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St Marys, FORCE present on Aggregate Resources Act

By Catherine O'Hara, REVIEW STAFF

St Marys Cement and the local organization that opposes the aggregate company's plans to build a limestone quarry in northeast Flamborough have appeared before the legislative committee struck to evaluate the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA).

Over the last two weeks, four hearings were held in Toronto. A limited number of stakeholders were provided with the opportunity make a delegation before the Standing Committee on General Government, an all-party legislative committee tasked with penning recommendations to enhance the Act.

Individuals representing industry, such as St Marys CBM, governments, trade associations and community activist groups, like Flamborough's FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment), as well as planners and lawyers, addressed the committee to provide input on how they believe the ARA should be amended to better serve the needs of aggregates while protecting Ontario's natural resources.

John Moroz, vice-president and general manager of St Marys made a presentation to the committee. "We believe that your work...has the potential to reverse a disturbing trend in the way our industry is regulated," he said in his delegation. While not suggesting a "major overhaul of the Act," Moroz was in support of modernizing the process by removing any overlaps and implementing procedures that would "always be followed."

The company claims that the current consultation process for aggregate licence applications is "confusing and inadequate." In turn, Moroz noted the Act could benefit from reforms that "improve the consultation process."

He went on to explain that the St Marys Flamborough Quarry plans have been subjected to "unprecedented actions" by the government, which issued a Ministerial Zoning Order on the property in 2010 and later declared a provincial interest in the land. As a result, Moroz suggested the Standing Committee consider terminating "political influence of any kind on deciding the merits of any application under the Act."

Graham Flint, chair and spokesperson of FORCE, interpreted Moroz's comments to mean that the company was opposed to the current standards that scrutinize, review and challenge aggregate licence applications.

"They feel that they should be entitled. They feel that if they want to put one of these projects in, they should be allowed to go and put these projects in," said Flint, who argued that projects such as the Flamborough Quarry, which is located on 158 hectares of environmentally sensitive land that comprises Provincially Significant Wetlands, should undergo more scrutiny.

St Marys, according to Moroz, boasts 22 aggregate operations, a transportation division, has 1,200 employees working at two of its cement plants and an additional 40 or so staff at ready-mix concrete plants. His report also stated that, to date, the company has spent some \$20 million to demonstrate the project's suitability since 2006. It has also launched a number of legal and judicial battles against various parties, including the province of Ontario and the Government of Canada, to see its project through.

Flint pointed out that FORCE and other like-minded groups, area municipalities, organizations, elected government officials and agencies have vehemently opposed the large limestone quarry project. Flint was expected to make a presentation to the committee Monday afternoon.

"They just won't let it go," he said.

As a result, the Act must be amended to ensure that the process is fair for both the industry and the host communities, which have become more and more involved in the consultation process since the ARA was last amended in 1997.

"We think the Act needs to be brought up to the 21st century," said Flint, adding, "We need gravel for our roads, but let's be sure we are taking it from the right place and the right way."



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Moroz, during his delegation, explained that the cost of aggregate is on a significant incline since companies have been forced "to look further and further afield from where the aggregate is needed." As a result, transportation costs have soared, as have the greenhouse gases emissions, he argued.

"The sustainability of our business in Ontario is dependent on a long-term supply of high quality aggregate reserves," noted Moroz.

The Standing Committee on General Government is expected to table a report after reviewing information it garnered during the consultation process.

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