

Malaysia

Ulu Muda water catchment area shrinking, claims Penang

BY OPALYN MOK
OCTOBER 26, 2017



PBAPP chief executive officer Jaseni Maidinsa said the Ulu Muda water catchment areas must be saved.

GEORGE TOWN, Oct 26 — The Ulu Muda water catchment area in Kedah is shrinking and giving way to timber production, claimed Penang Water Supply Corporation Chief Executive Officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa.

He said the Ulu Muda water catchment area has shrunk by 87.3 per cent from 98,400ha in 1969 to 12,484ha in 2017.

Jaseni said the water catchment area was first specified to be 98,400ha back in 1969 when the Muda Dam was built.

“In 2008, the Kedah Forestry Department report stated the gazetted water catchment for this dam was 22,611ha while 78,052ha of forest lands were allocated for timber production,” he said in a press conference in Komtar today.

He said the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, in August 2017, stated only 12,484ha of the 106,418ha Ulu Muda Forest Reserve were gazetted as forest water catchments.

“This meant the water catchment area has been reduced to only 12,484ha while more and more areas in Ulu Muda have been opened to logging activities, including forest lands that may have been originally identified as water catchment areas when the Muda Dam was built,” he said.

He called on the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to prevent more logging and deforestation at the Ulu Muda Water Catchment area.

“They must act now, otherwise, they will be regarded as an accomplice to the destruction of the Ulu Muda forests that serve as an important water catchment for Perlis, Kedah and Penang,” he said.

He said Putrajaya must step in to intervene before it is too late.

“Hydrologists, engineers and experts must be appointed to ascertain the impact of logging in the water catchment areas of Ulu Muda,” he said.

He suggested that the federal government compensate Kedah for gazetted and conserving Ulu Muda as the most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

“If this is not done, logging will continue to threaten water supply in Perlis, Kedah and Penang which will affect 4.09 million consumers and the economy of NCER is also at risk,” he warned.

He said the Muda Dam was built to release raw water into Sungai Muda for abstraction by Kedah and Penang during dry seasons when river levels are low.

“Raw water from the dam is also pumped via the Salong water transfer tunnel for treatment and supply to Perlis and Langkawi,” he said.

Jaseni said the maximum capacity of the Muda Dam is 160 billion litres which is 8.3 times more than the maximum capacity of the Teluk Bahang Dam (19.24 billion litres) and 61.3 times more than that of the Air Itam Dam in Penang (2.61 billion litres).

“Logging in Muda Dam’s water catchment areas in Ulu Muda will adversely affect the dam’s performance as a strategic drought reserve for three states.

“When logging affects the Muda Dam’s ability to store sufficient raw water, three states will face a catastrophic water crisis in the next dry season,” he warned.

He said the dangerous trend of converting water catchment areas into logging areas must be stopped to prevent adverse effects on the Muda Dam.