

## Penang advises other states to impose 30m buffer zone at rivers for water supply security

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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, Sept 8 — Penang water supply operator, Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP), has advised other states in the country to strictly impose a 30-metre buffer zone on both sides of strategic rivers to ensure water supply security for consumers.

PBAPP chief executive Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said strategic rivers, in which raw water is extracted for water supply needs, must be protected with this buffer zone to prevent pollution.

“We have recommended this 30-metre buffer zone since 2008 to protect the rivers where we extract water from,” he said.

The 30m buffer zone meant that all developments, including housing and factories, are not allowed within 30m from both sides of a strategic river.

Jaseni said the 30m buffer zone is applied along 14km of the Sungai Dua canal downstream from Sungai Muda, where PBAPP extracted water is channeled into its Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant.

“We also have 24/7 patrol by auxiliary policemen along the river so that people know we are looking after the river,” he said.

He said every state should do the same to declare rivers where they extract raw water as strategic rivers and enforce a 30m buffer zone on both sides of the rivers.

Jaseni said illegal factories found within the buffer zone of a strategic zone should be immediately demolished.

“Issuing compounds are not enough, the factories must be immediately demolished,” he said.

He said if there were legal factories, these factories should be relocated as soon as possible.

He referred to the water pollution case of Sungai Gong in Rawang involving an illegal factory.

“A notice was issued in 2014 but they did not do anything after that, they have all the laws to take appropriate action, there must be will power to do this as this involved water security,” he said.

He stressed that there were existing laws to protect the rivers and local authorities must strictly enforce these laws.

He said the main problem in Malaysia was the lack of respect for the rivers by the public.

“If we look overseas, they build housing fronting rivers as prime land but here, we build housing with the toilets facing the rivers, this shows the utter disrespect we have for our rivers,” he said.

He said there is also a river act where non-strategic rivers must have a buffer zone of 15 metre.

“This 15m buffer zone for other rivers are also not practiced and not enforced by relevant agencies,” he said.

He said the lack of a buffer zone along rivers, especially for strategic rivers, meant that there could be a repeat of the pollution issue like Sungai Gong.

“If they do not strictly enforce the buffer zone, every other month, we might get the same issue,” he said.