

Shane Jones swipes back at billion trees critics

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Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones. Photo / John Stone

Concerns that carbon foresters are planting pine trees that will never be harvested are the result of "misinformation", says Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones.

"The billion tree strategy is an excellent idea, unfortunately from time to time it's tainted by misinformation spread by the National Party or their grandees, hiding in scattered crevices around the Federated Farmers community" he told The Country's Jamie Mackay.

Some in the rural sector had expressed concern that Jones' One Billion Trees planting programme would encourage the sale of productive sheep and beef land over to forestry.

"There is no money that our government has dedicated or given to carbon forest investors" said Jones.

"The money that we have given is dedicated to planting, with farmers, native trees and where they want, with regional council planting poplars and some pine trees - but they are a mix of farming forestry".

Jones also suggested it wasn't up to the Government to stop this practice, and that farmers themselves were occasionally selling their land to "Queen Street lawyers who are investing in these carbon spends".

"The bottom line is, we're not going to undermine the right of cockies to sell their land".

"I say to the cockies - you guys are the ones selling the land".

Budget 2020

As Minister of Infrastructure, yesterday's Budget 2020 announcement meant Jones had an extra \$3 billion for "shovel ready" projects. Mackay asked how he was going to decide which ones to pick.

"You measure twice and you cut once. And once this money is cut we want to be absolutely confident that it's dedicated to enriching the productivity of regional New Zealand and as you obviously are aware, not a cent will go towards the experiment in Auckland to build light rail" said Jones.

Another aspect of interest to the rural community in Budget 2020 was the \$433 million invested in farm environmental work. Mackay asked if this was a "carrot" before Environment Minister David Parker's "stick" - freshwater reforms.

"I did have some entreaties come my way during the lockdown because I had advanced the notion that look, let's just, as we say in Kaitia - 'tai hoa' - until we understand how important the primary sector's going to be in relation to our recovery".

Jones said he had heard from "a number of farming leaders" who were interested in trying to "crack a deal" before the election, as they were concerned with the "terrible polling of the National Party".

With that in mind, Mackay asked Jones if the farming community should vote for New Zealand First or the Greens this coming election.

"Well the leader's said don't ever pretend you're going to be back in the limo as a Minister until you've gone out and tested your desirability in the market"

That's what I am going to be doing on a regular basis and then people can make a clear distinction if they want my brand of economic development [and] political advocacy or Eugenie Sage's".

"Make your choice".

Source:<https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/on-air/the-country/audio/shane-jones-swipes-back-at-billion-trees-critics/>