

24 October 2023

Penang water authority: Mengkuang Dam not high-risk dam, drawdown capacity boosted next year



GEORGE TOWN, Oct 24 —The Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) in Penang is still serving its purpose as a strategic drought reserve and remains a useful emergency raw water resource for the state, said Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan.

He said there was nothing wrong with the EMD and that it was not one of the "high-risk dams" as reported in several news reports yesterday that quoted the National Water Services Commission (SPAN).

"PBAPP cannot comment on the other six dams mentioned in the news reports. However, we may point out that the EMD is definitely not a high-risk dam," he said in a statement issued here.

He said the EMD's current maximum drawdown capacity of 300 million litres per day (MLD) will also be increased to 600 MLD in 2024 under Phase 2B of the RM1.2 billion Mengkuang Dam Expansion Project (MDEP) by the Federal Government.

Phase 2B will involve laying a pipeline to upgrade the drawdown capacity to 600 MLD.

He said the current limited drawdown capacity of 300 MLD meant that EMD could not fully back up Sungai Muda as an emergency raw water resource for the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP).

"The Sungai Dua WTP needs about 1,100 MLD of raw water to produce sufficient treated water for 465,000 water consumers in its service area," he said.

He said the re-scheduled completion of Phase 2B of the MDEP in 2024 will boost the EMD's maximum drawdown capacity to 600 MLD.

"PBAPP is proposing to undertake a separate project to lay more pipelines to further ramp up the MDEP's maximum drawdown capacity to 1,000 MLD to reduce the risks of another major water supply disruption in Penang whenever another 'Sungai Muda Incident' occurs in the future," he said.

He also appealed to the federal government to complete Phase 2C of the MDEP which is to construct a new 440 MLD pumping station at Sungai Muda to enable efficient refilling of the EMD during wet seasons.

He also hoped the federal government would build a new barrage at Sungai Muda to support additional abstraction of raw water from the river during wet seasons to refill the EMD.

“These two missing components are also important because the EMD must be efficiently refilled with as much water as possible during every wet season to serve as a 'standby' raw water resource for the Sungai Dua WTP,” he said.

Pathmanathan said the EMD was handed back to the Penang state government in October 2020 after its maximum storage capacity was expanded from 22 billion litres to 86.4 billion litres.

“The EMD has more than proven its worth to Penang in 2022 and 2023 when its raw water reserves were drawn down during PBAPP’s emergency responses to three major unscheduled water supply interruptions arising from three mishaps in Kedah,” he said.

The three mishaps were the Baling flood waters incident in July 2022, the sudden drop in Sungai Muda river level in May this year and the Baling flood waters incident in September this year.

“Without the EMD, the impact of these incidents would have been worse for the majority of Penang water consumers,” he said.

He said only the three phases — 2B, 2C and a new Sungai Muda barrage — remained to be completed under the MDEP when the Penang state government took back control of the EMD.

“This has been proven to be the correct strategic decision,” he said.