

The big winner in Abbott's reshuffle is the ambitious Scott Morrison

Written by The Conversation

Tony Abbott has seized the opportunity for a significant reshuffle that he says puts “jobs and families” at the heart of his 2015 agenda, as he seeks to “reset and refocus” his battered government.

The changes favour key allies (Scott Morrison and Kevin Andrews), scrape at barnacles (the women issue) and attempt to address some problem areas (the failure in selling messages, poor negotiation with crossbenchers).

The big winner is the highly ambitious Scott Morrison (who, incidentally, is said to be close to Abbott's chief of staff Peta Credlin). He gets the expanded portfolio of social services, which has had child care added.

Abbott said Morrison had likened it “to being the minister for economic participation”.

“It is very important to have a minister of Scott's drive and competence in this role because this is about trying to ensure that Australians are having a go,” Abbott told his news conference. Morrison said in a statement: “Getting as many Australians as are able off welfare and into work will be one of my core goals.”

Morrison will be on cabinet's expenditure review committee, so he will have a hand in budget preparation, access to whole-of-government information, and the chance to participate in the broad economic debate.

He'll be able to talk tough about welfare cheats and the like to his favourite Sydney shock jock and the Daily Telegraph. He will also be in charge of the families package the government will unveil, including child care and the restructured parental leave scheme. This will give him something positive to sell, complete with plenty of picture opportunities with kids.

Morrison has lobbied and manoeuvred for months for an expansion or change of role and this had not made him popular with some colleagues. For a time the speculation was that he could

The big winner in Abbott's reshuffle is the ambitious Scott Morrison

Written by The Conversation

get a new homeland security portfolio or defence.

Defence became open with Abbott's sacking from cabinet and the ministry of David Johnston, the big casualty of the reshuffle (the other casualty was Brett Mason, dropped as a parliamentary secretary).

But in terms of the future, Morrison is much better placed in social services where, with other advantages, he will have maximum opportunity for publicity.

It remains to be seen whether he'll be able to win crossbench support for the budget welfare measures that the government hasn't be able to get through the Senate. But he was successful in negotiating his temporary protection visas package, and seems to have built a relationship with some key crossbenchers.

In immigration Morrison has been a man with a harsh face. He has succeeded in stopping the boats but seldom shows compassion or any signs of being troubled about the human costs of the policy, preferring to emphasise only the (undoubted) benefit in terms of preventing people drowning. The next year will tell whether he can adopt a more nuanced public persona.

The second most interesting change is Kevin Andrews, who goes from social services – where he has not been able to convince either the public or the crossbenchers – into defence. Abbott said he had worked with Andrews for a long time and sees him as a “very safe pair of hands”.

In defence Andrews will face the difficult issues of the new submarines and the coming defence white paper, but it is likely that the Prime Minister's Office will be all over these.

Abbott has moved to counter two problems that dogged the announcement of his initial team: he has promoted women and he has designated a minister for science.

Sussan Ley goes into cabinet and replaces Peter Dutton in the health portfolio, where she will

The big winner in Abbott's reshuffle is the ambitious Scott Morrison

Written by The Conversation

have to begin a difficult dance with the Australian Medical Association over the revamped Medicare changes, on which the doctors are arcing up.

Having two women in cabinet is better than one, but the criticism “only two” will replace “only one”.

Two women become parliamentary secretaries. The well-qualified Kelly O'Dwyer will be parliamentary secretary to Treasurer Joe Hockey; Karen Andrews, a former engineer, is parliamentary secretary to Ian Macfarlane who has now had “science” added to his title of industry minister.

Asked why he'd changed his mind after always saying Macfarlane didn't need science in his title Abbott said, a touch ruefully, “well it seems that sometimes it helps if you do put these things in the titles”.

Dutton, unimpressive in health, gets a decent consolation prize by taking Morrison's immigration and border security job, which gives him membership of the national security committee.

Josh Frydenberg, who has performed well as parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, moves into the junior ministry as assistant treasurer, a post in limbo for most of this year. The reshuffle was prompted by last week's reluctant resignation from the frontbench of Arthur Sinodinos, who had stood aside as assistant treasurer in March when he was called before the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Another parliamentary secretary, Simon Birmingham (one of that little band of Liberal moderates), moves up to be assistant minister for education and training. His senior minister, Christopher Pyne, has had training added to his education portfolio, with some functions transferred from the industry area.

Former West Australian treasurer Christian Porter becomes parliamentary secretary to Abbott. It's a pity he isn't a minister.

The big winner in Abbott's reshuffle is the ambitious Scott Morrison

Written by The Conversation

Despite its limitations (some notable poor performers are still in their places) and oddities (Andrews in defence), Abbott in his reshuffle has sent the message to his team and the public that he's listened to some of the criticisms being made.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/the-big-winner-in-abbotts-reshuffle-is-the-ambitious-scott-morrison-35757>