

Penang's Teluk Bahang Dam capacity remains low despite rainy season

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Penang Water Supply Corporation chief executive Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa speaks to the press at the SPICE Convention Centre in Bayan Lepas September 8, 2020. — Picture by Sayuti Zainudin

GEORGE TOWN, Oct 7 — The effective capacity at the Teluk Bahang Dam in Penang remained low despite increased rainfall in Penang over the last few weeks.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) Chief Executive Officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the dam's effective capacity increased by 6.6 per cent in one month but it remained abnormally low at only 22.6 per cent.

He said PBAPP is targeting an effective capacity of 45 per cent by December 31 to prepare for the dry season that will start from January 2021.

“The effective capacity of the Teluk Bahang Dam was 41.8 per cent on January 1 this year and it was due to this level of effective capacity that we managed to weather through the dry months this year from January to August,” he said.

He said the dam needs to reach an effective capacity of at least 45 per cent or higher by the end of this year to be able to sustain normal water supply for January to August next year.

Despite the rainy season, Jaseni said they could not rely purely on natural rainfall to refill the dam. He said cloud-seeding is still needed in the Teluk Bahang and Sungai Pinang Water catchment areas to refill the dam.

“This is the only way to refill the dam to safer levels before the end of the year,” he said.

The state government had approved cloud-seeding operations over water catchment areas in Penang and Kedah earlier this year.

However, eight of the 16 cloud seeding operations were put on hold since July due to “a technical issue”, he claimed.

“Apparently, the cloud-seeding contractor recommended by MetMalaysia, AFJETS, had not received the ‘flares’ needed for cloud seeding from another MetMalaysia contractor, MTO,”

“As such, all cloud seeding operations for Penang in August and September were postponed,” he said.

He said the state government sought assistance from the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA) in Putrajaya on September 24 to help expedite the remaining eight cloud seeding operations.

He said the eight outstanding cloud seeding operations will primarily target the water catchment areas of the Teluk Bahang Dam.

“These are critical operations that must be carried out before December 31 to refill the dam with as much rainwater as possible,” he said.

He said the Teluk Bahang Dam is an important component of the water supply system that serves about 38,000 consumers in the Teluk Bahang, Batu Ferringhi and Tanjung Bungah area.

He said the reason for the abnormally low effective capacity of the dam was due to low rainfall between September 1 in 2019 and September 18 this year.

“During this period, the total rainfall recorded in the dam’s water catchment areas was 4,545 mm which is 33.8 per cent lower than the average rainfall of 6,863mm for the three-year corresponding period in 2017, 2018 and 2019,” he said.

He blamed the lower rainfall on climate change and called on consumers in the supply areas of the dam to conserve water and use it wisely.