

'Ulu Muda logging threatens water supply for 2m people'

Susan Loone Published Today 3:00 pm Updated Today 4:54 pm



The massive destruction of forest reserves in Kedah has shocked the Penang Water Supply Authority (PBAPP), which said this threatens water supply for more than two million citizens, businesses and paddy farming.

PBAPP chief executive Jaseni Maidinsa urged the federal government to act immediately to stop logging in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve as this place serves as the primary water catchment area for the Sungai Muda.

Jaseni urged Putrajaya to immediately gazette Ulu Muda as a water catchment area, halt logging activities now and totally ban it in future. He also called upon the Kedah government to seek financial assistance from Putrajaya to protect Ulu Muda to implement this initiative.

"Say no to logging in Ulu Muda now! It is not environmentally friendly. It is threatening the quality and life and livelihood of more than two million people in South Kedah and Penang," Jaseni (photo) said at a press conference at the Penang Legislative Assembly.

"The Ulu Muda Forest Reserve must be protected by law immediately," he added.

He cited the 10th Malaysian Plan (2011 to 2015), where the federal government stated that it would "undertake initiatives to encourage states to gazette forests, especially water catchment areas, as protected areas".

Jaseni was responding to the front-page report in The Star today, which says at least five logging depots, with thousands of high-quality logs such as meranti, cengal and merbau lying around, were waiting to be transported out to their processing destinations.



The Star report added that the logging depots discovered were about the size of 30 football fields.

Jaseni noted that the catchment area around Ulu Muda is the main source of raw water for South Kedah and Penang. "If the forest reserve is further damaged or destroyed, there will be serious consequences in terms of the availability of sufficient raw water from the river," Jaseni said.

"If the quality of raw water from Sungai Muda is compromised, it will also threaten the quality of treated water supplied in Southern Kedah and Penang," he added.

80pct of Penang's water from Sungai Muda Jaseni said PBAPP abstracts 80 percent of Penang's water - more than one billion litres - from the Sungai Muda daily. Without this raw water, there will be a massive water supply crisis in Penang and South Kedah, he explained.

As for businesses, Jaseni said logging in the water catchment areas would impact on high-technology manufacturing companies in Kulim in Kedah and in Penang.

He noted that in 2014, Penang contributed 6.5 percent and Kedah 3.4 percent to Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$338 billion. He added that the RM30.1 million that Kedah received in "forest premium" in 2014 is only 0.02 percent of the RM135.3 billion in GDP contribution from Penang and Kedah in the same year.

"All businesses are dependent on a continuous supply of good water supply. If there is a water supply crisis, the losses will be counted in billions of ringgit," Jaseni said.

He said there are six Kedah irrigation intakes and two in Penang in the Sungai Muda system, Jaseni said.

The average daily abstractions of water from the river, during a paddy planting season, amounts to about 2.59 billion litres, which is 1.5 times more than the normal water supply abstraction, he added.

"If there is not enough water to draw from Sungai Muda, the livelihoods of thousands of paddy farmers will be affected," Jaseni warned.