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River restoration rising in Penang

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PENANG

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Strict monitoring improves Sungai Pinang by over 50% as waterways recover from severe pollution

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ONCE infamous for having some of the most polluted waterways in the country, Penang continues to enforce stringent measures to restore its rivers.

State housing and environment committee chairman Datuk Seri Sundarajoo Somu said Penang rivers had since improved and pollution levels were now moderate.

“Despite Penang being included in the list of six states with polluted waterways, rivers in Penang are now well-monitored and are under control.

“During the Covid-19 pandemic, activities were restricted, leading to a temporary decrease in river pollution levels,” he said.

“With life returning to normal, the state government is committed to maintaining river quality.”

In 2000, the Environment Department (DOE) found Sungai Pinang to be a “Class 5” river, going by measurements used in the DOE’s Water Quality Index (WQI).

The department has five classifications of river cleanliness levels, with the cleanest rivers scoring above 92.7 out of 100 to be in Class 1.

In contrast, a Class 5 river is so polluted that it is not suitable for water supply or even irrigation.

By 2016, well-funded clean-up efforts and regulation enforcements resulted in Sungai Pinang’s condition improving by over 50% to become a Class 2 waterway.

This achievement was in spite of certain segments of society having expressed frustration with the remedial actions.

In June, Energy Transition and Water Transformation (Petra) Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof said Penang was among six states with polluted rivers.

He had said this after chairing the first meeting of the Special Committee to counter water quality deterioration.

Penang government is continuing efforts to address river pollution through clean-ups and enforcement. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/ The Star



The committee was set up following last year’s 5th National Water Council Meeting in which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said government efforts to strengthen water management nationwide would continue.

Among Penang rivers listed as polluted were Sungai Jawi on the mainland and Sungai Pinang on the island.

Sundarajoo said pollution sources must first be identified

in river clean-up efforts.

Most of the discharge into these rivers came from agriculture, including livestock farms, he said.

“I have spoken to the state Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) about its plans to improve river water quality as a preventive measure.

“We are conducting a trial where farm waste is used to produce gas that is a form of renewable energy.

go the same preventive measures.

Sundarajoo said Penang government, through the DID, had applied for Federal Government funds to improve the quality of Penang’s watercourses.

The state, he highlighted, was also working with the DOE to monitor its rivers.

Meanwhile, the Kedah government is also doing all it can to address river pollution.

This is especially after two of its waterways, Sungai Petani and Sungai Bakar Arang were found to be in Class 3 after being WQI-rated at 53 and 58 respectively.

Kedah public works, natural resources, water supply and water resources and environment committee chairman Mohamad Yusoff @ Munir Zakaria said the state government was working closely with local and federal authorities.

“Through the Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) programme and other initiatives, we are collaborating with the Federal Government and local councils to tackle river pollution,” he said.

An example, he cited, was an upcoming river restoration workshop organised with Petra and Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry.

Mohamad Yusoff said a special committee was also set up to address pollution of the state’s waterways.

However, he stressed that Kedah’s river pollution was not severe or as bad as in other states.

He said Johor had the most highly-polluted rivers, with nine of its rivers scoring below 59 on the WQI scale.

Penang has six polluted rivers in need of urgent restoration while Sarawak and Kelantan come next on the list with four badly affected rivers each.

Selangor and Kuala Lumpur were also listed, with each state having three polluted rivers.