

Stop Ulu Muda logging: Penang water authority

Proposed mining area equals Penang's land mass and would disrupt water supply to Perlis, Kedah and Penang, says PBAPP chief

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Penang's water authority is calling for all logging near the Ulu Muda Forestry Area to stop, for fears it will disrupt water supply to northern states. – MESYM.com pic, January 1, 2020

GEORGE TOWN – The Penang's water authority Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) wants all forms of logging near the Ulu Muda Forestry Area to be stopped immediately as it will diminish its role as a prime water catchment area for states in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia.

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said if Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammed Sanusi Md Nor allows 25,000ha of Ulu Muda's rainforests to be logged, the cleared land size would be almost equivalent to that of Penang island.

"The land size of 25,000ha account 15.3% of Ulu Muda's total land area of 163,000ha and is equivalent to 250 sq km.

"As a comparison, the land area of Penang Island is 293 sq km. The loss of the 25,000ha rainforest, which is almost the size of Penang island, will diminish Ulu Muda's role as a water catchment area," Jaseni said in a statement yesterday.

He said at present, about 70% of Perlis' raw water and 96% of Kedah's raw water originate from Ulu Muda.

PBAPP sources more than 80% of the daily raw water that Penang needs from Sg Muda.

Since Ulu Muda is the water catchment area for Sg Muda and the Muda Dam in Kedah, cutting down 25,000ha of rainforests may cause Sg Muda and the Muda Dam to “dry up” during prolonged dry seasons.

If there is insufficient water from Ulu Muda, there will be a regional water crisis affecting Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

A total of 4.2 million people will suffer, thousands of businesses will grind to a standstill and the gross domestic production contributions of the three states, which amounted to RM147.8 billion in 2019, will drop.

Since irrigation activities will also be affected, Kedah may no longer serve as the “Rice Bowl of Malaysia”.

This “nightmare scenario” is the outcome of the Kedah menteri besar’s proposals to log rainforests and clear land for the subsequent mining of minerals, including rare-earth elements (REE).

Only the federal government can stop him from creating an environmental and socioeconomic disaster of epic proportions in the northern corridor economic region (NCER).

Penang's state government and PBAPP have publicly expressed support for Kedah to seek federal funding and compensation to conserve Ulu Muda and not go ahead with the mining project.

Kedah had gazetted only 51,046ha of rainforests in Ulu Muda and its surrounding areas as “water catchment forests”.

Cutting down huge swathes of rainforests will result in less rainfall in Ulu Muda, and subsequently, less raw water availability in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

Ulu Muda is the largest and most important water catchment area in the NCER and logging may lead to Sg Muda and the Muda Dam drying up during severe dry seasons. – The Vibes, January 1, 2020