

Groundwater extraction will be ‘catastrophic’, says Penang

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GEORGE TOWN: Penang said today that tapping into water from the ground was not feasible due to the risk of land sinking and the state’s general limited landmass.

Penang Water Supply Corporation CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said given the state’s dense population and high-rise buildings, the potential damage caused by groundwater extraction could be “catastrophic”.

He was replying to a government water institute which called the northern states to consider tapping groundwater, as rivers were being “extremely stressed” and would soon run out of water, with Sungai Muda being a prime example. The river supplies water to 80% of the Penang population.

Jaseni said that in Bangkok, the over exploitation of groundwater has caused the city to sink over the past 35 years, a similar effect also experienced on the island of Java, Indonesia and Venice, Italy.

He said that while Kelantan is reported to have the highest groundwater extraction in the country, a 2018 study by a New Zealand university showed the state had been subsiding at a maximum rate of 4.22mm a year. He said the research also revealed how the floods that threaten Kelantan on an annual basis may also be due to similar factors.

Jaseni said it was best that long-term plans include conserving water catchment forests, such as Ulu Muda, where Sungai Muda flows from in the eastern frontiers of Kedah.

He said a river basin authority should be set up so the states of Perlis, Kedah and Penang can protect and manage the water supply for the 4.2 million populace in the region.



To meet Penang's future demands, Jaseni said a water transfer project from Sungai Perak to a river south of Seberang Perai ought to be expedited. He said another option was a desalination plant in Penang.

“Groundwater withdrawal is not a viable or safe option for Penang. It makes more sense for Penang to focus on short and long-term solutions for the time being,” he said.

Last week, the National Water Research Institute said Sungai Muda was in extreme stress with the water fast running out. He said the next step in providing water security in the future was groundwater extraction.

The institute also recommended storage systems to trap stormwater from surface runoff, see [here](#).