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## **ABARE predicts economic growth reduction**

Australia's agriculture and commodities forecaster ABARE predicts the drought will reduce economic growth in Australia by close to \$6 billion in 2002/2003.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics released its latest predictions during its annual conference in Canberra.

ABARE forecasts for the March quarter say economic growth in Australia is likely to moderate gradually as a result of the continuing drought.

It says there have been large falls in farm production, exports and farm incomes.

Agriculture Minister Warren Truss says it could take three to four years for the industry to recover.

"There's no doubt that the decline in the number of cattle and sheep as a result of the drought will take a longer period for recovery," he said.

He says the Government is committed to a summit of key players once the worst of the drought is over.

ABARE is hoping improved conditions for the rural sector will arrive by autumn.

ABC News OnLine