

## Penalty forces Penangites to stop wasting water

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*AFP pic.*

GEORGE TOWN: A penalty imposed on those who waste water has proven effective, said the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBA) today.

PBA CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said Penang residents had the reputation of being the highest water users — at 276 litres per capita per day (lpcd) compared with the national average of 201 lpcd .

As such, the reduction in water use was welcome, he added.

Jaseni said according to statistics, Penang's water use dropped from 291 lpcd in 2010 to 285 lpcd the following year, after the water conservation surcharge (WCS) of 24 sen was imposed.

The WCS is applied to those who use more than 35,000 litres of water per month. The 24 sen surcharge is applied to every 1,000 litres used after hitting the 35,000-litre mark.

Jaseni said after the WCS was raised to 48 sen in 2013, water use dropped from 295 lpcd to 276 lpcd in 2017.

He said if the WCS had not been in place, Penang's water use would have most likely soared as high as 319 lpcd in 2017.

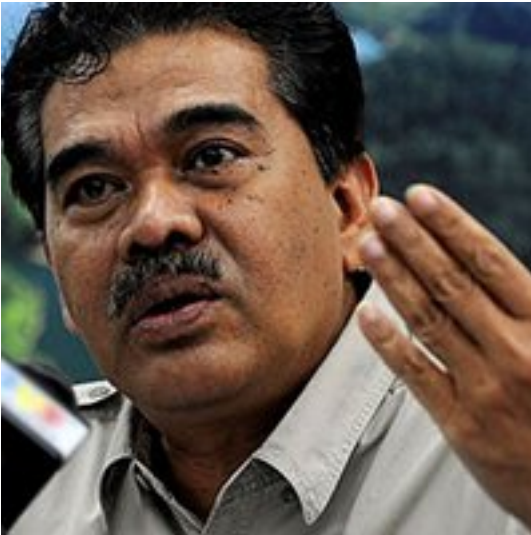
Jaseni said it had imposed the WCS after federal ministers in charge of water matters kept insisting that Penang raise its tariffs to reduce water consumption.

"We are not proud to be the highest in using water. Previous ministers and even the present minister have told us to bring down the numbers.

"The explanation is simple. With more water saved, we will be able to supply water to newer consumers in the future," he said.

Currently, PBA has slightly over 600,000 accounts, with water reserve margins at 35%, which is the highest in the country.

Only 23% of the accounts are affected by the WCS.



Jaseni said the hardcore poor in the state were given 60,000 litres of free water in a two-month cycle. He said families of eight or more were given 60% off the WCS.

"If Singaporeans can live on 148 lpcd in an urban setting like Penang, then why not us?"

"Penang is a water-stressed state. In the age of climate change, we must cut the risks of water rationing and save water as resources are limited."

Currently, Penang uses 276 lpcd, compared with the national average of 201 lpcd. It has also the cheapest water rates in the country.

Previously, the state government announced that it would likely raise water rates by between 10% and 20%, subject to National Water Services Commission approval. It decided to do so at the urging of the federal government.

At the same event, Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow today said Penang had raised domestic or household water rates only once between 2008 and 2018, not four times as alleged by critics, including former prime minister Najib Razak.

He said the domestic water tariff was adjusted just once in 2015, and the trade or business water tariffs were adjusted twice, once in 2010 and another in 2015.

Chow said it was wrong to assume the WCS was a form of water rate increase.

"Unlike a domestic tariff review, the WCS is avoidable. Just use less than 35,000 litres a month."

On Jan 9, Najib said the planned water rates increase in Penang would be "the fourth hike" since Pakatan took over the state administration in 2008.

Meanwhile, Bernama quotes Water, Land Natural Resources Minister A Xavier Jayakumar as saying that most states are expected to raise water rates.

"Most states have agreed. There are one or two states that do not agree, but we will discuss with them.

"However, I can give the assurance that it will not burden the people, and it will be of benefit for the people as there will be clean water to drink," he said.

Asked if the increase would be 20%, like what Penang is considering, he said: "We'll see how. There is still time for us to discuss the tariff rate. 20% is too high. We can reduce it a little bit."

Meanwhile, Xavier said the integrated or single billing system for water supply and sewage services in Labuan had proven successful with collection increased to 93%, from 40%, since it was introduced in 2016.

He believed that if the system could be introduced nationwide, Indah Water Konsortium (IWK) would be able to cover its operational cost, hence enabling the government to reduce its subsidy of RM150 million a year.