

**THABO MOKONE
and BABALO NDENZE**

ANC MPs will defend President Jacob Zuma during the no-confidence vote, but they want the party's parliamentary structure to come up with its own resolution on his fate.

Discussing the motion of no confidence for the first time at a closed caucus meeting on Thursday, ANC MPs told party secretary-general Gwede Mantashe and his deputy, Jessie Duarte, that although they would shoot down the opposition-sponsored motion, the ANC should deal with the Zuma matter at the next meeting of its national executive committee.

The caucus discussion comes as pressure is mounting on the ANC — from within and outside the party — to act against Zuma following his recent reshuffling of the cabinet without consulting senior leaders.

ANC national chairwoman Baleka Mbete and treasurer-general Zweli Mkhize were also present at the meeting.

MPs, who spoke on condition of anonymity because caucus discussions are confidential, said they had told the ANC officials that "they can't close their eyes to the problem facing the ANC".

Mantashe confirmed the discussion but said there was no hostility directed at Zuma.

"You can't ride on the motion of the opposition. You must raise your issues here. But there was no such call [to step down]. I think only one member insinuated that in a way. But there was no call or cacophony of noise calling for the president to step down," he said.

The MPs are also said to have proposed that the caucus should at

MPs will back Zuma, then decide his fate

some point debate its own resolution on Zuma, to be considered by the NEC, and that Zuma should be offered an exit package.

But the meeting ended without giving an indication whether it accepted or rejected this proposal.

One MP said: "We have agreed ... to support the president because we can't dance to the tune of the opposition, and then [we'll] come back and deal with this matter of the president. Probably the issue that we need is to make sure that the NEC should do the right thing and make sure they prepare a nice package for the president so that he can move.



The NEC should prepare a nice package for Zuma so he can move

"So that was the mood and argument of the caucus."

But another MP sought to downplay the debate, saying the top six officials had merely come to hear the views of individual MPs because a number had expressed their views in public.

Outspoken MPs such as Makhosi Khoza and Mondli Gungubele, who have separately called for a conscience vote, did not speak at the meeting.

Khoza is said to have raised her hand repeatedly but was not given a chance to speak.

MP Lerumo Kalako, Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande and Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga are among caucus members who spoke against Zuma.

But he was defended by former Gauteng MEC Humphrey Mmemezi, Defence and Military Veterans Deputy Minister Kebby Maphatsoe and MP Zet Luzipho, who told the meeting that the caucus had no authority on the matter, and only the NEC did.

Mmemezi would neither confirm nor deny that he came to Zuma's defence at the meeting. "The best person to be checked is the chief whip, and it would be up to him whether he would want to indicate who said what," he said.

Maphatsoe said he told the meeting that calls to remove Zuma had been defeated in the NEC.

Kalako did not deny speaking against Zuma. "Well, everything you've said is not a lie," he said.

Public Works Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin, who is also SACP deputy secretary, told delegates at the party's Western Cape congress yesterday it was encouraging to see "resistance" against corruption and Zuma inside the ANC parliamentary caucus.

"Opposition to corruption is not just being led by opposition parties. We are also seeing it in parliament. It's often SACP members [who are also] MPs who get the credit, let's not forget those in the background," said Cronin.