Rail work set for Dry but no date yet

By CAMDEN SMITH

Construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway will begin in the Dry, one of the project's main financial backers said yesterday.

Halliburton chief executive officer Dick Cheney said speculation of possible hitches with the project were unfounded and speculators would not be rewarded.

Mr Cheney held a breakfast meeting in Darwin yesterday with Chief Minister Denis Burke before flying to Sydney for talks with Prime Minister John Howard.

Mr Cheney declined to put a date on the signing of financial and other railway contracts, but said the project would go ahead.

A private consortium headed by Halliburton will invest about $500 million into the project.

Contribute

The Federal, Territory and South Australian governments will contribute the remaining $60 million of the overall cost.

He said: "In terms of trying to put a date on it, the sooner the better.

"At the same time everybody involved wants to get something worked out and done properly, and I think it is more important we get it right than have a specific date on it.

"You can see, watch out! I wouldn't be here if there wasn't some serious prospects of being able to build this railway.

"Mr Cheney confirmed a commitment made earlier by Mr Burke that the project would start this season.

Mr Cheney said Australia's foreign exchange troubles would not affect the project.

He said: "We're used to dealing with foreign exchange risks all over the world. Currency risk is a normal part of business."

Mr Burke said he and Mr Cheney discussed timetables for design work and the structures that were in place for the expected influx of railway employees.

He said: "You can understand the complexities of getting work going in place and the full escalation of the work effort."

"Mr Martin welcomed the approach of the contract signing, but called on Mr Burke for more "community engagement."

"Ms Martin said there was "still time left" for the Government to develop programs to train Territorians for railway jobs.

"There is a real frustration from people in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Darwin about the lack of a jobs strategy."

Mystery toxin in water

A mysterious algae, found to be toxic for the first time in the world, has been isolated and shown to be a source of a water health scare in South Australia.

Mr Pash said the increase in algal population had been linked to weather conditions and not to pollution.

He said: "We're seeing an increase in the number of blooms in the water."

The blue-green algae called Phaeodactylum was discovered in a water storage facility in the York Peninsula this year.

Mr Pash said the increase in algae levels was not linked to pollution.

He said: "We've had a lot of blooms this year, but we haven't seen anything like this before."