

Minister in shock move to 'hijack' SABC

By [Qaanitah Hunter](#)

7 Dec 2015

Controversial Communications Minister Faith Muthambi has launched an audacious bid to take command of the SABC in a move that would put the public broadcaster under direct state control.

With cabinet backing, Muthambi, who is known to be very close to President Jacob Zuma, has introduced legislation that would give her the sole power to appoint the SABC board.



The Broadcasting Amendment Bill, tabled on Friday, would wipe out the carefully crafted consensus reached after 1994 to turn the institution, once notorious as a mouthpiece of the apartheid government, into a public broadcaster.

In effect, Muthambi is pushing to turn the SABC into a state broadcaster, usurping the power of parliament to have a say over who sits on the board.

As matters stand, members of the National Assembly interview candidates for the board and recommend names to the president.

But the bill proposes that: "The role of the National Assembly with regard to the appointment of non-executive members of the board is replaced by the minister."

It also allows for a "nomination committee" to be set up by Muthambi to recommend candidates.

"In appointing the members of the committee, the minister must ensure that the committee is broadly representative, and have the necessary skills, knowledge, qualifications and experience to serve on the committee," says the bill.

If the bill is passed, it will reduce the number of nonexecutive board members from 12 to nine. It also proposes that the number of board members required to obtain a quorum be reduced from nine to seven.

Muthambi is already unpopular within the ANC, with some leaders becoming increasingly impatient with her behaviour and her apparent disregard for the party's sub-committee on communication. Party sources said this week that she would meet ANC opposition on the bill.

The Save Our SABC, or SOS, coalition has threatened to go as far as the Constitutional Court to challenge the proposed amendments,

SOS co-ordinator Sekoetlane Phamodi said, adding that giving the minister full control over the SABC was contrary to what was envisaged in the current Broadcasting Act.

"The SABC will shift from a public broadcaster to a state broadcaster if this bill is passed and it is quite possible it will be passed as is.

"The public broadcaster needs to be distinguished from the state and the government of the day. It needs to be independent of government and the executive. This was in the preliminary constitution and it was agreed to when the Broadcasting Act was passed," said Phamodi.

Franz Kruger, who was part of the first post-apartheid management team of the SABC, said the



amendment bill was a real problem.

Faith Muthambi

"We have fought long and hard so that we are where we have public broadcasting. This takes us back to a situation where the SABC would be a state broadcaster," he said.

Earlier this year, Muthambi amended the SABC's memorandum of incorporation to give herself the power to appoint its chief executive, chief operations and financial officers. She also increased her powers to approve all the board's business and strategic plans.

Since her appointment, Muthambi has stumbled from crisis to crisis - most notably those arising from the questionable appointment of Hlaudi Motsoeneng as chief operating officer.

The High Court in Cape Town declared the appointment "unlawful and irrational". Her appointment of Motsoeneng angered Luthuli House, too, and was publicly slammed by ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe.

But she has continued to take unpopular decisions - leading observers to conclude that she has Zuma's protection.

The SABC board has been dysfunctional since the departure of six board members.

Professor Bongani Khumalo, Thembinkosi Bonakele and Ellen Tshabalala resigned from the board, with the latter doing so under a cloud after her claimed qualifications were brought into question.

Muthambi removed Hope Zinde, Rachel Kalidass and Ronnie Lubisi - a decision widely regarded as irregular.

The *Sunday Times* reported last week that some of the remaining board members were furious about Muthambi's constant interference in the broadcaster's operational matters.

She is also accused of appointing television head of news Jimi Matthews as acting CEO without consulting the board.

Muthambi's bill is likely to face resistance from parliamentarians, with the DA vowing to oppose it.

The party's communications spokeswoman, Phumzile van Damme, said the amendments would pave the way for the SABC to become an ANC propaganda tool, directed by Muthambi.

"The amendments would see the last vestige of independence removed from the SABC. The DA will use all available mechanisms to prevent the bill from passing. We encourage civil society and the public to express their opposition to this bill," said Van Damme.

Communications Portfolio Committee chairwoman Joyce Moloi-Moropa said she could only comment after she had discussed the proposed amendments with other members of the committee when parliament resumes next year.

A member of the ANC's subcommittee on communications told the *Sunday Times* that Muthambi had defied the party once again in pushing through the new amendment.

"We don't all agree on this, there is going to be a fight," said the source.

The bill has already been approved by the cabinet, with Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe announcing the submission of the bill to parliament in what he said was an effort to "implement a stable corporate governance model that ensures long-term stability and sustainability of the SABC".

Source: Sunday Times

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>