

PBAPP: Logging in Hulu Muda will endanger water supplies for three states

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GEORGE TOWN: The proposed reopening of logging concessions in Ulu Muda, Kedah, announced by Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor, is seen as leading to more deforestation activities in the most important water catchment area in the northern area in the future.

Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa (pix) said only 16% of the 160,000ha of rain forest in Ulu Muda were classified as water catchments and logging activities in the area would endanger water supplies for Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

“All three states are heavily dependent on ‘rainwater’ in the Ulu Muda rainforest. About 70% of Perlis’s raw water and 96% of Kedah’s raw water come from Ulu Muda. In Penang, PBAPP extracts more than 80% of its raw water daily from Sungai Muda and the catchment area for Sungai Muda is Ulu Muda,” he said in a statement yesterday.

He said if the plan to open logging concessions was to resume, it would not only undermine Ulu Muda’s role as a water catchment area but also impact on climatic changes and the capacity of the three dams in Kedah, namely, Muda, Beris and Pedu.

“There are three dams in Kedah, namely, the Muda Water System, which retains raw water from Ulu Muda where, on May 26, the capacity of the Muda, Beris and Pedu dams recorded 14.8%, 52.3% and 37.7%, respectively, compared to the capacity percentage average on the same date for 2018 and 2019 at 62.5%, 76.4% and 78.5% respectively,” he said.

According to Jaseni, the unusually low dam capacity reflected the effects of climatic changes in Kedah, possibly due to lower rainfall than normal in Ulu Muda during June 2019 to mid-April 2020.

He added that with the lack of rain and uncertainty following climatic changes, it would be illogical for the Kedah state government to agree and support deforestation that would undermine Ulu Muda’s role as the most important water catchment area in northern Malaysia.

“The Kedah state government’s proposal to reopen logging concessions or allow logging companies to harvest ‘forest produce’ in Ulu Muda should be stopped because the risks are too high and the consequences may be quite severe,” he said.

On May 27, Muhammad Sanusi said the Kedah state government was mulling opening timber concessions to avoid lawsuit by the logging companies to the tune of RM1.5 billion.

He said, through the proposal, the Kedah government would consider other logging areas outside the catchment area by taking into account suitable measures that were in line with the law and standard operating procedures (SOP) and did not adversely affect the environment such as from erosion and deforestation. — Bernama