

**Deputy Minister of Public Works  
Ms BM Nzimande  
6 July 2000**

[Back](#)

**Official opening of the Komodo Dragon Enclosure  
National Zoological Gardens of South Africa**

Master of Ceremonies, Ms Sarita Cronjé  
Mr Willie Labuschagne, Director of the National Zoological Gardens  
Prof John Skinner, Chairperson of the National Zoological Gardens  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Sanibonani, Goeie môre, Dumelang, Khotsong, Good Morning, Molweni

Today we are celebrating not just a successful project of providing a safe home for the Komodo Dragons, but we are celebrating a natural bond between human beings and the rest of the animal kingdom - the opening of this enclosure for these attention grabbers. The Komodo Dragons also symbolise the socio-political maturity of our country. There is no doubt that it is not by accident that the dragons find themselves in South Africa as from 1997 and not before.

The South African nation is now popularly known as a 'Rainbow Nation' after its first democratic elections in 1994. Today we are witnessing an occasion whereby another 'colour' is being added to the "rainbow" of our animal kingdom through the addition of this fine species of Komodo Dragons.

When the former President of Indonesia Mr Soekarto presented the dragons to our former President Nelson Mandela, it was an expression that all over the global village, in one way or another, human beings are connected to each other.

Our government is delighted to have been given the opportunity to contribute to the world programme of preserving this enigmatic and fascinating, yet endangered species. The two Komodo Dragons, a male and a female, were both born on 19 July 1995 and are the only representatives of their species in Africa. There are, apart from the Far East, only 35 other collections of Komodo Dragons in the world, totalling 110 of these reptiles.

By providing this facility for the Komodo Dragons, the National Zoological Gardens and Public Works are ensuring that members of the public who know nothing about this particular artistic expression of life and its miracles, will in future increase their awareness not only of the dragons themselves, but also the importance of conserving our environment.

The department of Public Works is committed to doing its bit in the improvement of accommodation conditions, not only of the Komodo Dragons, but also of other government departments. We are on course in preparation for introduction of facilities management in some of our Prestige accommodation as announced by the Minister recently. This initiative is only one among several that will see a turnaround in the conditions of our buildings. We are quite pleased with the co-operation that we are getting from other departments in addressing their space requirements.

Mr Chairman, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the management of the National Zoological Gardens for accommodating the Komodo Dragons and wish them well in their association with the dragons. I also wish to congratulate officials of my department for the professionalism and the good workmanship with which the enclosure has been dealt with.

Komodo Dragons are highly endangered members of the Varanidae (Lizard) family. The Komodo Dragon's natural habitat is in Indonesia, mainly on the Islands of Komodo, Rinea, Gili Motang and Flores. They are the world's largest lizards and the male can grow up to a length of three meters, weighing up to 130 kg. They are known to reach a speed of 18 km per hour over short distances. Because of poisonous bacteria in their saliva, they can kill humans. They are carnivores and would naturally feed on deer, goats, water buffalo, smaller Komodo Dragons, birds, pigs, eggs, carrion, crabs, snails, snakes and fish. They are able to climb trees, dig burrows and swim.

The display complex for Dragons and Monsters, apart from the Komodo Dragons, houses the blue tongue skink, rhinoceros iguana, green iguana, giant plated lizard, beaded lizard, bearded dragon, snapping turtle, alligator snapping turtle, conures and Nile monitor.

Design criteria for the accommodation of this variety of inhabitants, and more specifically for the highly vulnerable yet dangerous Komodo Dragons, posed a number of challenges to be met. Some interesting specifications are:

Climatic conditions necessitate that all spaces have to be fully air-conditioned and humidity controlled, to simulate their natural habitats. The temperature during the day will be at 32° Celsius and 28° Celsius during the night. In the basking hot spots, the temperature at 42° Celsius is maintained through infra-red heaters. Temperatures and humidity are electronically controlled.

Because the Komodo Dragons cannot have any contact with insects, not even a mosquito, air intakes have double filters. Double double access doors to service areas, sealed all round and electronic insect killing apparatus are provided in the service areas.

Water from the various display areas are kept separate by different dams and filters, while washed river sand is used in the ±2 x 1 x 0,5 meter basking area to cater for the digging. Landscaping and water features are provided throughout the display area. However, rounded corners and smooth wall surfaces up to two meters restrict to a certain extent the climbing of the reptiles.

The enclosure provides for a display area consisting of three large separate areas and five smaller separate areas. Three separate night rooms with concrete floors, sealed and fully washable with drain outlets, all connected to the large display areas, are provided. An educational display area with two TVs is included.

A separate plant and store room as well as food preparation and medical examination facilities and an office for the supervisor are provided.

In February 1999 a tender was accepted to build this enclosure at an estimated cost of R3,8 million according to the agreed design and planning. In the process of delivery, some problems relating to Previously Disadvantaged Individual participation had to be overcome, which led to the appointment of a second contractor in May 2000 who successfully completed the enclosure.

Normal affirmative procurement requirements applied on this project.

On a day like this one wishes also to add an African dimension to conservation of nature, specifically the wild animals. Any effort at the preservation of animal species is something we can readily identify ourselves with. During the pre-colonial era, the indigenous inhabitants of this part of Africa posed no threat to the survival of the animals that shared with them a common environment.

What I want to stress in this regard is that this did not happen by coincidence. There was a conscious effort on the part of the indigenous peoples, whose socially sanctioned customs like *inqina* [hunting party] were given permission to go hunting by an Inkosi. This was done at certain seasons of the year. As a result the killing of animals during their gestation period or when they were suckling their young ones, was avoided.

Further, we did not regard hunting as a sport, nor did we hunt to make profit. [ I am sure many of you have heard about the plight of our black rhinos and the elephants whose survival is still under threat even now, due to the trade in rhino horn and ivory]. We used to hunt to address a genuine need for food. But of course I do not intend unsettling our fascinating Komodo Dragons by repeated use of the word 'hunting'.

I sincerely hope that the Komodo Dragons will find their new abode acceptable and that the envisaged programme of observation and breeding will successfully contribute to our South African pool of knowledge and educational enrichment of zoologists and lay visitors alike.

It is my pleasure to unveil this commemorative plaque and declare the Dragons and Monsters Enclosure officially open.

[top](#)