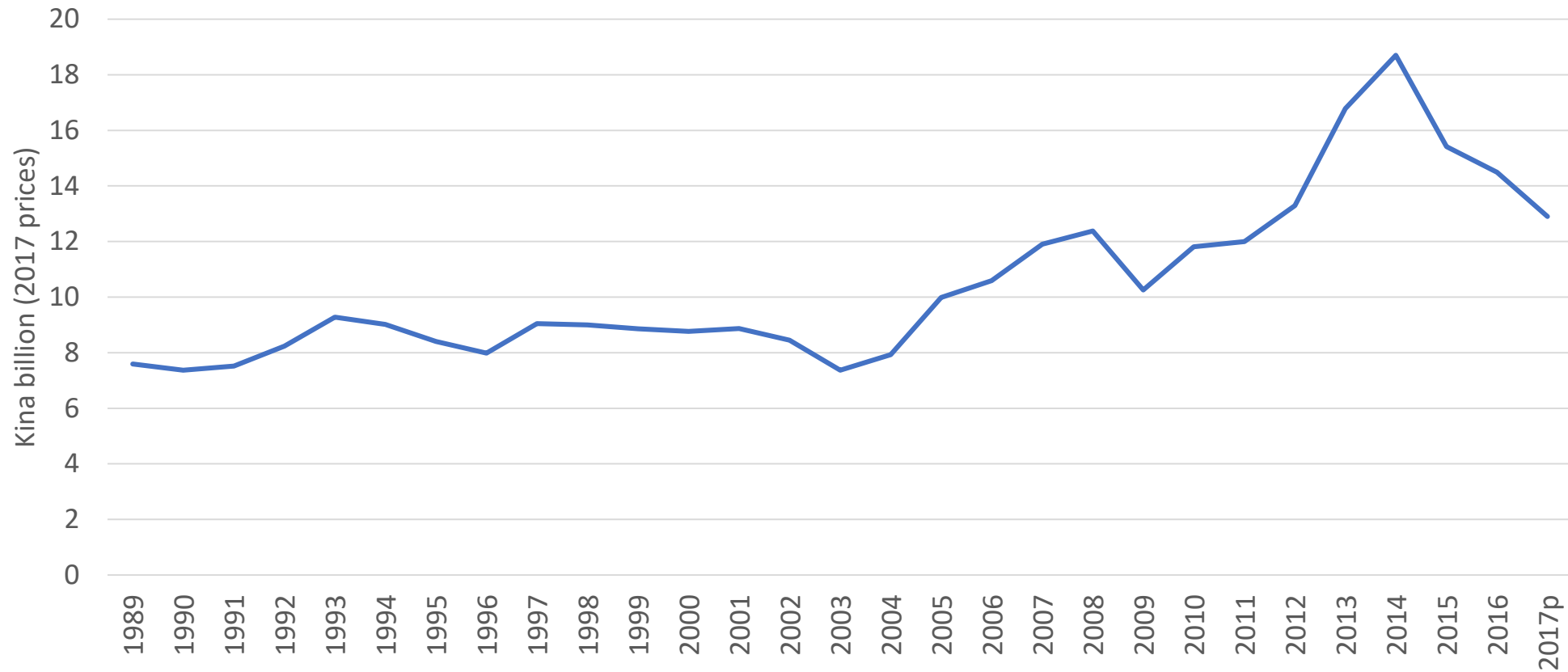
Compliance likely correlated to IRC budget

Internal Revenue Commission budget allocations 2012-2017

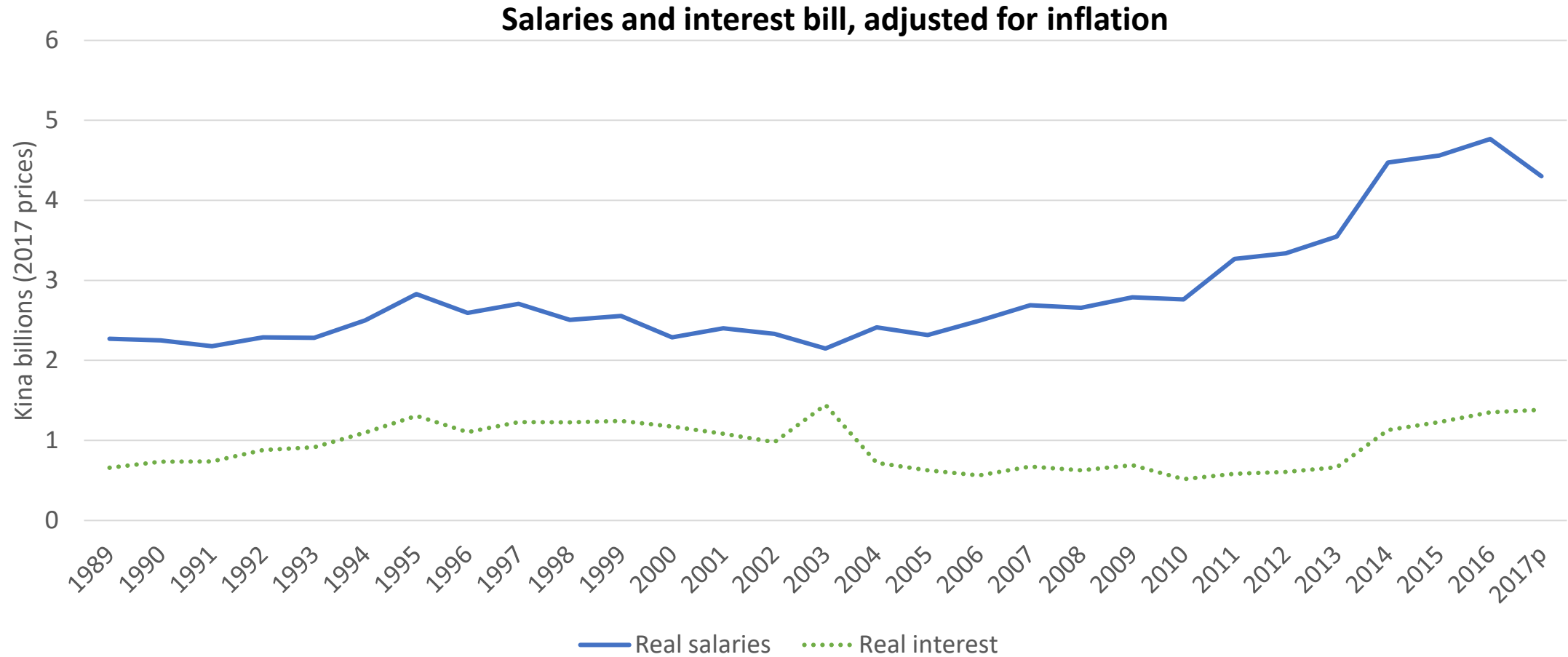


Sharp falls in expenditure, but after a steep increase

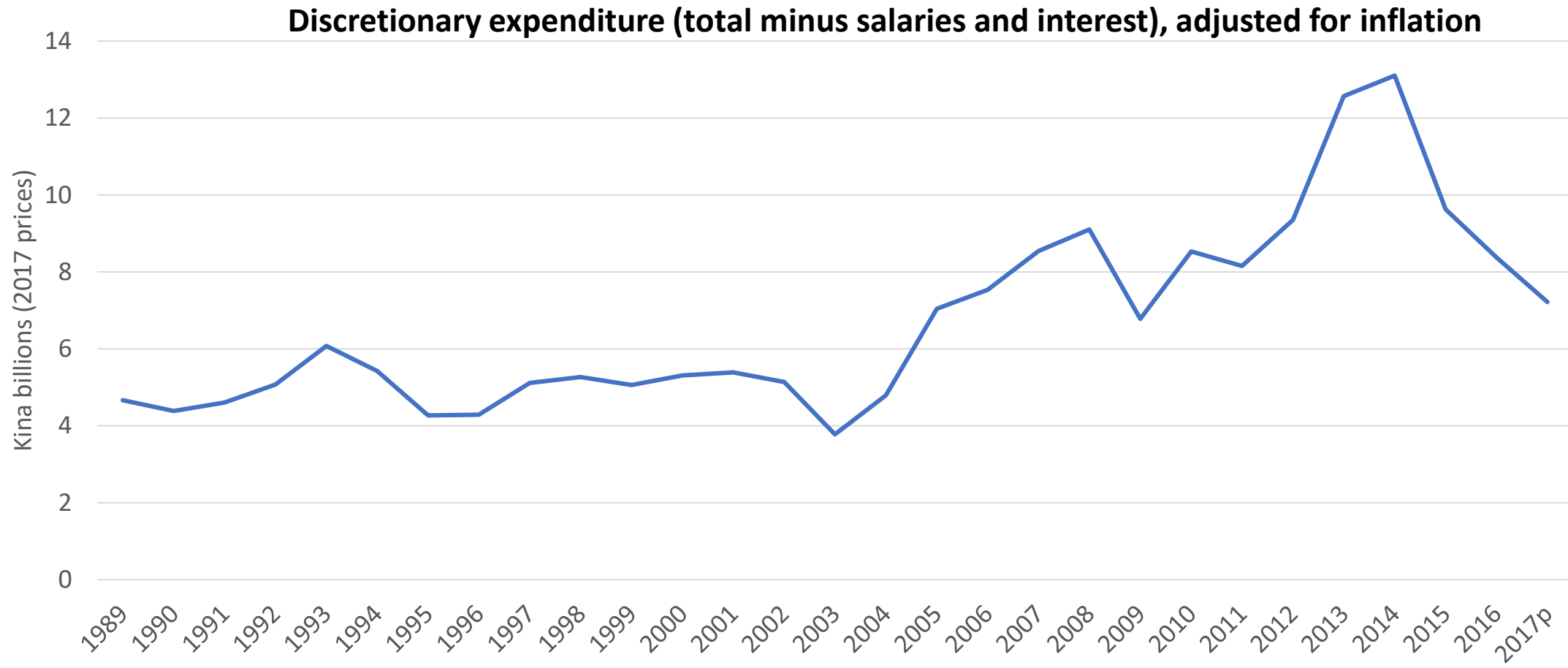
Government expenditure, adjusted for inflation



Rising salary and interest bill

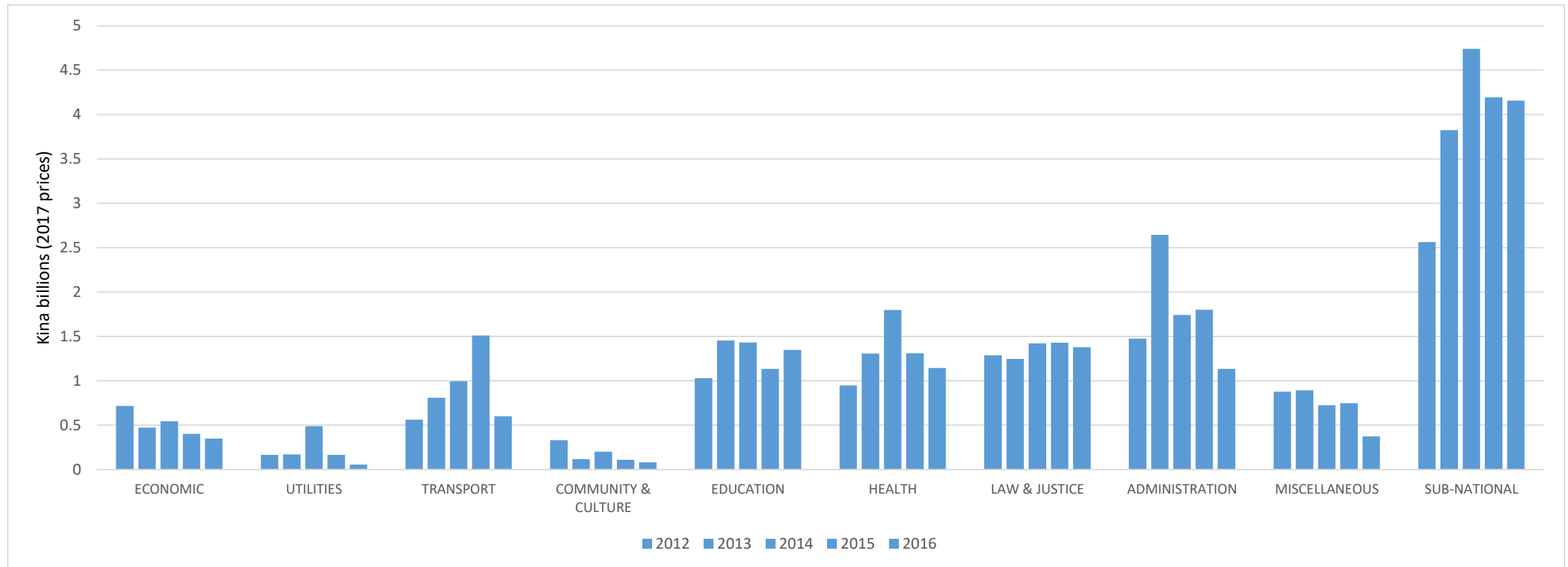


Discretionary spending back at 2006 levels



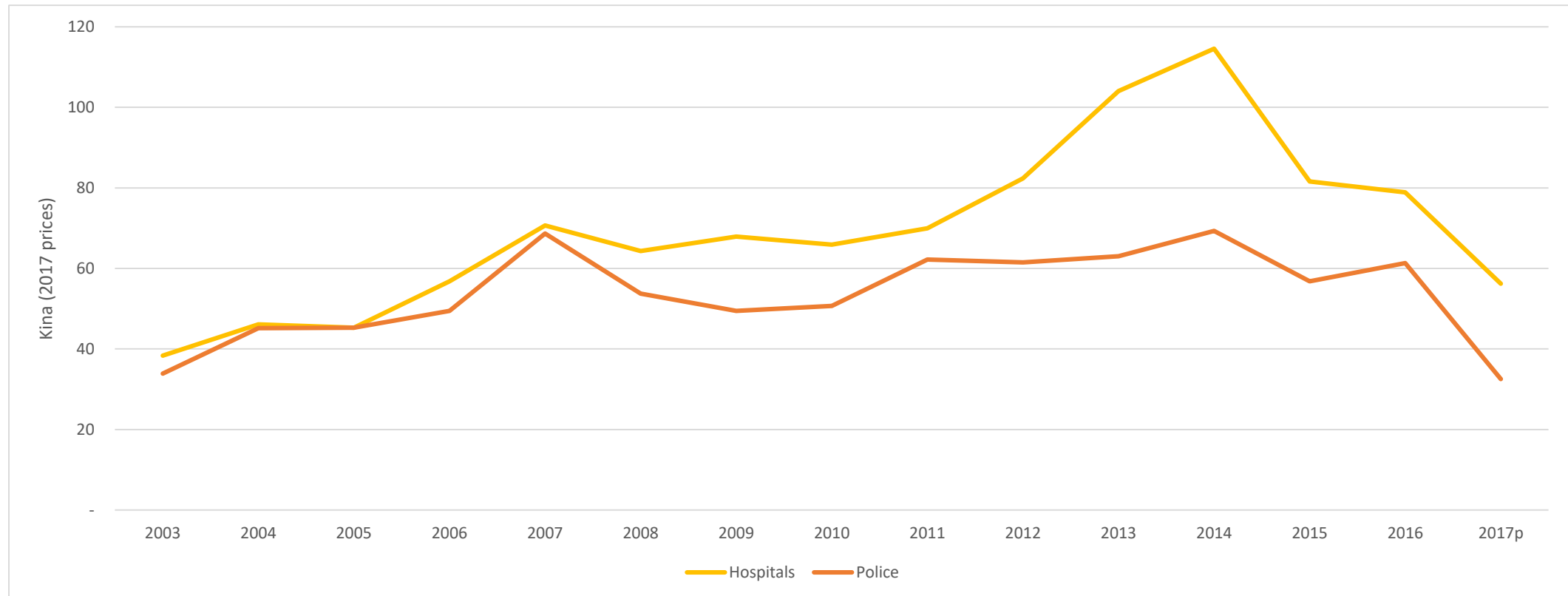
Growth in provincial spending (DSIP etc) has also crowded out other sectors

Budget expenditure by sector, adjusted for inflation

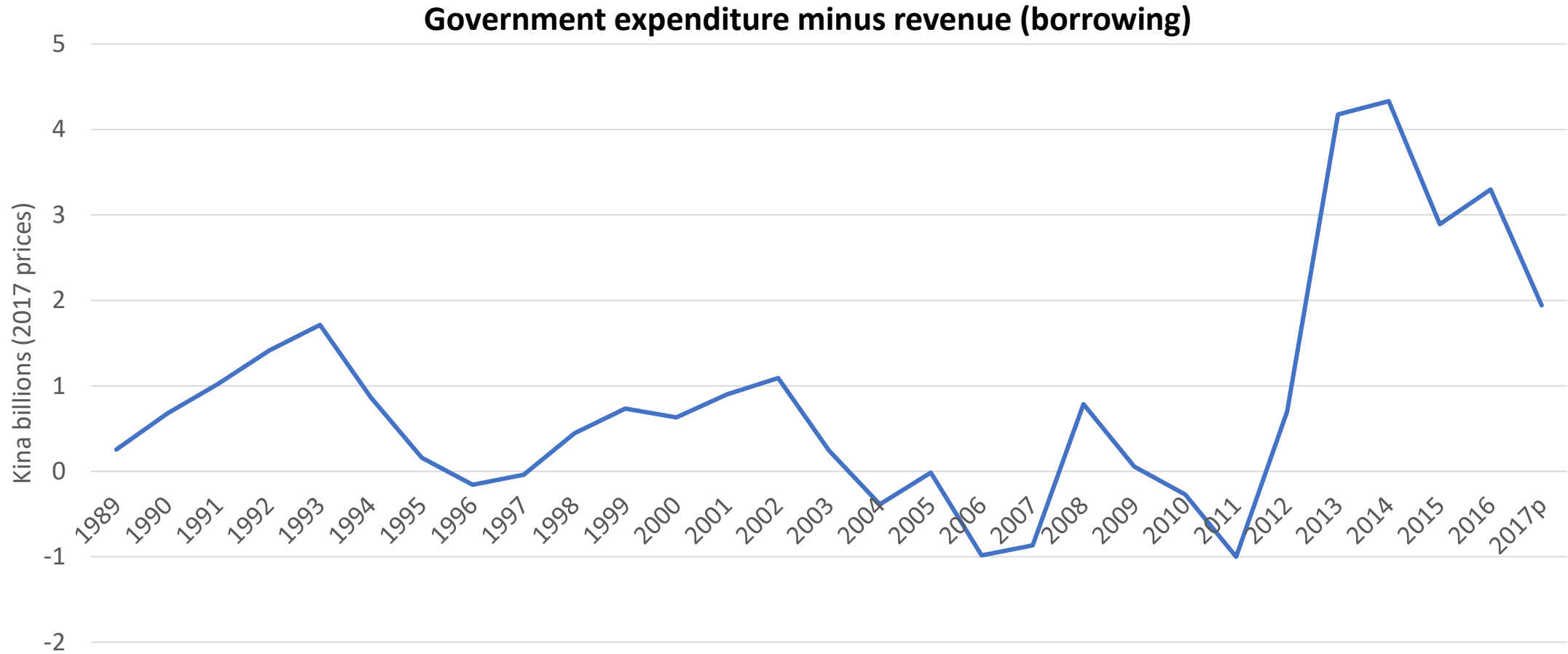


Decline in spending on hospitals and police

Per capita spending on hospitals and police

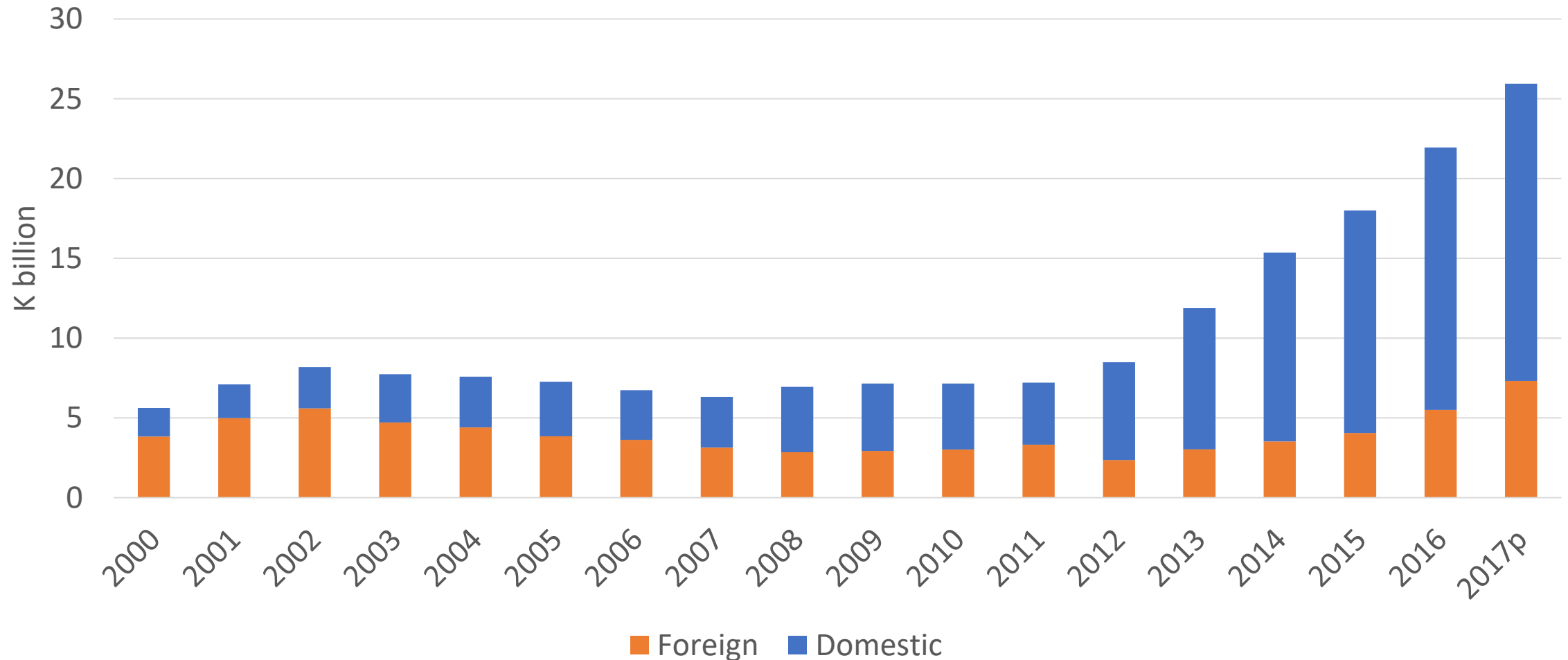


Big increase in deficits (borrowing) in recent years



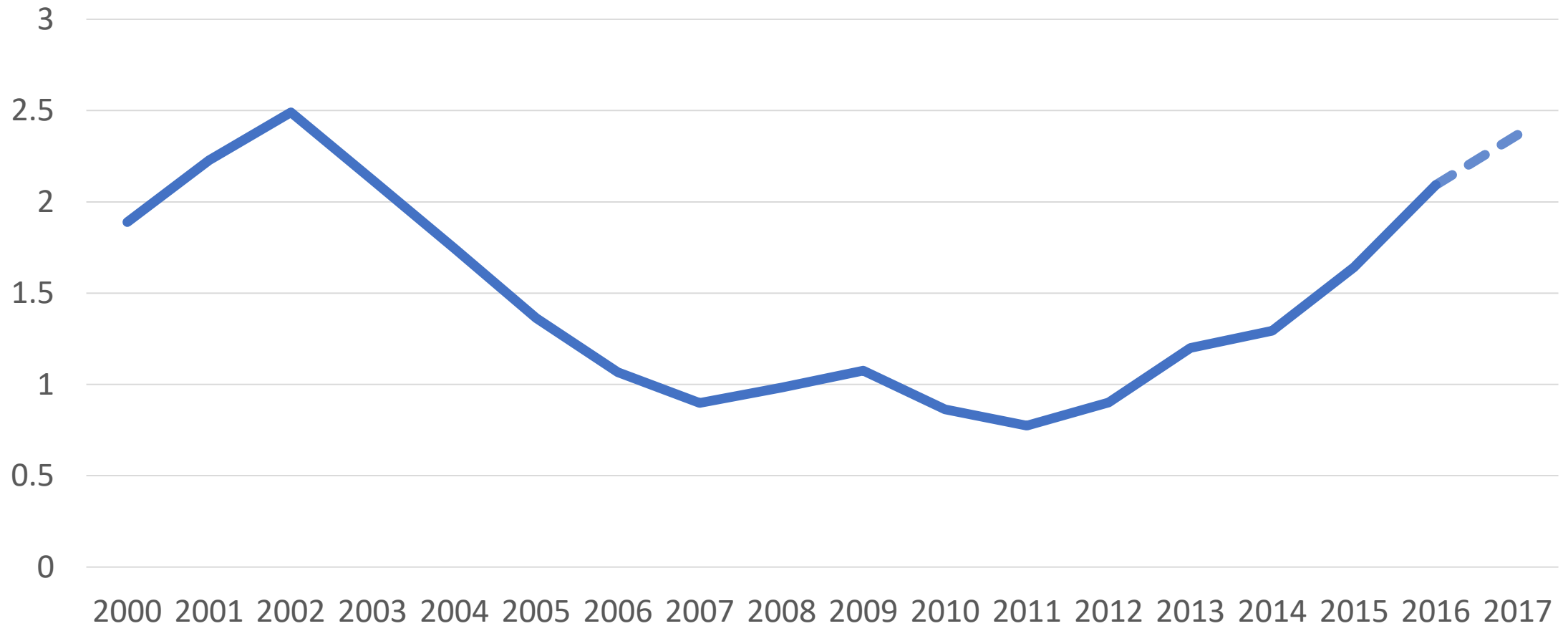
Leading to rapid growth in debt

Government debt (not adjusted for inflation)



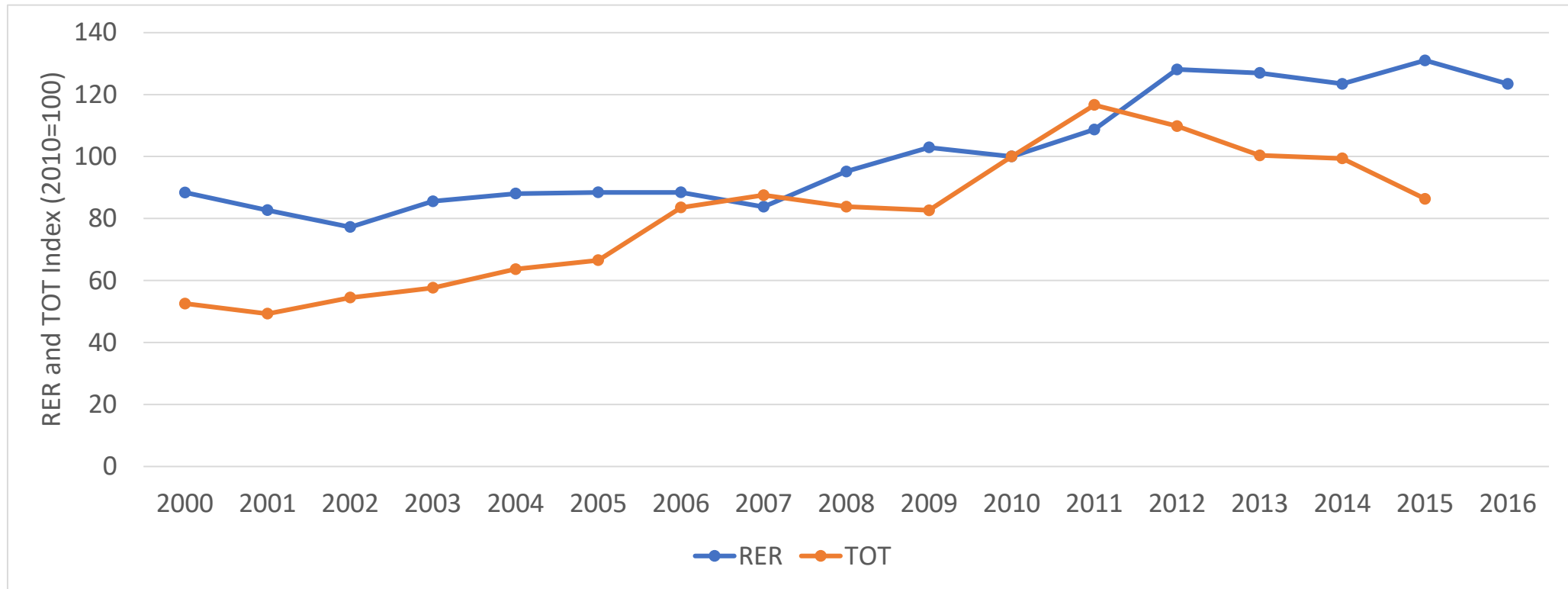
Debt-to-revenue back at pre-boom levels

Debt to revenue ratio



Macro and the Real Exchange Rate (RER)

Background - RER and TOT (terms of trade), 2000-16



Source: BPNG and WDI

PGK/USD Exchange Rate, 08/2012-08/2017

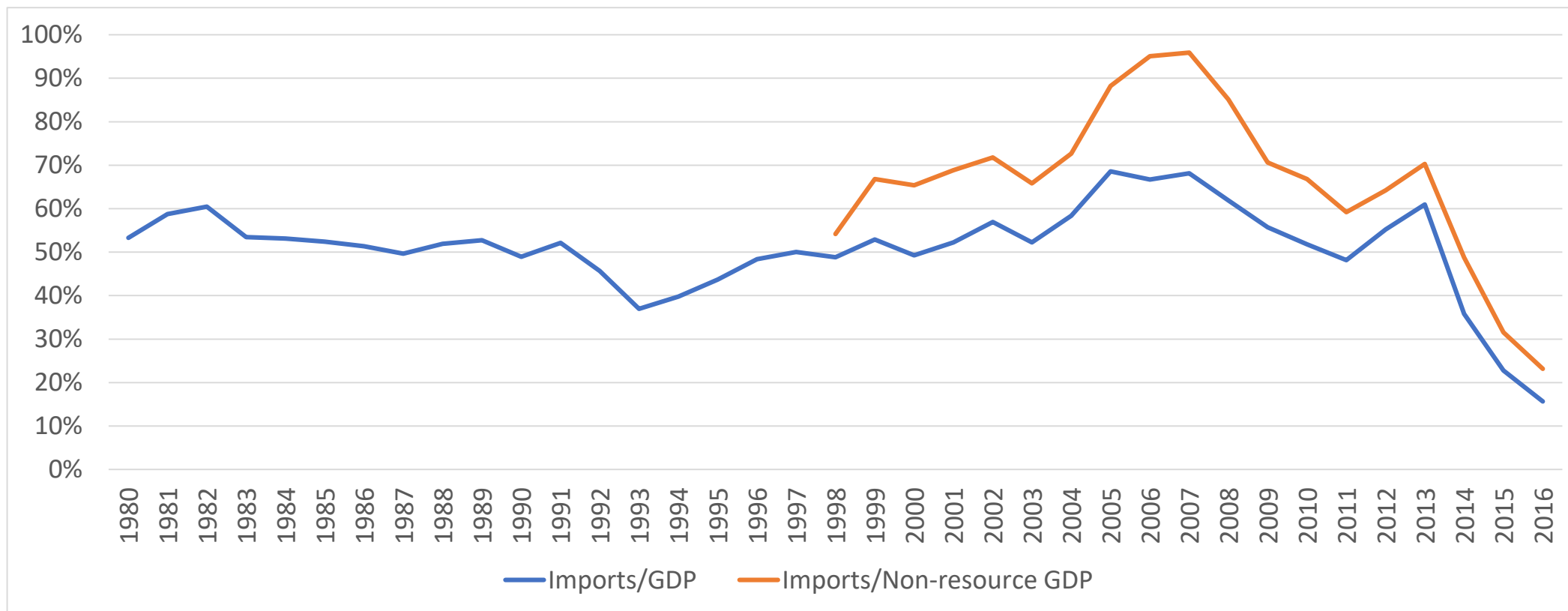


- Theory: Sharp RER appreciation during resource boom and decline of tradable sector ("Dutch Disease").
- After the boom, RER depreciation needed to restore internal and external balance
- In PNG, RER continued to appreciate even after the boom (see previous Figure)
- Reserves declined from US\$ 4B in 6/2012 to US\$ 1.7B in 12/2016.
- FX restrictions since 2014: US\$ 300M-1B excess demand.
- Fox & Schröder (2017): kina overvaluation = 22% in 2015.
- We update their estimate to 2016: kina still 20% overvalued.
- 2017: RER appreciation projected → overvaluation likely to increase

Macro-level consequences of FX restrictions

- Macroeconomic adjustment to end of resource boom postponed for years.
- RER overvaluation leads to resource misallocation → lower output and productivity growth, and investment.
- Businesses have great difficulty to source intermediate and capital goods from the rest of the world.
 - Imports have collapsed to historically low levels.

PNG Imports – 1980-2016

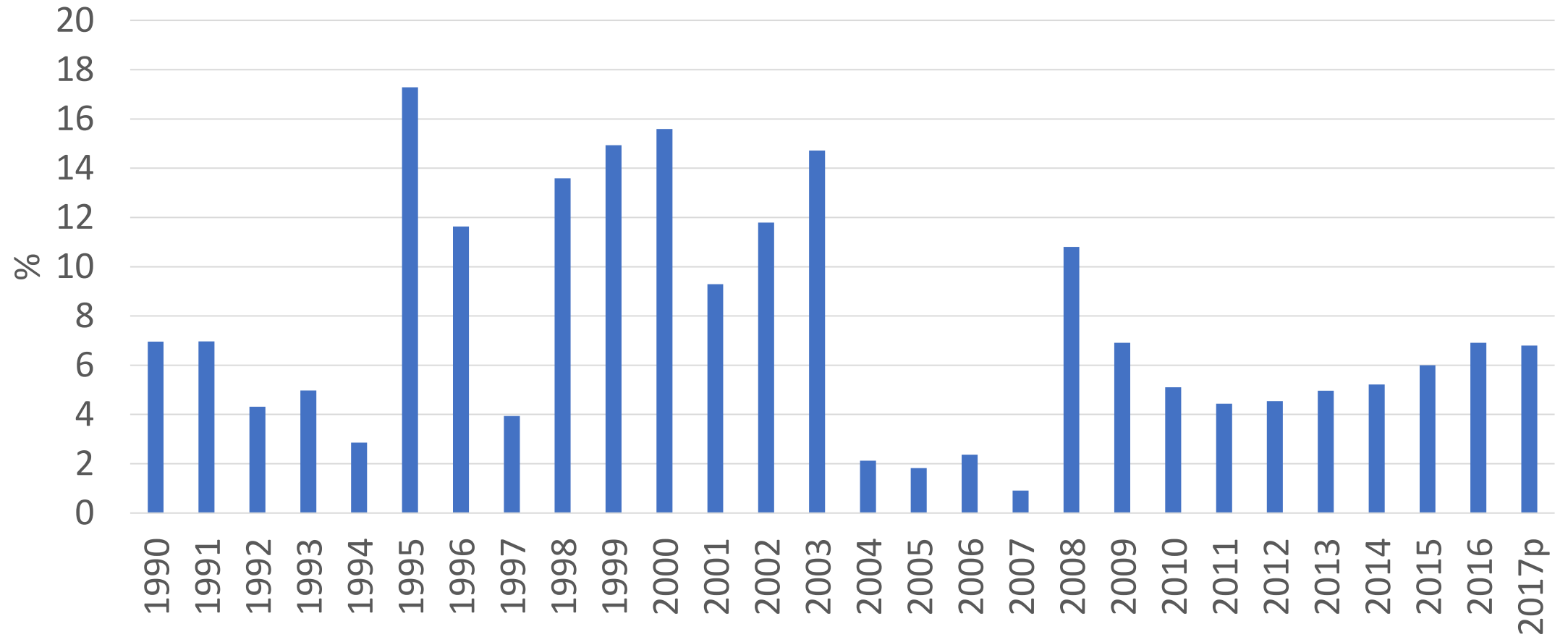


Source: BPNG and WDI

Micro-level consequences

- FX has become number 1 issue for PNG businesses.
- Processing time of FX-orders: Currently 8-16 weeks.
- Invoices outstanding now 60-180 days vs. 14-30d credit lines.
- "Dollarized" debt piles up while kina is pressured to depreciate.
- Overseas suppliers may lose have lost their patience.
- MNEs cannot repatriate profits.
- Administrative burden of FX-crisis increases costs → Inflation.

Inflation



Why is inflation high and accelerating?

- Inflationary expectations?
- Optimism about the future?
- Excess liquidity?
- FX rationing
 - Reduces competition
 - Excess demand
 - Increases supply costs

Policy options

- Why does BPNG not devalue?
 - “Fear of depreciation” (Inflation, loss in urban real income).
 - “Elasticity pessimism”.
 - “Sit out the crisis: Next resource project just around the corner?”
- Current situation has very limited benefits, only significant costs.
- Our policy recommendation: Depreciate the exchange rate. One option is to introduce a dual exchange rate for a limited time (up to 24 months)
 - Apply current appreciated rate for essential imports (rice, pharmaceuticals)
 - Depreciate kina by 20% and apply that rate to all other transactions.

Conclusion

Reform challenges

- Twin reform goals:
 - Stimulating economic growth
 - Restoring fiscal sustainability while protecting basic services

Reforms to stimulate economic growth

- Interest rate: BPNG has limited influence on market interest rates
- Exchange rate: Case for depreciation already discussed
- Structural policy: Need to rebuild business confidence
- 100-day plan: Had some positive statements re business confidence and structural reform but nothing on exchange rate flexibility

Reforms for fiscal sustainability

- Borrowing: Government already borrowing as much as it can; deficits need to fall as the economy recovers.
- Taxation: Focus on compliance – IRC funding and performance
- Expenditure: Protection of key services (health, education) will require salary restraint and cuts to MP funds (DSIP etc).
- Supplementary budget: Step in the right direction (cuts to DSIP, focus on tax compliance), but real test will be 2018 budget in November

Tenkyu tru!

Paper available from devpolicy.anu.edu.au or devpolicy.org

Email: rohan.fox@anu.edu.au

**The
University of
Papua
New
Guinea**



**Australian
National
University**