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The Malaysian Water Association

Media Release

Water cuts affect over 309,687 accounts in Klang Valley due to Sg Semenyih pollution incident on 4 October 2020

The most recent pollution incident of raw water supply to the Sungai Semenyih and Bukit Tampoi water treatment plants has left 309,687 consumer accounts in 274 areas without water. This latest disruption comes on the heels of a similar incident last month that affected 1,292 areas in the Klang Valley, Petaling, Klang/Shah Alam, Kuala Selangor, Hulu Selangor, Gombak and Kuala Langat for almost a week. At the time, Air Selangor confirmed that pollution at the raw water source had halted operations at the Sungai Selangor water treatment plants in Phases 1, 2 and 3, as well as Rantau Panjang. Back in July, a total of 290 areas in the Petaling, Klang, Gombak, Kuala Lumpur and Kuala Langat regions also experience a temporary water supply disruption from July 14 to 17, affecting approximately 425,000 accounts. The shutdown was in order to replace certain critical assets and carry out several improvement works of the SSP3 WTP.

These unfortunate disruptions from raw water pollution has once again given the nation both cause and opportunity to critically look at the ineffectiveness of our environmental laws and the roles of the respective enforcement agencies to protect not only our environment, but our citizens from pollution and its consequences thereof. This most recent occurrence is not an isolated issue. There is a pattern of behavior where time and time again, various companies have willingly abused our environment, (and thus by default our citizens) with

laughable consequences. Indeed, we are looking at a much bigger problem than this one incident that will only be addressed by strengthening and expanding the role of the Environmental laws and relevant regulations. Our country needs to progress, and environmental protection is a critical part of our nation's overall progress.

With the ever-increasing growth of the industry, the local authorities and the environmental agencies cannot and should not remain to be a toothless watchdog as it currently exists. We are not witnessing this type of event that has polluted our water supply for the first time- it has happened before and the consequences for the offenders have been no more than the proverbial slap on the wrist. It is clear that in its present form, the Environmental Quality Act 1974 (EQA) and the Water Services Industry Act 2006 (WSIA) have lamentably failed in its role to act as a deterrent to offenders. World over, tackling environmental issues have become a top priority in the business of governance, and Malaysia cannot afford to idly witness the degradation of our environment due to its direct impact on our citizen and our economic development. The three incidents in 2020 in Selangor alone when translated monetarily will be found to be a colossal loss when the various factors ranging from health, to local businesses being negatively affected as a result of the repeated pollution.

As consumers and citizens, we must insist that it's time for the environmental agencies' authority be expressed through concrete action rather than mere pointing fingers on unclear responsibilities of counterpart agencies as have often been the case. The local authorities must be by law, empowered to effect more impromptu inspections of industries, and must impose not just hefty fines, but criminal proceedings where offenders show a reckless attitude towards our environment. Our environmental laws must be positioned to be in tune with the rest of the progressive world's attitude towards the importance of protecting our environment. It is the poor and yet overwhelming majority of our citizens in

Selangor who are already getting a raw deal from the same problematic illegal industries and such incidences are simply adding insult to the omnipresent injury.

Water pollution is caused by emissions of very different composition, coming from varying sources. The sources, can be divided into point sources and non-point sources of water pollution. This discussion is on raw water pollution, which is one the largest threats to our rivers. The reduction in river water quality is a clear indicator of the decline in the environmental health of a river basin. It's the government's call to act and undertake a realistic immediate short term plans that can be implemented effectively to curb the issues. For example, critical rivers like the Sg Selangor should right away be classified as a strategic river where the authorities are to impose 30m reserve on both sides on the river. At the same time, all existing legal factories within this buffer zone are to be relocated to a designated factory zone and all illegal factories to be demolished. The state agencies involved with this special exercise to include the relevant local councils and LUAS whilst the federal agencies shall include the JPS and DOE. For the longer term, one possible solution for consideration is to lay raw water pipes from the Sg Selangor and Sg Rasa Dams as well as from the off-river storage ponds to the three water treatment plants, SSP1, SSP2 and SSP3. Water security at least would be ensured to great extent. In addition, the country should speed up the full implementation of the integrated water resources management (IWRM). IWRM to promote the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. River asset management and IoT innovative technologies can also be introduced to better monitor the development as well as data gathering for more effective management and enforcement of our rivers.

From the economic perspective, we think that many companies underestimate the associated risks of water pollution, and are not doing enough to tackle water pollution. Under the new EQA amendments, we recommend companies across industrial sectors – including textiles, food and beverage, and manufacturing are required to regularly measure and monitor their water discharges, where the obligations to act are not only ethical, but also legal and financial. With this we hope companies will stop underestimating the economic, ecological and health implications of water pollution. The economic imperatives are clear. By monitoring their water impacts, companies can begin to manage associated risks involving regulation, reputation and potential litigation.

In the meantime, (though we must state how skeptical we are on the way the local authorities and enforcement agencies had been “meekly” reacting to such issues each time they happened) we ask the government to see the frequent water supply disruption as a challenge and as a resounding warning to persons and factories along the river reserves that infringement of our Environmental laws will not be tolerated. The Environmental Quality Act which we understand is being reviewed could actually incorporate broader powers to increase penalties such as whipping, imprisonment and deprivation. The agencies must also act as a responsible corporate citizen by taking measures to prevent these incidents from happening.



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