

## Climate change may shrivel forestry, agriculture

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Lucas Ledwaba and Nicola Lazenby

A newly published handbook on climate change and its effects paints a gloomy picture for South Africa's forestry sector.

A report titled Climate Change Handbook for North-Eastern South Africa, published by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, warns that some areas may no longer be suitable for commercial forestry due to a projected increase in rainfall and temperatures.

AgriSA and Forestry SA, which represent large-scale farmers and timber growers in South Africa, say they have not reached a consolidated position on global warming and the effects it will have on the future of South Africa's agricultural and forestry sectors.

Koos van Zyl of AgriSA says the body will discuss the matter and may reach a view in March.

According to [www.southafrica.co.za](http://www.southafrica.co.za), forestry plantations cover about 1.3 million hectares of South Africa's land surface.

The forestry sector, which employs close to 170 000 people mainly in rural parts of Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, contributes more than R16 billion to the South African economy yearly.

But the sector looks set for tough times ahead if projections by the Climate Change Handbook for North-Eastern South Africa are anything to go by.

The handbook states that:

- » Given projected increases in temperature and changes in rainfall, some areas may no longer be suitable for commercial forestry;
- » Climate change is likely to exacerbate existing declines in river run-off due to water use by commercial plantations, agriculture, and urban and industrial land use.

The report also warns that the degradation of South Africa's natural agricultural capital may be exacerbated by climate change.

It also warns that projected increasing temperatures and changes in rainfall timing, amount and frequency, have critical implications for the full range of agricultural systems in South Africa.

"Emerging agriculture is likely to be particularly adversely affected, due to, in many cases, lower adaptive capacity," it says.

The agricultural sector is also likely to feel the direct and indirect impacts of projected climatic changes in a number of ways:

- » Crop productivity may decrease for even small increases in temperature;
- » Increased temperatures and resulting evaporation are likely to increase irrigation demands in a

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country where existing water supply and quality difficulties already provide stress to the irrigated agriculture sector; while

» Existing water supply and water quality challenges already stress irrigated agriculture. Predicted climate change impacts on water supply and quality will add to these stresses, increasing existing water competition.

- City Press