

As water spat heats up, Penang CM proposes Ulu Muda Basin authority

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Kedah says it plans to build 14 giant water tanks along Sungai Muda which Penang also uses for its raw water supply. (PBA pic)

PETALING JAYA: Penang chief minister Chow Kon Yeow has called on the federal government to set up a statutory body to manage and protect the Ulu Muda Basin, as its raw water spat with neighbouring Kedah heats up.

Chow proposed the establishment of the Ulu Muda Basin Authority (Umba) to look after the basin, especially its 163,000ha of rainforests that serve as the most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

“Umba’s role will be to manage the Ulu Muda Basin, including Sungai Muda, from NCER’s raw water security standpoint, to address and circumvent all the threats that may compromise its role as a critical NCER water basin,” he said in a statement today.

“After all, Ulu Muda’s well-being is directly related to the socio-economic well-being of 4.2 million people living in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.”



Chow said the authority's key role would be to draft and implement a scientific and sustainable Ulu Muda Basin Plan that is fair, equitable and acceptable to the federal government and three NCER states.

He said Penang contributed RM94.7 billion to the national gross domestic product and generated estimated tax earnings of RM10.5 billion for the federal government.

"These achievements would not have been possible without continuous water supply services, 24/7.

"We should remember that Penang is a 'raw water stressed state' because it has a small geographical footprint.

"Although Penangites continued to enjoy continuous good water supply in 2020, all our in-state raw water resources have already been optimised for conventional water treatment processes and we will need more water in the future," he said.

The water issue escalated recently with Kedah threatening to "slow down" water flow at Sungai Muda, which Penang uses to supply 80% of the state.

Kedah is proposing to build 14 water tanks along the river along with barrages that would slow down water flow on the end of the river that empties into Penang waters.

Chow said the Penang government and Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) were also pursuing two other urgent raw water initiatives, besides Umba, to mitigate the challenges of climate change, increasing water demand and water supply security.

They are the Sungai Perak Raw Water Transfer Scheme and the Penang Water Supply Initiative 2050.