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For Environmental Justice

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Press Statement

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SAM Supports Call for Protection of Ulu Muda Forest

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) supports the call by Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) for an immediate ban of logging in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve and to gazette the forest reserve as a water catchment area.

It was reported recently that the Kedah Forestry Department had issued a stop-work order to a company conducting logging activities in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve in Sik after it was found to have breached conditions of its logging licence. Lately signboards indicating licence to take forest produce from several compartments in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve have also been encountered.

The Greater Ulu Muda area consists of several forest reserves, the biggest of which is the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve. The Greater Ulu Muda forests play an important role as a water catchment area for the Ahning, Pedu and Muda dams which supply drinking water to Kedah (including Langkawi), Penang and Perlis.

As much as 96% of Kedah's, 80% of Penang's and 50% of Perlis's water supplies originate from the Ulu Muda forest. The Muda irrigation scheme in Kedah, which accounts for about 40% of total rice production in Malaysia, also relies greatly on water sourced from the Ulu Muda forests.

Unfortunately the importance of the Greater Ulu Muda as a water catchment is neglected by the State by continuing to allow logging in this area. Furthermore not the entire Ulu Muda Forest Reserve is classified as a water catchment area. Several of the forest reserves here have been gazetted as Permanent Reserved Forests (PRFs) for both production and protection purposes.

By allowing logging in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve, its role as water catchment is adversely affected and jeopardizing water security because without the water storing and filtering functions of natural forests, rainfall will be significantly reduced and rainfall will not be captured and stored.

The drought in the northern states in 2016 had caused a drastic drop in the water levels of the Pedu and Muda dams. PBAPP's media statement of 8 March 2017 revealed that the storage capacity of Muda Dam was 60.3% on 1 January 2017 and it had dropped to 27.3% on 7 March 2017. It is evident that deforestation had led to this water deficit.

Given the above, all logging and quarrying activities in the Greater Ulu Muda area must be stopped immediately. There should be no more issuance of logging concessions in the Ulu Muda forests. The Federal government should deliver on its promise to compensate the Kedah State Government for not logging the Ulu Muda forests.

Considering the importance of the forest reserves as water catchments, we call on the Kedah State Government to immediately gazette the entire Ulu Muda Forest Reserve and the surrounding forest reserves as water catchment forests under the National Forestry Act 1984 as they provide water to the Pedu, Muda and Ahning dams.

Water is Life. Save our Forests.

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