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Water issue: Kelantan, Terengganu made no objections, says Koh

PENANG, Mon. - The Kelantan and Terengganu representatives who attended the National Water Council meeting recently did not object to the proposal for the Federal Government to take over the management of water resources.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said today the representatives appeared indifferent to the proposal although all who attended the meeting on July 30 had a chance to air their views.

Expressing surprise at the two State Governments' denial of having agreed to the proposal, Koh said:

"They were there with the rest of us. However, the two representatives did not raise any objection and they are members of their respective States' Executive Council."

He did not name the two Executive Councillors, but they were Ahmad Yakub, who is Kelantan State Works and Infrastructure Committee chairman, and Yahaya Ali, who chairs Terengganu's Infrastructure Development, Public Facilities and Communication Committee.

Koh reiterated the Penang Government's support for the proposal because of the necessity to have integrated management of the country's water resources.

"Sure, there are details that needed to be discussed and possibly problems to be ironed out."

In Port Dickson, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad advised his counterparts from Kelantan and Terengganu, Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat and Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, to put the interests of their people first.

He said they should attend all important meetings chaired by the Federal Government.

Speaking after presenting Exxon-Mobil scholarships, he said the Federal Government had the experience and capability to deal with the country's water resources.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Federal Government would stop any loans or further aid to the two States if they were adamant about opposing the proposal.

Isa said it was not only Kelantan and Terengganu which could not afford to manage their water resources but other States, including Negri Sembilan, as well.

Negri Sembilan has at present water debts of about RM1.2 billion.

In Ipoh, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali said Perak agreed in principle to allow the Federal Government to take over the management of its water resources as long as the tariffs were not raised.

He said although the Perak Water Board recorded accumulated profits of RM60 million for the past few years, the State Government still had to take Federal loans to finance the construction of new water treatment plants, reservoirs and replacing old water pipes.

The State Government, he said, earned profits from the management of water resources, but it would amount to nothing if it was spent for capital expenditure.

Speaking after the State Assembly sitting, Tajol Rosli said the State Government had promised the people that water tariffs would not be increased until 2005.

In Kuching, the Sarawak Government wants to continue managing its own water resources.

"We have been doing it so well," Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan said today when commenting on the Federal Government's decision.

Dr Chan, who is also Finance and Public Utility Minister, the situation in Sarawak was different from Peninsular Malaysia as its water system was not linked to any other State.

"We are not even linked to Sabah and since we are not linked, the State can manage its own water resources independently," he added.