

Take action to reduce Penang's water risks, Chow urges federal govt

By Audrey Dermawan - July 12, 2022 @ 3:31pm



GEORGE TOWN: The federal government must take urgent action to mitigate the risks of another water supply mishap involving Sungai Muda that will affect water supply services in Penang, Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said.

Chow, who is Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) and PBA Holdings Bhd chairman, said more than 80 per cent of the raw water that PBAPP abstracted daily came from Sungai Muda.

As such, he said, any mishap involving Sungai Muda would affect the water supply services of about 80 per cent of Penangites and Penang-based businesses.

He added that the "fallout" from the recent flash floods in Baling, Kedah, had proven that.

On July 6, floodwaters caused the turbidity of raw water from Sungai Muda to suddenly spike up to 3,000 nephelometric turbidity units (NTU).

The water turbidity was so high that it forced PBAPP to shut down the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP). The shutdown of Penang's largest and most important WTP affected water supply services here for six days.

"To minimise the risks of a recurrence, the Penang government and PBAPP are calling on the federal government to set up the Ulu Muda Basin Authority (UMBA) to conserve, manage and protect the Sungai Muda river basin as an NCER (Northern Corridor Economic Region) water asset. If the federal government is serious about developing the NCER properly, it should firstly focus on securing water resources. Water supply mishaps and issues are bad for business and will cause suffering for millions of people.

"Similarly, the federal government should also stop logging in Ulu Muda to reduce the risks of flash floods. Cutting down rainforests will compromise Ulu Muda's performance as the most important water catchment area in the NCER.

"The federal government should also prevent Kedah from implementing the Kulim airport project and rare earth elements mining proposals in the Sungai Muda river basin. The risks of water pollution, water contamination and river sedimentation are unacceptable. Moreover, the Kulim airport project proposes to dump millions of litres of sewage into a tributary of Sungai Muda daily.

"It is clear that mishaps in Kedah can cause widespread water supply issues in Penang because Sungai Muda is a shared raw water resource. This should be regarded as an urgent 'wake-up' call for the federal government to reduce or mitigate Penang's high water risks," he said today.

Alternatively, Chow also urged the federal government to expedite the completion of the Mengkuang Dam Expansion Project (MDEP).

He explained that the recovery of water production operations at the Sungai Dua WTP and the normalisation of water supply services in Penang were delayed because PBAPP could draw down only 300 minimal liquid discharge (MLD) from the Mengkuang Dam in an emergency scenario.

Phase 2B of the MDEP must be expedited to increase drawdown capacity to 600 MLD.

Chow said lastly, the federal government should implement the Sungai Perak Raw Water Transfer Scheme (SPRWTS).

"Sungai Muda has served as Penang's primary raw water resource since 1973. We need a second major raw water resource badly.

"The Penang government and PBAPP have been pursuing the implementation of the SPRWTS since 2011. Until today, the federal government insists that the state government must negotiate directly with the Perak government. We have attended multiple direct negotiating sessions to no avail.

"Meanwhile, excess water from Sungai Perak continues to flow wastefully into the Straits of Melaka every day.

"Today, 1.78 million Malaysians living in Penang are facing high water supply risks. Penang-based business that contributed at estimated RM92.6 billion to the national gross domestic product in 2020 are also at risk," he added.