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DOE advice on Chini dam ignored (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The consultant engaged to design and build the Tasik Chini dam had disregarded a recommendation in the project's environmental impact assessment on the height of the dam.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding informed the Cabinet today that the recommended height for the dam was 1.8 metres but the consultant had instead increased it to 3.12 metres.

The height of the dam had raised the water level of the lake, causing floods in the surrounding area.

The report submitted to the Cabinet today was based on the Pahang Department of Environment's investigation into the Tasik Chini problem. The department was directed by Law in April to prepare a detailed report on the matter for the Cabinet.

Law said a different consultant was engaged to carry out the EIA for the RM1 million dam project in 1992. An EIA was carried out although the project did not require one as it involved a surface area of less than 80ha for impounding water.

The consultant, believed to be Erinco Sdn Bhd, had recommended that the height of the dam be 1.8 metres.

Law said a copy of the EIA was submitted to the State DOE.

"We (the DOE) had also given our advice and recommendation on the project based on the EIA.

"However, the second consultant had disregarded the EIA by increasing the height of the dam. This had caused the problem," Law said.

Asked if the consultant who disregarded the recommendation in the EIA would be taken to task, Law said this was up to the State Government.

"This has nothing to do with the DOE. The project did not require an EIA, therefore, we have no jurisdiction. The matter comes under State jurisdiction," he said.

Asked if the DOE would submit a copy of its report to the State Government, Law said the State was aware of this.

"If they (the consultant) had stuck to the original design, the problem would not arise. There was a lack of co-ordination," he added.

The dam was built in 1994 to raise the level of Sungai Chini. This was to enable boatmen to ferry tourists two kilometres upstream to the lake.

However, the dam had caused the water level at the lake to go up by three metres. The result was that it flooded the surrounding forests and destroyed an estimated 60ha of trees.

During his visit to the lake in March, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed dissatisfaction with the situation after having seen the dead trees along the shoreline of the lake and Sungai Chini.

Following the damage to the environment being highlighted by the media, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob admitted that the problem was due to a "technical mistake".

He had said the dam was built with an allocation from the Prime Minister's Department.

According to him the implementing agency - the State Economic Planning Unit - did not have the technical staff to oversee the project, hence supervision was lacking.

He had also said that work to restore Tasik Chini back to its original state had begun in earnest. This included lowering the water level and flushing out dead leaves trapped at the bottom of the lake.

Khalil said the height of the dam would also be reduced by 1.4 metres to lower the water level.

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