

No sign of Penang domestic water being misused for business

Predeep Nambiar | April 27, 2017

Penang worried as Sungai Muda may only be able to meet the island's raw water needs until 2020 and Penang's water consumption remains highest in country.



GEORGE TOWN: Penang's main water wasters are indeed home users, not traders using domestic accounts to operate businesses as earlier suspected, the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBA) said today.

PBA chief executive officer Jaseni Maidinsa said checks showed that 25% of 504,400 domestic accounts are heavy water users and they are actually using the supply for home use.

He said overall, home users used 59.4% of treated water in Penang, beating factories, hotels and businesses combined.

"We only have one primary raw water resource: Sungai Muda. This is shared with Kedah.

"Based on our high water consumption trend, it has been projected that Sungai Muda may only meet our raw water needs until 2020," he said at a press conference at Komtar today.

Jaseni said the Mengkuang Dam near Bukit Mertajam, which is currently under construction, would be completed by year's end and will be commissioned in two years. The dam would take two years to fill, he said.

Penang's water prices are the lowest in the country, at 32 sen per litre for the first 35,000 litres monthly. The national average is 70 sen per litre.

Jaseni said a Water Conservation Surcharge of 48 sen was currently imposed on every 1,000 litres used after consumption hits 35,000 litres.

Citing a letter from Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Maximus Johnity Ongkili, dated Sept 18, 2013, he said the surcharge was imposed after the federal government had urged Penang to reduce its water use.

"Maximus had asked us to implement a 'demand management strategy' to reduce the very high domestic per capita consumption to 250 l/c/d (litres/capita/day) for urban areas and 240 l/c/d for rural areas.



“His letter was our key rationale in implementing the Water Conservation Surcharge of 48 sen then.”

PBA chairman Lim Guan Eng recently proposed that the 48 sen surcharge be increased to RM1, pending approval from the National Water Services Commission.

Lim said water tariffs would otherwise remain the same, and that the proposal would only affect water wasters, that is those using 35,000 litres a month or more.

Discounts, free water for large families

Jaseni said ever since the surcharge was introduced in 2014, large families consisting of eight members or more have enjoyed 60% rebates and even free water.

He added that 985 families have been given these rebates since 2014.

Meanwhile, low-income families earning below RM790 a month have been given the first 30,000 litres used monthly for free. Jaseni said this was a move under the Projek Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin.

Jaseni said PBA has also been giving interest-free loans of RM1,500 for poor families to install water supply pipes in their homes.

He said those who need such help could apply through the state welfare office or district offices.

Similarly, clubs, societies, associations, welfare homes, NGOs, homes for the aged, disabled centres, hospitals, hostels, orphanages, schools, government and private institutions of higher learning were all exempted from the surcharge, he said.

Jaseni said PBA had spent RM91 million last year for domestic water subsidies, which was not sustainable as the money could be used for important water infrastructure projects.

“If we do not save water now, we will have to spend more in subsidies, which is untenable,” he said.

Penangites used the highest volume of water at 286 l/c/d last year, compared with the national average of 209 l/c/d. Comparatively, Singaporeans recorded 152 l/c/d in the same year. The United Nations’ recommendation is 148 l/c/d.