

# 3 CAMERONS RIVERS DECLARED 'DEAD'

Sungai Tringkap, Sungai Icat and Sungai Parang heavily polluted

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ONLY 10 per cent of the 123 rivers in Cameron Highlands are in healthy condition.

Regional Environment Awareness Cameron Highlands (REACH) president Ramakrishnan Ramasamy said most rivers in the highland, known for its tourism and agriculture, are heavily polluted.

He said data from the Department of Environment (DoE) and the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) showed that only about 10 per cent of 123 rivers were in Class I and Class II, while the remainder were in Class III and Class IV.

He also said three rivers had been declared biologically dead, and came under Class V of the classification.

According to Ramasamy, the biologically dead rivers are Sungai Tringkap, Sungai Icat (near Kampung Kuala Terla and Sungai Terla, which is the main source of water supply in Cameron Highlands) and Sungai Parang (near



Rubbish trapped in Sungai Bertam.

33rd Mile between Tanah Rata and Habu).

The Interim National Water Quality Standards (INWQS) listed six classes (I, IIA, IIB, III, IV and V), which referred to classification of rivers or river segments based on a descending order of water quality, with Class I being the "best" and Class V being the "worst".

"If the rivers in Cameron Highlands could talk, it would most probably say to human beings — 'don't kill me'," said Ramasamy.

REACH recently released a short documentary using drone footage in an effort to save Sungai Bertam, which has been classified under Class IV, as well as

other polluted rivers, with the hope of gaining the attention of the authorities.

"We hope to conduct an awareness campaign to protect and preserve rivers in Cameron Highlands from pollution.

"This may seem like an uphill battle with the odds stacked against us, but as responsible citizens, we will not allow our beloved rivers to die," he told the *New Straits Times*.

The three-minutes and 45-second documentary, titled *Tears of a River*, documented the pollution of Sungai Bertam, one of three main rivers in Cameron Highlands.

Available on YouTube, the film

## WATER USE CLASSIFICATION IN THE NATIONAL WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

Class type	Class uses
Class I	Conservation of natural environment water supply I - practically no treatment necessary, Fishery I - very sensitive aquatic species
Class IIA	Water Supply II - conventional treatment required Fishery II - sensitive aquatic species
Class IIB	Recreational use with body contact
Class III	Water Supply III - extensive treatment required Fishery III - common, of economic value, and tolerant species livestock drinking
Class IV	Irrigation
Class V	None of the above

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captures how the river had turned into a "dirty drain" within the first 2km of the river after decades of abuse, mainly caused by development projects and agricultural activities.

Ramasamy noted that heavy rain had also caused sewage to flow into the river, while people had been discharging waste, both solid and liquid, into the river or its feeder drains.

"At the same time, pesticide and fertilisers, which carry a heavy load of pollutants such as oxygen-depleting nitrate, make their way from farm soils into rivers and threaten to aggravate an already serious situation."

He pointed out that popular riverside attractions in Cameron Highlands, such as Parit Falls and Robinson Falls, had long been given a miss by people especially the locals.

Ramasamy warned that the people living downstream of pol-

luted rivers might be unaware of the pollution.

A river with high level of pollutants might appear deceptively clean, as even crystal clear water contained toxic substances, he said.

Ramasamy said he had lost faith in the local authorities as there had been little effective action despite warnings and revelations.

Citing an example, he said in 2015, REACH and Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PANAP) revealed that banned pesticides, such as endosulfan, edrine ketone, aldrin and DDE, which is a derivative of the dangerous DDT found in the water catchment and riverine system in Cameron Highlands.

Page 1 pic: Soil erosion near a farmland polluting a stretch of Sungai Bertam in Cameron Highlands.

## Poor farming practices to blame, too

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Poor agricultural practices are among the reasons for river pollution, said the Cameron Highlands Flower Growers Association.

Its vice-president, Wong Seng Yee, said the matter was made worse by the fact that agriculture was a dominant component of the local economy in the tourist and agricultural spot.

He noted that sustainable agriculture was one of the greatest challenges for the farming community due to their unwillingness to invest.

The use of technologies for sus-

tainable farming systems was a challenging and dynamic issue for farmers, he said.

For example, many farmers operate on Temporary Occupation Licence (TOL), which has to be renewed yearly.

TOL for farm lands was a long-standing issue in Cameron Highlands and because of the fear that they might lose their land, farmers were disinclined to upgrade their farming practices, Wong said.

However, he pointed out that the development projects in Cameron Highlands were also

polluting the rivers by causing surface run-off, which led to soil erosion.

"But, nevertheless, farmers should shoulder some of the responsibilities. Farmers can play a role in minimising the adverse effects of agricultural chemicals by using integrated pest management."

He said things were looking up, but it would take time for drastic improvements to take place.

Citing an example, he said the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry had been promoting the Malaysia Good Agri-



A farmer spraying pesticide at a farm in Kuala Terla.

cultural Practice (MyGAP), a resource management system in agricultural production that is sustainable and follows good practices.

The system is expected to in-

crease agricultural productivity of quality and safe food, taking into account the welfare, safety and health of workers and conservation of the environment.