

Sungai Sarawak not polluted

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Claims by Batu Kawah rep contradicts findings by NREB and JAS that the river is fine



ALL SMILES: Second Resource Planning and Environment Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hassan smiling for the cameras at the State Legislative Assembly (DUN) Complex yesterday. The minister earlier delivered his winding-up speeches for his ministries – Ministry of Resource Planning and Environment, Ministry of Public Utilities and Ministry of Industrial Development.

KUCHING: There is very rich aquatic life and microorganisms in downstream Sungai Sarawak and the levels of heavy metal in the river are not at toxic level.

Contrary to claims by Christina Chiew (DAP-Batu Kawah) that Sarawak River is one of the most polluted rivers in the state, Second Resource Planning and Environment Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hassan told the State Legislative Assembly yesterday that findings by the Natural Resources and Environment Board (NREB) and state Environment Department (JAS) showed the river to be all right.

NREB and JAS, he said, found the water quality for Lembangan Sungai Sarawak to be of Class 3 (or slightly polluted) whereas for Sungai Sarawak Kanan and Sungai Sarawak Kiri, the water quality is at Class 2 (or clean) based on the National Water Quality Standard of Malaysia (NWQSM).

“The survey carried out by NREB last year found that macro invertebrate organisms (benthos) living in the sediment in downstream Sungai Sarawak showed a populated and uniformed ‘benthos’ community compared to the survey carried out in 2001,” he said in his winding-up speech yesterday.

“The ‘benthos’ community comprising ‘infauna’ (worm, micro snail or small crustacea) and ‘epifauna’ (large

crustacea and snail) have shown an increase in the Shanon International Standard Index from 0 to 1.59 in 2001 to 0.96 to 1.64 in 2014.

“The ‘benthos’ community is regarded as healthy if the index is higher than 1 but less than 3.5.”

On heavy metals in the sediment at the downstream of Sungai Sarawak, he said studies based on the Canadian Sediment Quality Standard found a more positive result compared to 2001; heavy metal levels in the river are not at a toxic level.

Awang Tengah told the august House that apart from the initiatives above, the state government had also taken a proactive and long-term approach in ensuring that the water quality of Sungai Sarawak is constantly clean for the well-being of the people and the state’s tourism industry.

“This included the implementation of a centralised sewerage system to treat black water and grey water to a level that adheres to standards before it is channelled to the drainage system and river, ensure that the septic tank is desludged once every four years for housing estates and once every two years for commercial development; and to ensure that all industries producing factory waste are equipped with wastewater treatment system.”

Meanwhile, Assistant Minister of Resource Planning Datuk Naroden Majais told a press conference at the DUN Complex that the allegation hurled by Chiew was an overstatement and unprofessional.

“You cannot judge (the river) purely based on visual observation. Our eyes cannot see what is actually in the water. Based on the studies conducted by NREB and JAS, there’s a very rich aquatic life and microorganisms in the river.

“Rest be assured that the water in Sarawak River and all other rivers in the state are safe and clean. She (Chiew) can jump into Sarawak River, drink the water, and will still survive.”

Assistant Minister of Public Utilities (Water Supply) Datuk Sylvester Entri Muran, who was also present, echoed Naroden’s statement regarding Chiew’s allegation.

“I would like to urge her to go back to her constituency and get all the facts right. She should be a responsible elected representative and just explain to the people that the water quality in the river is very clean.

“We, in Barisan Nasional (BN), are responsible and we have facts and data to explain. If she is responsible for her allegation, then she should just swallow (her pride) and go back to her constituency and explain to the people,” said Entri.

As a responsible elected representative, Entri said Chiew should get her facts rights rather than acting on her emotions for political mileage.

“She should not speak on subjects she is not familiar with. If she wants to talk about it, she must first find out the facts.

“To me, she is irresponsible not only for the people in her constituency but also herself by alleging that Sungai Sarawak is the worst.”

Also present at the press conference was Assistant Minister of Environment Datu Len Talif.

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