

# Who will replace Supra?

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The ANC might not have made a final decision on North West Premier Supra Mahumapelo's future, but this has not stopped informal lobbying for his position. The names of six possible successors are already doing the rounds.

A decision on Mahumapelo is expected after a meeting of the national executive committee, due in May.

City Press has learnt that, while he is resisting pressure to quit, Mahumapelo has been trying to influence the choice of his successor. A source close to the ANC in the province said Mahumapelo held a meeting with two female MECs and a district municipality mayor to discuss how one of them should be positioned to be considered for premier when he leaves office.

His fellow party members believe he is hoping the party will go for a female premier, as it did in the Free State to fill Ace Magashule's shoes. The other worry is that the Mahumapelo-led ANC provincial executive committee (PEC) might have no input to make if it is disbanded; one of the things the party is apparently considering in trying to rebuild the fragmented organisation in North West.

"Our greatest wish is for whoever is appointed to be someone focused and not close to Mahumapelo," said an ANC provincial legislature member.

"It is clear he'd prefer to be replaced by someone he can still have influence on and that's not what we want."

Provincial SA Communist Party (SACP) chairperson and former North West public works MEC Madoda Sambatha said they expect the ANC to appoint someone who "knows exactly what the problems are".

"There are such people in the legislature. We don't want to be seen to be pushing for Mahumapelo's removal and quickly say who should replace him. We have made it clear that he should go, but we expect the ANC to give us someone who will represent us and our views."

The three women candidates are local government MEC Fenny Gaolalwe, agriculture MEC Manketsi Tlhape and Bojanala Mayor Fetsang Mokati.

Three of Mahumapelo's detractors - ANC PEC member Mmoloki Cwaile, chairperson of Parliament's environmental affairs committee Philemon Mapulane and former provincial MEC China Dodovu - are also under consideration.

Cwaile was suspended from the troubled provincial health department where he was a director. Last year, Cwaile was seen as the only black sheep in the PEC as he openly campaigned for Cyril Ramaphosa at the Nasrec conference.

Dodovu, a former local government MEC and North West ANC deputy chairperson, has written a few open letters to Mahumapelo criticising his leadership in government and in the ANC.

Mapulane has been looking into the scandal in which the North West government awarded more than R100 million worth of game to a few individuals, some close to Mahumapelo.

An ANC provincial legislator said it would not be easy. "Most of the people in government have got their own skeletons. Most of the names that are coming up will possibly be opposed, based on one or two scandals. Removing Mahumapelo is already hard for the ANC, but finding someone to fill his shoes might be even harder. There are a lot of ambitious people out there who are already lobbying through influential people."

The last time a North West premier was removed was in 2010, when Maureen Modiselle fell out of favour amid infighting and the ANC had to step in. Thandi Modise replaced her.

A new premier will be expected to not only lead the province, but also help the party regain support among the people ahead of next year's elections.

Mahumapelo's position weakened even more this week after the central government clipped his wings and party headquarters Luthuli House went to ground to listen to both sides of the story.

The view that Mahumapelo should resign and the provincial ANC be disbanded persisted during discussions in the ANC's national working committee earlier in the week. His supporters fought back, citing the need for the committee to go on a fact-finding mission before taking a final decision.

On Wednesday, President Cyril Ramaphosa placed the ailing provincial health department and provincial treasury under administration, meaning that future decisions on government spending will be made in Pretoria, not in Mahikeng. Mahumapelo welcomed this move two days later.

Mahumapelo has been hammered on several fronts. Provincial SACP secretary Smuts Matshe wrote to ANC officials on Sunday to support the view that Luthuli House should axe him and that an "inclusive team" be appointed to prepare for the 2019 elections.

The SACP's seven-page letter lists 14 grounds on which Mahumapelo should be fired. These include organising and coordinating hooligans to attack his opponents, championing the Guptas' business interests in the province and enabling corporate state capture, running a parallel government and tolerating or defending corruption.