

N Cape premier swings the axe

Zuma's hand seen in surprise cabinet reshuffle

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PREMIER Sylvia Lucas dropped a bombshell when she announced a surprise provincial cabinet reshuffle yesterday afternoon as MECs were making their way to the ANC provincial elective conference in Colesberg, which started today.

After calling the media to an urgent press conference at 3pm, Lucas read out the names of her new cabinet, without allowing any follow-up questions to be asked.

MECs were apparently called in individually to her office from 11am yesterday. Lucas did not provide any reasons for her decision, other than to indicate she had started a consultative process last week, which concluded yesterday.

Both the Office of the Premier and the ANC have previously denied there was a possibility of a cabinet shake-up.

Mac Jack and Pauline Williams were axed.

Jack as MEC for finance, economic development, was instrumental in promoting fiscal discipline in the province under difficult economic circumstances.

Williams was appointed as MEC for transport, safety and liaison last year, following a long sabbatical from government life.

ANC Women's League deputy secretary Gail Parker will replace Jack and ANC MPL Alexandra Beukes will take over from Williams.

The new MEC for Roads and Public Works is Bongiwe Mbin-

qo-Gigaba and the new MEC for Sports, Arts and Culture is Mxolisi Sokatsha.

The rest of the cabinet – MEC for Nature Conservation and Environmental Affairs Tiny Chotelo; MEC for Education Martha Bartlett; MEC for Co-operative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs Alvin Botes; MEC for Social Development Father Gift van Staden; and MEC for Health Lebogang Motlhaping – will remain in their positions.

The spokesperson for the Office of the Premier, Bronwyn

“War has been declared. This wasn't expected”

Thomas-Abrahams, said the premier's decision was taken after “applying her mind and consultation with her MECs”.

An ANC insider believed Lucas must have had the backing of President Jacob Zuma, or was heavily pressured into removing Jack.

“War has been declared and this move was not expected and could not have been executed of her own accord. Jack occupies a powerful position, second in command to ANC provincial secretary Zamani Saul.”

He indicated that while Lucas's detractors had been purged, he believed the last-minute reshuffle ahead of the

conference would serve to alienate many of the delegates.

“Whether the bombshell announcement will give her the upper hand at the conference remains to be seen. Many members who are supporting the ‘Premier League’ are boycotting the conference or have been denied access to the venue in Colesberg. This will serve to dilute the Zuma support base in the upcoming ANC national conference. Everyone is waiting with bated breath to see the outcome of the provincial elective conference.”

The DA in the province cautiously welcomed the reshuffle but said there were other MECs who were not performing and should also have got the chop.

DA provincial leader Andrew Louw said the Department of Health was in dire straits. “We are disappointed that the MEC for Health, Lebogang Motlhaping, was not removed as the political head of this critical department. Things have gone from bad to worse, and if not addressed soon will result in a total collapse of this department,” said Louw.

He added that both Parker and Beukes had proved themselves to be earnest in their oversight tasks as members of the provincial legislature.

“They have not been afraid to raise sensitive matters with departments. They have also displayed a willingness to listen to the opposition. We sincerely hope that their apparent determination to resolve problems within departments will not wane once they cross the threshold from MPLs to MECs.”