

Hwy. 407 decision nears

Fisheries minister wants to weigh eastern extension options soon

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

The bulldozers standing by to clear a path for Hwy. 407's eastern extension may not have to wait much longer.

Federal Fisheries Minister Herb Dhaliwal oversaw an environmental screening of the proposed 16-kilometre, Markham-to-Pickering toll road and then allowed the public 40 days to comment.

But Dhaliwal doesn't want the process to drag on further and has asked to see by Friday everything he needs to either approve or delay the construction, a department spokesperson said yesterday.

"I gather he wants to make a decision as soon as possible," said Colleen O'Meara of the department's office in Burlington.

There is more than enough evidence for the federal government to call a full review.

The screening report released last month found the road is "not likely to cause significant adverse (environmental) effects" — a conclusion opponents of the road say is wrong.

The opponents have sent 2,200 letters calling for

construction to be delayed for a federal full review. At 10:30 a.m. Thursday in the Cedar Grove Community Hall in Markham, they are promising to present evidence the road will damage human health as well as important fish and wildlife habitat in the area.

"There is more than enough evidence for the federal government to call a full review," Jim Robb, spokesperson for the 407 Action Group, argued last week.

The private owners of the highway, however, say their plans exceed environmental requirements.

This month, air quality expert Dr. David Pengelly concluded the new expressway would expose Stouffville and Markham residents to significantly increased health risks due to pollution.

And a leading groundwater expert, Dr. Ken Howard, stated the project "represents a serious long-term threat to the region's water resources."

The private owners of the highway, however, say their design and construction plans exceed environmental requirements "to insure that every precaution is taken," according to a letter from spokesperson Betty Fevreau this month.

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