



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Press Statement

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A Commission of Inquiry needed to address river pollution

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls upon the government to set up a Commission of Inquiry to study the root causes of river pollution, including catchment areas, in the country. It must come out with recommendations that would put an end to the perennial problem of river pollution.

Among the issues the Commission must look into are:

- If there is an adequate body of laws to protect the rivers and their sources.
- If there is effective law enforcement.
- Identify and rectify the underlying problems associated with state/federal relationship on river management.
- Look into governance issues such as whether there should only be one agency in charge of managing rivers with power to enforce the law.
- Corrupt practices in the public and private sectors which enables the dumping of waste into rivers and water bodies.

We urge the government to avoid ad hoc measures as they have not been effective in addressing the festering problem. A holistic solution is needed because whenever a crisis occurs, all sorts of promises are made to deal with the problem but nothing substantial or effective happens.

The situation is serious because, according to the Malaysian Environmental Quality Report 2017, only 219 (46 per cent) of the 477 supervised rivers are categorised as 'clean'; 207 (43 per cent), 'slightly polluted'; and 51 (11 per cent), 'polluted'. However, it was reported in 2019 that Malaysia has 25 'dead' rivers. Of these 'dead' rivers, 16 were in Johor, five in Selangor, three in Penang, and one in Malacca.

Discharge of waste from industries, workshops, residential areas, animal husbandry and agriculture farms is the major contributor to river pollution. Until September 2019, parts of Selangor suffered four unscheduled water cuts as a result of Sungai Selangor pollution. Again this year, there was water cut in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor for four days affecting 5 million people due to river pollution caused by a factory.

The government must revamp the entire system to eliminate any legal loopholes. For example, the Department of Environment (DOE) has power only to summon polluters under the Environmental Quality Act (EQA) 1974. Thus, DOE is unable to take action against illegal or unlicensed factories, wet markets, food stalls and squatters.

There should be a single agency to enforce the law for the protection of rivers and catchment areas with power to imprison violators and close down the source of the pollution, including factories.

The pollution of Sungai Selangor must be investigated thoroughly, and effective measures must be taken to ensure such incidents do not happen in the future. It should also be used as a case to emphasise the importance of our water sources.

We are puzzled how the factory has been operating since 2014 without a license and yet the authorities took no action to close it down. It is a repeat offender, previously caught and compounded RM60,000 by DOE for releasing contaminants into Sungai Gong in March 2020. Why did the Selangor Municipal Council not demolish the unlicensed factory instead of giving the operator three days to submit a plan for approval. The dereliction of duty by the public office involved must be investigated and made accountable.

The state government should not legalise illegal factories through its so-called legalising process. This would only encourage the building of factories in contravention of the laws.

The owners of the factory should be blacklisted and should not be allowed to apply for an operating license and the factory be demolished. We would remind the Selangor State Government that it had declared in 2016 that factories would not be allowed to operate along the main rivers in Selangor to prevent contamination. In fact, no human polluting activities should be permitted as they will result in contaminating water sources. We also urge the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to investigate whether there was corruption involved in allowing 2,978 illegal factories in Selangor in 2016 to function.

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