



Slash and burn: A part of the forest on the fringes of Bekok Dam allegedly being cleared for farming activities.

Bekok folk told to be on lookout

Residents near dam asked to watch out for encroachment

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JOHOR BARU: Residents living around the Bekok Dam have been advised to be the "eyes and ears" of the authorities in an effort to stamp out encroachment into the reservoir.

Ayer Hitam MP Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong said the encroachment should be stopped to prevent the possibility of water pollution from occurring in the area.

"There had been cases of people clearing the land to plant crops, leading to the use of pesticides which can pollute the water source.

"The district and state land office has been successful in taking action against seven such illegal encroachments in the area," he said, adding that those involved in the latest case were nabbed on Feb 18.

Dr Wee was confident that the local enforcement agencies could come down hard on the culprits once the state government had gazetted the area.

"I want to advise local residents to not believe that by paying off certain individuals, you will be able to cultivate a plot of land beside the dam," he said, adding that the Bekok Dam was an important water source supplying water to 500,000 households in Batu Pahat.

Dr Wee said it was important for security to be stepped up

around the dam, including deploying army personnel around the area to check encroachment activities by farmers.

"I want to assure the people that the water from the Bekok Dam is safe for consumption as it is treated according to standards and tests are also conducted regularly to ensure it is safe for consumption," he said, adding that the state government was in the midst of gazetting the area as a protected area.

State Water Regulatory Authority director Idris Kaparawi, when contacted, said the water quality in Bekok and 14 other dams state-wide was accepted according to the World Health Organisation and Health Ministry guidelines.

Meanwhile, residents living around the dam have expressed concern and called on the authorities to take stern action to prevent encroachment activities.

Daud Rosmin from Kampung Sri Sepakat claimed that due to the encroachment activities, erosion usually occurred during heavy rains, causing soil to flow into the dam.

A resident from Kampung Belian said the villagers there were worried about water pollution.

"The authorities have conducted raids several times but those involved in the encroachment activities just return when the authorities have left," he said, adding that a committee should be set up to watch over the dam.