

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERED

BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES SIXTH ANNUAL CONSERVATION WEEK

Address by Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi  
Chief Minister of KwaZulu, President of Inkatha and  
Chairman, The South African Black Alliance

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Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Amakhosi present, Members of the Legislative Assembly, Senior Officials, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is once again my pleasant duty to extend a very warm welcome to all of you here today, at this our Sixth Annual Conservation Week. Unfortunately, due to factors entirely beyond our control, we have been forced to condense our usual week long programme into only three days. The programme is, however, a particularly interesting one and I am sure that all who participate will benefit by their participation.

Conservation Week is held annually at a time when the Legislative Assembly is in session in order that leaders of KwaZulu be afforded an opportunity of acquainting themselves with pertinent conservation issues. That we are now holding our sixth Conservation Week is a clear demonstration of the commitment to conservation which we as a Government have. A review of the more significant achievements of my Bureau of Natural Resources during the past year will provide further tangible evidence of this commitment.

During this period, two further conservation areas were proclaimed. These being the Amatikulu Nature Reserve and the Hlatikulu Forest Reserve. Both Reserves have been fenced and the Amatikulu Reserve has been stocked with breeding nuclei of reedbuck, water buck, giraffe and zebra. Situated as it is close to the major centres of Esikhawini, Richards Bay, Empangeni and the greater Durban area, this Reserve will undoubtedly prove to be an important tourist destination in due course.

In addition, the Ndumo Game Reserve was formally incorporated into KwaZulu on the 1st April, 1988. This is a very important addition to our system of conservation areas and we are very conscious of our responsibility towards the Reserve. I am, however, confident that the Reserve will continue to be well managed and indeed cherished, as such a unique area should be, by the Bureau of Natural Resources.



While on the subject of conservation areas, I must mention that it has been decided that all the indigenous forests in KwaZulu will in future be managed by the Bureau of Natural Resources. The phased hand over of these areas by the Department of Agriculture and Forestry has already begun. This move has been necessary in order to streamline the administration of conservation areas and to ensure that only one body is responsible for both conservation management and tourism in these areas.

The Community Conservation Area concept is extremely popular in KwaZulu and I would like to highlight three areas where particular progress has been made. These are the Matshitsholo Community Conservation area at Mabedlana, the Isandlwana Community Conservation area and the Matshenezimpisi Community Conservation area at Nkandla.

The Matshitsholo Community Conservation area was the first such area to be developed in KwaZulu and great strides have been made here. In fact, it was possible for a First Fruits ceremony to be held there where the first surplus game animals from this area were hunted. This area has been in operation for some considerable time now and is well known in KwaZulu. It is one of our success stories. Here we have a poor rural community setting an example of good conservation which many of the more affluent sectors of South African society would do well to emulate.

Unfortunately, the fact that this community was able to set aside an area large enough to carry game animals created an impression in some quarters, that Community Conservation areas must all have populations of game animals. Nothing could be further from the truth. Community Conservation areas are areas set aside by communities to conserve the resources important to that community. This means that the areas may vary from a reed bed where reeds are conserved and harvested as a building material, to small patches of forest which yield medicinal plants. All these areas are important and I wish to pay tribute to those communities which are protecting these less spectacular but equally important areas.

Another important reason for developing Community Conservation areas is that they sometimes provide a means of keeping intact some of the cultural heritage of our nation. The Isandlwana Community Conservation area, which is situated adjacent to the Isandlwana Battlefield is one such area. It gives me great pleasure to inform you that the South African Breweries Community Trust has indicated that they are to make a donation of R25 000 towards this project. This enables a start to be made with the provision of facilities.



The guiding light behind the Matshenezimpisi Community Conservation area is the Inkosi for the area, our Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, Inkosi Biyela. This community has succeeded in obtaining the support of the Rotary Club of Durban Umgeni for their conservation project. Rotary have indicated a willingness to be involved at all levels of the project's implementation, from fund raising to actual erection of buildings, etc. The co-operation of these two very different communities towards the attainment of a common goal will, in addition to the obvious conservation benefits, have important spin offs with regard to furthering mutual understanding between the people of our country.

There are, of course, many more Community Conservation areas and all are, in one way or another, important. I am unfortunately, due to time constraints, not able to mention them all. I would, however, like to emphasise my earlier point that often it is the smaller, less spectacular areas which are important, and to encourage all those communities who are endeavouring to conserve their natural resources no matter how insignificant they may appear to be.

The development of a tourist infrastructure has been the focus of much effort on the part of the Bureau of Natural Resources over the past few years. These efforts are now bearing fruit to the extent that three lodges at Kozi Bay, and a new wilderness camp at Lake Sibaya were opened; a hiking trail around the Kosi Lake system is in an advanced stage of completion.

A heartening aspect of the tourism development has been the support received from the private sector. The Sibaya Wilderness Camp, for example, was made possible by sponsorship from Teba. Such support from the private sector will enable the Bureau to implement tourism development projects much sooner than originally planned.

That the Bureau of Natural Resources has made great strides during the past year is self evident. What has made this progress possible is perhaps less so. I would contend that this progress is directly related to the Bureau's policy of "Conservation by Consensus". By involving local communities in conservation projects and by ensuring that these projects are of relevance to them, the Bureau is winning the support of not only the Government of KwaZulu, but the people at grass root level. This approach has made and will continue to make progress possible.



It is also for this reason that the theme of this year's Conservation Week symposium is so relevant. This theme, "The Value of Oral Knowledge", underlines the importance attached to dialogue with rural communities. The 'illiterate' is an often overlooked individual, but the Bureau knows, as I do, that the wealth of oral knowledge possessed by these people is of immense importance. This oral knowledge of nature and her creatures has been obtained over generations of close contact with nature and is of great relevance to those who must manage natural systems, while taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the communities associated with those same systems.

I could take a great deal of your time in discussing the vast knowledge of grassland ecology, which almost all rural Zulu women possess. Anyone who has watched a Zulu housewife alter the temperature of an open fire simply by the addition of a particular type of wood will realise that she has a knowledge of timber which could well surpass that of university trained foresters.

I will, however, not preempt our two speakers, Professor Breen and Mr. Len van Scalkwyk, who are well qualified to address you on this topic, and I would compliment the organisers of this Symposium on an excellent choice of speakers.

Before handing over to Mr. Steele, our Master of Ceremonies, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the South African Breweries Community Trust for again sponsoring our Conservation Week. The importance of Conservation Week as a means of bringing about a greater understanding of our environment should not be underestimated, and I am truly grateful for their support.

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