

Scientists apologise for failing to make girl a dragon

January 10 2014, by Madeleine Coorey

Australia's national science agency has issued a rare apology to a seven-year-old girl for not being able to make her a fire-breathing dragon, blaming a lack of research into the mythical creatures.

The youngster, Sophie, wrote to a "Lovely Scientist" at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), politely asking whether they could make her a winged pet of her own.

"I would call it Toothless if it was a girl and if it is a boy I would name it Stuart," she wrote in her letter, promising to feed it raw fish and play with it when she wasn't at school.

Toothless is the name of a [dragon](#) befriended by a Viking teenager in the How to Train Your Dragon series of children's books. The pair also feature in a popular film franchise. Stuart is her father's name.

Sophie's request prompted an unusual apology from the 87-year-old institution, which admitted "we've missed something".

"There are no dragons," it said in a blog reply posted on its website this week.

"Over the past 87 odd years we have not been able to create a dragon or dragon eggs," it said, adding that its scientists had observed dragonflies and even measured the body temperatures of the lizard known as a

mallee dragon.

"But our work has never ventured into dragons of the mythical, fire breathing variety. And for this Australia, we are sorry."

The CSIRO said scientists overseas had recently pondered whether dragon fire would be produced by flint, gas, or rocket fuel, and speculated whether its own research into alternative fuels could be a starting block for its dragon research and development programme.

"Would dragon fuel be a low emissions option? Thanks for the fuel for thought, Sophie. We're looking into it," it said.

The enquiry had a fairytale ending Friday when the CSIRO announced that, thanks to Sophie's letter, "a dragon was born".

"We couldn't sit here and do nothing. After all, we promised Sophie we would look into it," they explained in a new blog.

"Toothless, 3D printed out of titanium, came into the world at Lab 22, our additive manufacturing facility in Melbourne."

The electric blue and grey dragon, small enough to be held by hand, is currently en route from Melbourne to Sophie's home in Brisbane, the CSIRO said.

"Being that electron beams were used to 3D print her, we are certainly glad she didn't come out breathing them... instead of fire," said the CSIRO's Chad Henry.

"Titanium is super strong and lightweight, so Toothless will be a very capable flyer."

Sophie's mother Melissah Lester said her daughter had asked for a dragon for Christmas, and her father, Stuart, had told her it would not be possible, prompting the seven-year-old to contact a scientist for help.

"She is a very imaginative little girl and has been obsessed with dinosaurs and dragons from a very young age and had been pestering us for a dragon for Christmas," her mum told the ABC.

"We had hoped that by writing to the CSIRO they might write back saying it isn't possible, but it hasn't worked out that way."

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Citation: Scientists apologise for failing to make girl a dragon (2014, January 10) retrieved 28 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-scientists-apologise-girl-dragon.html>

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