Water in Sungai Muda river being tested after e-waste scare

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An aerial view of the former sand mining pool filled with plastic waste, next to Sungai Muda. (PTAS pic)

GEORGE TOWN: A Penang water supply company is taking samples of water from Sungai Muda to test it for contamination following the discovery of a second dumpsite along the river that irrigates thousands of padi fields and water for millions in Penang and Kedah.

This was after a second illegal dumping ground was spotted on the banks of Sungai Muda and there were concerns that heavy metals could have leaked into the river.

In a statement, Penang Water Supply Corporation CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said if the results confirmed the river had been polluted, then it would be forced to stop taking water from the river to be treated. He said this would lead to a water shortage for Penangites as the state's dams were dwindling rapidly due to a prolonged drought.

Penang relies on Sungai Muda for most of its water needs, but due to the drought, the river's levels have dropped from 2m to 1.4m two weeks ago. Jaseni said National Water Services Commission's (SPAN) chairman Charles Santiago's call for a 30m buffer zone at all river banks was a good start to protect Sungai Muda.

Jaseni also said regular patrols, periodic drone surveillance, and posting of warning signs at all river banks on illegal dumping should be stepped up.

He said all landowners near river banks ought to be educated and enforcement should be strict and unwavering. "We agree with SPAN that the protection of Sungai Muda must be seriously regarded as a public health and water supply security issue.

"The discovery of a second illegal waste dumpsite along the banks of Sungai Muda should serve as a warning for the relevant authorities to take action now," he said.

PBA was responding to FMT's report on a disused sand mining pool buried with 30ft of electronic waste at Kampung Belida, Kuala Ketil, on the upstream of Sungai Muda. Authorities have now sealed the site.