

# Air Namibia ordered to appoint MD

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DIRECTIVE: Transport minister John Mutorwa. PHOTO: FILE

Transport minister John Mutorwa has instructed the newly appointed Air Namibia board to finalise the recruitment and appointment of a substantive managing director.

This follows years of current acting MD Mandi Samson having her contract renewed on a six-month basis. Samson has been at the helm of the national carrier since August 2015 in an acting role, which has led many to question why her substantive appointment has not been formalised. The airline has been without

a substantive MD since the exit of Theo Namises on 30 June 2015. “We have just appointed a new board, they must initiate the process,” Mutorwa told Namibian Sun this week.

When approached for comment, the new Air Namibia board did not indicate whether they will start a new recruitment process or continue with the one led by the former board.

The new board consists of Escher Luanda, Heritaha Nankole Muyoba, Willy Mertens, Nangula Kauluma, Alois Nyandoro and Deidré Sauls-Deckenbrock. Their term started on 1 January 2019.

When the airline initiated the search for a substantive MD in 2017, Samson was identified by public enterprises minister Leon Jooste and former transport minister Alpheus !Naruseb, as well as former board chairperson Gerson Tjihenuna, as the ideal candidate.

Questions sent to Jooste via email did not yield any responses, while his phone went unanswered.

Mutorwa has in the past voiced his displeasure about the inability of the airline to appoint a substantive MD, while keeping Samson on in an acting capacity.

“I don't like it when institutions believe someone is competent enough to run things and appoint them in an acting capacity indefinitely. It is not fair,” Mutorwa said.

“The fact is, a person should only act for a short period of time. If somebody is found to be good at the job, either give the person that position or move on and give the position to another person who deserves it. These types of things cause problems,” he added.

Aviation consultant Linden Birns commended Samson, saying she brought a sense of stability to the airline.

“She has brought a degree of stability to the carrier and injected direction and a sense of purpose, at a time when it had to face increased competition as other long-haul operators began serving the Namibian market,” Birns said.

He said it was ideal for an MD to be appointed on a permanent basis.

“It is preferable for any business or organisation to be led by someone in the role on a permanent basis and it is unusual for a corporation to be led by an acting MD for such a prolonged period. Has this translated into any adverse impact on the airline's operations? I don't think so.

“The airline is managed by flight operations and technical and commercial professionals. The MD's role is like that of an orchestra conductor - to guide the different sections so that they reach the same conclusion at the same time, in harmony and at the same tempo,” Birns added.

Air Namibia spokesperson Paulus Nakawa confirmed to the Windhoek Observer in January 2018 that Samson had been shortlisted for the position of substantive MD following a recruitment process that was initiated in mid-2017.

Meanwhile, a source has informed Namibian Sun that the new board will also be tasked with publicising the airline's financial statements for the period 1998 to 2005.

The Tjihenuna-led board had promised to release the airline's results before the end of 2018, but this had not materialised.

“The results will be tabled by the new board. It is up to them to decide when to publish them,” the source said.

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