

# Nxesi plans to tackle corruption

*Business Day, 7 March 2013, page 4*

**NATASHA MARRIAN**  
Deputy Political Editor

**PUBLIC** Works Minister Thulas Nxesi yesterday revealed plans to clean up his department — long riddled with “collusion and corruption” — saying he had uncovered the looting of millions of rand in the 40 cases probed by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) so far.

From the scandal over police building leases to the pricey security renovations at President Jacob Zuma’s Nkandla residence, the Department of Public Works has in recent years attracted negative press.

The minister said that in the days ahead, as “heads roll” due to the SIU probes, it was important to note that the department was “simultaneously” being rebuilt.

It emerged last week that Mr Nxesi had appointed PwC to help reconstruct the department’s assets register — the source of many qualified audits.

As a result of the turnaround

strategy, one deputy director-general had been dismissed, and a former acting director-general and the head of property management were facing disciplinary hearings. Other officials would also face disciplinary proceedings.

“Certainly, it’s not going to be easy. It’s going to be difficult. Our clients (government departments) want services and at the same time we want to root out the rot,” Mr Nxesi said in a statement.

The SIU may soon turn its attention to capital projects, on which the department spends about R150m a month.

“High-profile cases of alleged overpricing in relation to leases, renovations of ministerial houses, and security provisions for the residence of the president ... all tell the same story; collusion and corruption are endemic within some elements of the department,” Mr Nxesi said.

Disciplinary processes would unfold against those implicated and the department would lodge civil

proceedings to recover the money. Mr Nxesi had asked the SIU to focus on construction projects on the prestige portfolio in Cape Town, looking at the high cost of renovating ministerial houses.

The investigation has revealed that about R100m was spent on renovating 11 houses. “I suspect that similar irregularities of corruption, inflation of bills of quantity, and fruitless and wasteful expenditure are likely to be discovered.”

A preliminary investigation into the renovation of the Department of Public Works’ head office in Pretoria showed that the initial budget for the contract in 2009 was R59m, but on completion, in 2011, the cost had jumped to R325m.

On the Skilpadshok border post settlement investigation, it was found that the department paid R50m through corruption. At the Lebombo border post there was the irregular appointment of a programme management firm resulting in wasteful expenditure of R3.5m.

Democratic Alliance spokeswoman on public works Anchen Dreyer said the SIU’s findings should be handed to the National Prosecuting Authority so those implicated could face the consequences. She said Mr Nxesi said “the right things” from time to time but clammed up on the “important issue”, Nkandla.

marriann@bdfm.co.za