

Penang gives Muda River Basin Authority establishment the nod

MRBA's role should not be limited to just Muda River Basin, but also Ulu Muda as raw water source for NCER, says PBAPP

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PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa says Penang's proposal aims to protect the Northern Corridor Economic Region's water catchment whilst the Muda River Basin Authority is limited to only protecting the Southern Kedah river basins. – Twitter pic, May 3, 2021

GEORGE TOWN – The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) said it supports the establishment of the Muda River Basin Authority (MRBA) as proposed by the Environment and Water Ministry.

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said they had proposed the same in March last year through the establishment of a Ulu Muda Basin Authority (Umba).

It was to draft and implement a Ulu Muda Basin Plan for the benefit of 4.2 million people living in Perlis, Kedah, and Penang.

“Conceptually, the difference between Penang’s proposed Umba and the ministry’s suggested MRBA is that Penang’s proposal safeguards the water catchments of the Muda, Pedu and Ahning Dams.

“The ministry’s proposal is limited to safeguarding the Sg Muda basin.

“In this way, Penang’s proposal aims to protect the Northern Corridor Economic Region’s (NCER) water catchment whilst the MRBA is limited to only protecting the Southern Kedah river basins,” he said in a statement today.

Jaseni said the water that flows through Sg Muda is actually rainwater that is “collected” in the rainforests of Ulu Muda and the tributaries of the Sg Muda Basin after the Muda Dam.

As such, he said, Ulu Muda must be protected and conserved “legally, totally, and sustainably” as the most important raw water resource in the NCER.

“Ulu Muda is the source of raw water for the Muda, Pedu and Ahning dams.

“As such, the ministry should implement measures to protect and conserve Ulu Muda even before setting up the MRBA.”

In this regard, Jaseni said, PBAPP reiterated the three recommendations that needs to be undertaken by the ministry and the federal government, namely banning all logging activities in Ulu Muda, and preventing any potential mining activities from being carried out in Ulu Muda, especially exploratory REE mining.

For the last proposal, PBAPP said it hopes the federal government can provide compensation to Kedah after 163,000 hectares of rainforest areas are gazetted, protected and categorised as untouchable water catchment forests under the National Forestry Act 1984.

“Penang supports the payment of federal compensation for Kedah if Kedah is fully committed towards protecting and conserving Ulu Muda as a NCER raw water resource”.

In addition, Jaseni said, Penang and PBAPP are proposing to establish Uмба as a solution to the Penang-Kedah raw water dispute.

“However, the ministry must look at the holistic picture and prioritise the proper protection and sustainable conservation of Ulu Muda now.

“It is arguably the most important component of the Sg Muda basin, and it is under threat.”

Last Friday, the ministry’s secretary-general Datuk Seri Zaini Ujang was reported to have said that the dispute between Kedah and Penang in Sg Muda is expected to be resolved with the setting up of MRBA.

He said MRBA would act as the body given all the rights and powers to manage Sg Muda and its catchment area. – The Vibes, May 3, 2021