

EIA shows Kulim airport mega project poses threat to water supply, says PBAPP

GEORGE TOWN: The proposed Kulim International Airport (KXP) project may put the water supply of Penang and southern Kedah at risk, says the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP).

Its CEO Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) report has revealed that it may contaminate Sungai Muda, Kedah, and thereby jeopardise water supply services.

"The EIA report states that the construction and operational phases of KXP and its aerotropolis (business, commercial and industrial park) may cause river blockages, water contamination and degradation of water quality.

"Based on the EIA, the major components of the KXP are the airport and airport city, the aerotropolis, an aerospace, logistics and manufacturing (SLAM) hub, and other development such as settlements, flood mitigation plans and roads.

"All the major components are projected to occupy an area of 3,982.51ha," he said in a statement on Monday (Aug 23).

Jaseni said KXP will be located alongside two sections of the riverbank of Sungai Muda, spanning a total of about 14km.

"Sungai Muda has served as the primary source of raw water for south Kedah and Penang since 1974.

"PBAPP abstracts more than 80% of the raw water that Penang needs daily from its Lahar Tiang Intake in Seberang Prai, about 6km downstream from the proposed KXP project site.

"The raw water abstracted at Lahar Tiang is treated at the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant in Seberang Prai.

"In 2020, more than 80% of the treated water in Penang was produced at this plant.

"A massive development project along the banks of Sungai Muda must not endanger or jeopardise the water supply services that support the well-being of 1.78 million people and thousands of businesses," he said.

He pointed out that the Penang government and PBAPP were neither consulted nor asked for feedback on the potential risks and negative impact of KXP, vis-a-vis water supply services in Penang.

"This is odd in light of the fact that the Department of Environment (DOE) did consult PBAPP regarding the EIA for a proposed green technology paper plant located along the banks of Sungai Muda.

“In an official reply to that consultation dated July 19, PBAPP stated that Penang and south Kedah would face a raw water threat with severe repercussions if Sungai Muda were to be contaminated by the operations of that proposed paper plant.

“If Sungai Muda is contaminated, PBAPP would have no choice but to stop abstracting water from Lahar Tiang Intake to protect public health.

“The 'fallout' would be that more than a million people in Penang would have no water supply.

“PBAPP stresses that any effluent discharged into Sungai Muda must comply not only with DOE standards but also with the Health Ministry’s water quality parameters for potable water supply,” he said.

Jaseni pointed out that an airport cannot be built in a location that places water supply services at high risk.

“It would be prudent to relocate this massive project to a 'safer place, away from the banks of Sungai Muda.

“PBAPP does not begrudge Kedah’s ambition to pursue a new international airport project that is expected to bring in an approximated RM3.8bil in private investments.

“However, PBAPP would like to highlight the paramount consideration that Sungai Muda is the primary raw water resource for Penang and southern Kedah and that any mishap would inevitably result in a water supply catastrophe.

“The proposed location of KXP is not ideal as its location presents direct and unnecessary water security risks,” he said.

Jaseni noted that the large-scale construction work on the project represented a short- to medium-term threat to the water supply.

“The long-term operations of the airport and aerotropolis, SLAM hub and other development components of KXP will represent a long-term threat to the sustainability of good water supply services in Penang and southern Kedah,” he said.