

Penang CM urges Putrajaya to gazette Ulu Muda, safeguard water security in north of peninsula

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By Opalyn Mok



Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow delivers his speech at the Water Security Conference in George Town April 25, 2019. — Picture by Steven KE Ooi

GEORGE TOWN, April 25 — Penang pressed the federal government today to gazette Ulu Muda as a water catchment area in order to protect it and water security for the northern states.

Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said Penang, Kedah and Perlis all rely heavily on Sungai Muda as a raw water source, making it vital to protect it from harm.

“It is important that the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry assist by gazetting Ulu Muda so that this water catchment is not destroyed,” he said in a press conference after launching a Water Security Conference today.

He said 85 per cent of Penang’s water supply came from Sungai Muda, which also supplies 96 per cent and 50 per cent of raw water to Kedah and Perlis, respectively.

Chow said Kedah is prepared for Ulu Muda to be gazetted but noted that this would cause the state to lose its logging revenue.

“The federal government is now looking at compensating the state for the loss in revenue so we hope the federal government will gazette Ulu Muda as soon as possible,” he said.

He said logging activities at the water catchment area will destroy the water source and put all three northern states in jeopardy.

In a press statement later, Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) urged both Kedah and the federal government to act swiftly to guarantee the safety of the Ulu Muda water catchment area. "Legislation, enforcement and compensation are needed to keep Ulu Muda safe," said PBAPP CEO Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa.

He said strict laws must be passed to protect Ulu Muda and enforced rigorously.

He proposed that to ensure the protection of the site is sustainable, some form of federal compensation must be paid to Kedah to keep Ulu Muda free from loggers.

He said the Kedah government and Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry's announcement that logging was banned in Ulu Muda last year did not provide real protection to the site.

He then referred to a recent exposé by *The Star* on logging activities near the Ahning Dam in Bukit Keramat, Kedah.

"This reflects uncertainty on how logging is 'licensed' in Kedah's water catchment areas," he said. According to the news report, the former Kedah state government had approved the logging of 140,000 hectares of forest reserve land on August 1 in 2017.

The logging of 70,000 hectares was carried out and another 70,000 hectares are in the process of being logged.

Jaseni called on the federal and Kedah governments to investigate how much forest reserve land, including water catchment areas, was approved for logging by the former state government.

"Are these approvals still valid with the change in state government? Is the Kedah Forestry Department issuing more permits for logging 'independently'?" he asked.

He asked if the ban on logging in Ulu Muda covered all 163,103 hectares of the greater Ulu Muda Forest Complex and which department is enforcing the ban since the announcement was made last September.

He said the logging activities in Bukit Keramat are a clear warning of how things can go wrong due to "administrative and legislative oversight".

"Such a mishap must not ever happen in Ulu Muda," he said.

He reminded the government that if Ulu Muda rainforests were stripped bare, the damage will not only be environmental but that millions of people in Perlis, Kedah and Penang will face an unprecedented large-scale water crisis.

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