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Penang urged to raise water tariffs to reduce wastage

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The state government should raise the water tariffs to promote prudent use of water and reduce wastage. (NSTP Archive)

By [BALVIN KAUR](#) - March 4, 2019 @ 4:04pm

GEORGE TOWN: The state government should raise the water tariffs to promote prudent use of water and reduce wastage.

Water Watch Penang president Prof Dr Chan Ngai Weng said this would help to address the issue of water shortage, which occur during hot and dry spells.

He said the current tariffs, which were heavily subsidised by the state government, were too low.

Chan said the recent move by the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) to seek the approval of the Federal Government for a water tariff review, was justified and fair.

“This increase will allow PBAPP to undertake important but expensive water supply projects costing RM501 million to ensure uninterrupted water supply for Penangites from 2019 to 2021,” he told the New Straits Times.

Chan was responding to reports of an extended drought in Penang, which had caused the water level at one of the state’s dams to fall below capacity.

The Universiti Sains Malaysia professor of water resources, hydrology and flood hazard management, and climatology said those who used water efficiently should be rewarded, while water wasters should be penalised by imposing surcharges.

Between Jan 1 and Feb 18, the water level at the Air Itam dam plunged from 92.2 per cent to 67.3 per cent, with PBAPP saying it was further compounded by the Chinese New Year festivities.

On Sunday, the water level at the dam stood at 63 per cent, while that of the Teluk Bahang Dam was at 76.5 per cent.

Today, the water level at the Air Itam dam dropped to 61.5 per cent while the Teluk Bahang Dam dropped to 75.8 per cent.

The other major dam in the state, the Mengkuang Dam near Bukit Mertajam, is not fully operational yet, after being completed in 2017. There are multiple defects at the dam and they are being rectified by the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry, the project’s original proponents.

Recently, Chief Minister and PBAPP chairman Chow Kon Yeow was reported as saying that it was planning to invest half a billion ringgit in water supply projects up to 2021.

The projects include a third twin-underwater link from Seberang Prai to the island, a water transfer scheme from Perak, and upgrades to water treatment plants.

Currently, the state has the cheapest water bills at an average of RM5.55 a month.

Chan said under PBAPP’s water tariffs proposal, the corporation would continue to subsidise low-income water users, especially those using less than 35,000 litres of domestic water.

“The only difference is that the amount of the subsidy will be less,” he said.

“More importantly, the poor will not be victimised.

“As such, PBAPP is not burdening the hardcore poor and lower-income households. For a household which currently pays RM10 to RM20 per month, the increase is only RM1 to RM4,” he said.

Chan said it was also important for the government to ensure that the Sungai Muda river was protected, as it was supplying more than 80 per cent of the state’s water needs.

“Sungai Muda’s flow, volume and quality is important for Penang and even Kedah. So, there should be a concentrated effort towards protecting the river,” he said, adding that the government should also expedite remedial works at the Mengkuang Dam, which is used as a backup source of water during drought emergencies.

“While the Mengkuang Dam will not reduce our reliance on Sungai Muda river, it is still very important when the Sungai Muda is running low and the Air Itam and Teluk Bahang dams fall to critical levels,” he said.

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