



POLIHALI TUNNEL BORING MACHINE BREAKS GROUND ON PHASE II OF THE LESOTHO HIGHLANDS WATER PROJECT

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) achieved a historic milestone on 15 January 2025, with the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) breaking ground on the Polihali tunnel during a landmark ceremony held at Ha Bereng, Leribe. The Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, LebonaLephema, officiated the event on behalf of the Prime Minister of Lesotho. This occasion marks the first TBM-driven tunnelling in Lesotho's highlands in over 20 years since Phase I of the project.

The groundbreaking ceremony was graced by dignitaries from the governments of Lesotho and South Africa, the Chinese Ambassador to Lesotho, members of the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission (LHWC), the LHDA Board, project contractors, and representatives of communities impacted by the project.

The Katse TBM, named Khoithea 'Ngoaha Kholo2 (The Rat Mole of 200 Years), is one of two double-shielded machines designed to excavate the 38km Polihali Transfer Tunnel. The machine's name, which symbolizes Lesotho's bicentennial celebrations, was selected through a nationwide naming competition that engaged citizens nationwide.

The Khoithea 'Ngoaha Kholo2 is set to tunnel approximately 20 metres per day, simultaneously installing concrete lining segments to reinforce the tunnel as it progresses. A second TBM, destined for the Polihali side, is expected to arrive on-site by mid-2025. Both machines were custom-built by CCCC Tianhe of China and designed by Robbins, ensuring they meet the unique requirements of this ambitious project.

The commencement of tunnelling represents a significant leap forward for Phase II of the LHWP, which aims to bolster water security and foster socio-economic growth in Lesotho and South Africa. The LHDA remains committed to delivering this transformative project in collaboration with all stakeholders, ensuring long-term benefits for the region.