

Firm told to study water flow

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PENGERANG: A silica sand mining company here has been told to conduct a study to determine the quantity of water flowing into Sungai Gambut and Sungai Gambut Kecil.

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry has given Perniagaan Usahasama Membalak (PUM) Sdn Bhd until year-end to submit a report.

Its deputy minister Datuk S. Sothinathan said the study was vital as it was aimed at determining whether the two rivers were the cause of flood-

ing in the area.

He was speaking to reporters after visiting a 142-hectare sand mining site at Sungai Gambut here yesterday.

He was accompanied by officials from the Department of Environment (DOE), the Department of Drainage and Irrigation (DID) and Land Office.

Sothinathan also told the two departments and the Land Office to monitor the sand-mining project at Sungai Gambut which was expected to be completed in 2016.

This followed numerous complaints of environmental

problems such as erosion and low catch.

It was reported that PUM had started work in 2002 before getting an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) done and was fined RM10,000 for the offence.

It only submitted an EIA in February this year. The EIA was subsequently approved by the DOE on April 11.

Sothinathan said most of the EIA conditions had been fulfilled but things could be further improved.

"The DOE has assigned an officer to monitor the site closely and take weekly water

samples for analysis.

"So far, there has been no illegal discharge from the sand-mining company," he said.

He said the black-coloured water found in Sungai Gambut was not due to contamination but was a natural occurrence due to the peat content, adding that the eight sedimentation ponds on the sand-mining site were in working order.

It is learnt that PUM is the third company to carry out silica sand-mining in the area.

Approval was given to the first contractor in 1965 and it operated until 1968. It was taken over by another compa-

ny in 1977.

PUM came into the picture in 2002 and started operations in 2004. Approval was given by the Kota Tinggi District Land Office to Wanimas Jaya Sdn Bhd in September 2002, which appointed PUM to carry out the sand mining.

The company exports 10 per cent of the high-grade silica to Singapore and the rest is for domestic use.

Pengerang MP Datuk Azalina Othman Said had highlighted the breach in the EIA to the *New Straits Times* after commissioning a study on the project this year.