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Penang water firm triggers action plan as dam levels fall due to very low rainfall



GEORGE TOWN, July 26 — About 7,400 consumers on the Penang island will experience water supply issues due to measures to mitigate the state's chronic low rainfall, the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) warned today.

PBAPP chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan said low rainfall in two water catchment areas (WCA) in both the northeast and southwest districts have reduced the water available from these traditional raw water resources.

The WCA of Penang Waterfall, in the northeast district, only recorded rainfall of 100.5mm in July while the WCA of Sungai Pinang Water Treatment Plant (WTP) is 54mm.

“As a result, treated water output from the Waterfall Water Treatment Plan has dropped by about 42.9 per cent from 14 million litres per day (MLD) to eight MLD,” he said in a statement issued today.

The treated water output from Sungai Pinang WTP, which is dependent on the Titi Kerawang intake, has also dropped by 33.33 per cent from 7.2 MLD to 4.8 MLD.

He said there will be a shortfall in water supplied to eight neighbourhoods: George Town, Air Itam, Lebuh raya Thean Teik, Tanjung Bungah, Balik Pulau, Pulau Betong and Bayan Lepas.

“Under normal circumstances, PBAPP will make up for this shortfall by diverting water from other WTPs to the affected areas,” he said.

“However, due to the 2024 El Nino phenomenon, PBAPP has to also manage the issues related to the low effective capacities of dams and the river level of Sungai Muda at the Lahar Tiang Intake in Seberang Perai,” he added.

The effective capacities of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam are at 42.3 per cent with 48mm rainfall recorded and 32.2 per cent with 39mm rainfall recorded respectively.

Pathmanathan said PBAPP is defending the reserves of the Air Itam Dam under its Air Itam Dam Action Plan 2024 and carefully managing water supply for Teluk Bahang, Batu Ferringhi, Tanjung Bungah and Tanjung Tokong.

“However, the river level at PBAPP's Lahar Tiang Intake has dipped below the two metre safe level for 15 consecutive days since July 11,” he said.

He said PBAPP is drawing down the reserves of the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) daily to supplement raw water abstraction from Sungai Muda.

As at July 25, the effective capacity of the EMD is still healthy at 88.4 per cent.

Due to these factors, he said PBAPP is implementing Phase One of its Crisis Management Plan to ensure water supply sufficiency until the beginning of wet season in September.

Among the actions to be taken include optimising water production at the Batu Ferringhi WTP and Guillemard WTP without overly compromising the effective capacity of the Teluk Bahang Dam.

This will allow PBAPP to deliver treated water to the service areas of the Waterfall and Sungai Pinang WTPs.

He said PBAPP will also step up production of treated water at the Air Itam WTP and reduce Air Itam's dependency on treated water from Sungai Dua which may be diverted to the peripheral service area of the Waterfall WTP.

“Water tankers and static water tanks will be deployed to the affected areas to provide water during high demand periods,” he said.

He said PBAPP will control valves and pumping operations to optimise the refilling of three key reservoirs at Bukit Dumbar, Bukit Gedung and Teluk Kumbar to sustain water supply in the southwest district of the island during peak hours when water demand is high in industrial areas.

He said they will also be leasing with Bagan Kawan Selia Air Penang daily to manage irrigation water abstractions from Sungai Muda and request for cloud seeding operations to be carried out by National Disaster Management Agency and Royal Malaysian Air Force.

“The present water supply scenario is causing some temporary water supply issues in Penang,” he said.

He said the implementation of the crisis management plan may result in some additional conveniences.

He apologised to consumers and hoped they would remain patient until the rains arrive in September.