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State leaders say setting up of NWC a timely move

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Several State leaders today supported the Cabinet's approval for the setting up of the National Water Council and described it as very timely.

The Cabinet yesterday gave the approval for the establishment of the NWC which will jointly plan and develop the country's water resources with State Governments.

In Kampung Gajah, Perak, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib said the approval was very timely as the water shortage in certain States had reached a critical stage.

"Although earlier it was a mere proposal, the council will finally become a reality. This will mean a more systematic and fair distribution of water to all States."

Ramli said with the setting up of the council, States like Perak, Pahang and Johor could help provide water to the States facing shortage.

Perak, he said, was fortunate as there was a large network of rivers and ample well-protected catchment areas to provide sufficient water reserves to last until 2010.

The State's demand was 823 million litres a day while its 43 treatment plants could supply 919 million litres. So the surplus is more than 90 million litres.

Ramli said discussions were also underway on the possibility of Perak supplying water to Penang and Kedah through an elaborate piping system.

"It involves a lot of civil work and since the water shortage in the two States is not that serious, it may take some time before the project materialised," he said.

Ramli said there was a possibility that the project would be privatised with the company concerned undertaking the work and bearing the costs in return for the concession to sell water to the two States.

In Seremban, the State Government is prepared to adhere to any regulations passed by the National Water Council which was approved by the Cabinet yesterday.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad said the State would give its full co-operation to the council in seeking ways to overcome the present water problem.

He said the State had no hesitation in assisting the council in all its efforts.

"We will discuss the matter in more detail at our first meeting with the Federal Government."

Mohamad Isa also said that the State was satisfied with the assurance from the Federal Government that the States' water rights would not be usurped.

Meanwhile, on the water situation in the State, he said the overall situation had improved following heavy rains over the past few days, especially at the catchment areas.

In Johor, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said Johor welcomed the move and was already supplying water to Malacca.

Ghani added that NWC would provide the general guidelines on tariffs to be imposed once inter-State water distribution was implemented.

In Terengganu, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad said the State Government commended the Cabinet's decision.

"The State Government will give its full support and assistance in

finding a solution to the water problem.

"However, we will only know our specific role in the council after holding the first meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad later.

"In view of this, the State Government has not fixed the price of water which will be supplied by Terengganu...", Wan Mokhtar said.

To date, Terengganu has 18 water plants that can supply 342,000 cubic metres per day, while 70 million cubic metres is used yearly.

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