

# Penang on water alert over 'worrying' status of Kedah dams

watercrisis

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Kedah's plan to seek federal assistance if water levels in the state reach critical levels has put Penang on an alert mode.

On Jan 15, Kedah local government and water resources committee chairperson Badrol Hisham Hashim said water levels in three main dams in the state were feared to be insufficient for padi cultivation in the coming season.

The Penang Water Authority (PWA) has expressed grave concerns over the status of Kedah dams.

PWA chief executive officer Jaseni Maidinsa described Badrol's remark as a "warning to highlight the seriousness of the problem to the federal authorities".

Jaseni said Penang's dams were currently at full capacity but the dams in Kedah were at "worrying" levels.

As at yesterday, the Air Itam and Teluk Bahang dams were running at full capacity of 98.1 percent and 100 percent, respectively.

Jaseni said this was a "rare occasion" and that Penang survived the long drought season last year - but may not this year if the Kedah dams fall to critically low levels.

“We are operating on an alert mode due to the status of the Beris and Muda dams in Kedah, which stood at 71.7 percent and 56 percent as at Jan 18,” Jaseni said at a press conference today.

Jaseni noted that early last year, the levels were above 80 percent, the mark considered “healthy”.

“We are worried with the status of these dams because these are the strategic drought reserves for Sungai Muda.

“More than 80 percent of Penang’s raw water is extracted from this river daily, and it is a raw water resource we share with Kedah,” he added.

Last year, Jaseni said, Perlis had to carry out water rationing to due to its water crisis, while Kedah and Penang had to halt irrigation activities, thereby affecting the agriculture sector. Situation calls for federal intervention.

However, in line with its “no water rationing policy”, Jaseni gave his assurance to Penang’s 575,747 registered water consumers that the state is on a strong footing to face the projected dry season this year.

Jaseni also called on the federal government to assist in “intensifying” cloud seeding activities to prevent a potential water crisis in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

He urged Kedah to manage its water releases prudently, saying “preventive action must be initiated now”.

“Don’t release too much water too soon and cause dams to run out of water before the rains arrive in April or May,” he advised the state.

Jaseni cited the potential crisis scenario that Kedah and Penang faced last year, when the capacities of the Beris and Muda dams fell to critical levels at 29.4 percent on May 7 last year, and 14.2 percent on Aug 2, respectively.

In May last year, Jaseni called for logging activities to be halted in Kedah as they threatened water supply for two million citizens.

Jaseni pledged support for urgent and timely federal action and intervention in Kedah, to avoid a water crisis that would affect more than four million people, and thousands of businesses in the northern region.