

## ‘Set up independent body to protect Ulu Muda, water resources’

Putrajaya can use Murray-Darling Basin Authority in Australia as reference, says Penang Water Supply Corp

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*Sg Muda originates from Ulu Muda in Kedah, but Penang is taking the water from its side of the river, within its own borders. – MESYM.com pic, March 19, 2021*

GEORGE TOWN – Alarmed at the prospect of losing the northern region’s main water catchment area to deforestation, Penang’s water authority has made an urgent request for an independent body to oversee the protection of the Ulu Muda basin.

Penang Water Supply Corporation chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa today called on the federal government to empower the body to also ban and stop all logging, mining and other destructive activities in Ulu Muda.

His call comes in the wake of a fresh round of acrimonious exchanges between the Kedah and Penang leaderships over the former’s insistence for payment from the latter over its extraction of water from the stretch of Sg Muda, which runs between the two states.

Sg Muda originates from Ulu Muda in Kedah, but Penang is taking the water from its side of the river, within its own borders.

However, Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor is adamant in allowing logging and mining of rare earth close to the water catchment area, to which the Penang government has objected.

Jaseni in a statement today said an “Ulu Muda Basin Authority” should be set up to draft and implement an “Ulu Muda Basin Plan” that will benefit 4.2 million consumers in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

“Naturally, sustainable management requires the federal government to completely ban and stop all logging, mining (including for rare earth elements) activities, and any other destructive activity in Ulu Muda. “The proposed Ulu Muda Basin Authority should then be empowered to enforce such bans independently, without fear or favour, to protect public interests.”

Jaseni said the federal government should refer to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), which manages the Murray-Darling basin that straddles across five states in Australia.

He pointed out that MDBA looks into consumption, infrastructure development, groundwater management, environmental health, as well as water quality and trading, and compliance with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, enabling it to tackle climate change, while supporting healthy rivers and wise water usage, and securing water supplies.

“Similarly, the Malaysian government may commission a scientific and environment-friendly management plan that prioritises the protection and preservation of 163,000ha of rainforests in Ulu Muda for the good of the people, in terms of long-term water supply security.

“The top priority should be to manage Ulu Muda sustainably as the key Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) water catchment area for Perlis, Kedah and Penang in the foreseeable future.”

Jaseni said the independent body should be funded by the federal government and three NCER states, similar to the Australian government’s 45.4% contribution and the five states’ 38.5% contribution to MDBA’s revenue. Another 16.1% is derived from other revenue income.

“The same formula should be applied for the setting up of the proposed Ulu Muda Basin Authority to ensure fair and equitable management of Ulu Muda, leaving Perlis, Kedah and Penang to continue managing water supply services independently.”