



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP Appeals to the Prime Minister to Cancel Penang South Reclamation Project

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) appeals to the Prime Minister (PM) of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and the Unity Government to take steps to cancel the wasteful Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project which will cause irreversible damage to the environment and the fishing community.

CAP welcomes the PM's recent statement that he had concerns about the PSR project and that he is prepared to look into the objections to it [*NST*, April 28, 2023].

The PSR project will have a devastating impact on the environment, food security, climate, the fishing community, and the demography of Penang island. This contradicts the MADANI policy framework, one of the pillars of which is to promote sustainable development.

Initially, the DAP-led Penang state government justified the mega reclamation project to finance the Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP) since the then Federal Government controlled by Barisan Nasional was not supporting it. The situation has now radically changed whereby we understand that the Unity Government is prepared to provide the funds required to finance improvements to the existing transport system to overcome traffic congestion.

We are curious as to why the Penang state government is adamantly insisting on proceeding with the reclamation project despite its adverse ecological and social impacts.

Faced with strong criticism of the reclamation project, the state government is now justifying the project by claiming that Penang needs more land for development and creating jobs. This claim is baseless and contradicted by the reality on the ground. Just across the second bridge in Batu Kawan, over 3,000 acres of land is available for economic growth. It has all the amenities and is close and well connected to the Butterworth Port and Bayan Lepas International Airport. The Chief Minister himself had admitted recently that over 12,000 hectares of land in Seberang Perai can be used for development. Also, several industrial estates in Penang are under-utilized. The state should focus on attracting investments there instead of pouring money into the sea for a problematic project.

The mega reclamation will exacerbate the climate crisis. Implementing the project would need 4,500 acres of the sea, an important carbon sink, to be covered with sand and soil. Additionally, it will produce 3.2 million tons of carbon emissions per year, in violation of Malaysia's commitment under the Paris Agreement. Malaysia had undertaken to cut carbon intensity against GDP by 45% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. What is so pressing a need that we are prepared to breach an international treaty? Does it benefit the people? Certainly not.

In addition, the total amount of sand needed for the project would be 190 million cubic meters, to be sourced from Penang and Perak waters. This is equivalent to volumes of sand that can fill up 75,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools, further damaging areas from where the sand is mined!

We stress that the project will result in the destruction of an important fishery in Penang which provides income for over 3,000 people and their families, and food – fish, prawns, crabs and other marine life – for the consumers.

In fact, in a letter on June 25, 2019, the Department of Environment director-general advised the Penang state government that the Penang South Reclamation will “cause permanent and residual impacts on mudflat ecosystems, fishing grounds, turtle landing areas, and some coral reefs in Pulau Rimau... This permanent destruction will have a significant negative impact on fisheries resources, fisheries and the security of national food supply”. Despite this warning, the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report for the reclamation project was approved. That speaks volumes for the independence and objectivity of the EIA process.

The 3-island project, if successfully implemented, would also bring about a major demographic change, with the local fishing community and those in the B40 segment being displaced to seek shelter in other places. Their places will be taken over by the local rich and wealthy foreigners from China, Hong Kong and the West. Is favouring both the local and foreign wealthy elite in line with the MADANI principles?

For all the above reasons, CAP appeals to the PM and the Unity Government not to support the PSR project, and supply funds and guarantees. The estimated RM16 billion reclamation cost can be better used to improve the living standards of the poor and marginalized, provide better healthcare and education, and improve traffic mobility.

Politics and cronyism should not be allowed to trump the interests and welfare of our people, social justice and the environment.

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