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## Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern pours cold water on work for the dole ...

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Shane Jones' new work-for-the-dole scheme is long overdue. Video/Newstalk ZB

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Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern says the Government's work scheme to help young people into jobs will not be a work-for-the-dole scheme because they will be paid at least the minimum wage.

And she is not endorsing Regional Development Minister Shane Jones' wish to compel young beneficiaries into work and cutting their benefit if they refuse, saying Cabinet will work through those details.

Yesterday Jones said he would take four projects to Cabinet for his Working For Your Country scheme before Christmas, which will give beneficiaries a chance to

stop "sitting on the couch" and work for minimum wage in industries such as tree planting, riparian planting or developing railway tourism.

"In order to plant one billion trees, in order to deliver on riparian planting, in order to prepare a workforce for recapitalising the railways, the ne'er-do-well nephews will be required to take those jobs," Jones told the Herald.

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"If they are unwilling, then I will spend every thinking and waking moment ensuring they do not fall back on the dole and be permitted to do jack, while the rest of us are out there working."

Jones talked up work-for-the-dole schemes, but Ardern told Newstalk ZB this morning that the terminology was wrong because they would be paid a legal wage.

She likened it to Labour's Ready For Work programme, which targeted 10,000 NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) for six months' work in Government-supported environmental or community projects.

She did not endorse compelling NEETs to work and cutting their welfare if they refused, saying Labour had not supported compulsion in the past.

Cabinet will work through "the detail of how we encourage take-up".

Work-for-the-dole had a number of problems, "not least that you're undercutting people who are in paid employment".

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"If it's a genuine job, you will be paid a genuine working wage."

Jones said that the programmes would keep young men out of gangs, and give gang members as well as former prisoners an opportunity to get their lives back on track, he said.

Jones said regional leaders were imploring him to use his \$1 billion regional development fund to kick-start projects.

"The Mayor of Wairoa wants to get cracking right now to reconnect Wairoa to Napier in terms of railways. The people of Whangarei expect to see picks and shovels by Waitangi Day on the way to Ruakaka.

"That's not only for freight. Railway tourism offers one untapped opportunity."

A riparian-planting programme would partner the Crown with NGOs, but other programmes could partner with the private sector.

He said funding could come from a \$60 million NEETS fund that was never used by the previous Government, or from the regional development fund.

The plan was criticised by Auckland Action Against Poverty which said the programmes could push people into temporary work with insecure hours, trapping them between low wages and welfare, while employers had access to cheap labour and could avoid paying real wages and hiring fulltime staff.

"If we're trying to create a situation where people are in employment, that employment has to provide a living wage [of \$20.20 an hour]. If beneficiaries were paid a liveable income, it would force employers to provide adequate hours and wages."

National's regional development spokesman Simon Bridges said Jones was "talking a big game", but his plans would divide the coalition.

"Work-for-the-dole is anathema to the Labour-Greens. If anything they want to reduce welfare obligations to be available for work."



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