

Stinking pool of filth by the seaside

Sungai Mas estuary resembles an open sewer with sand barrier blocking its flow to the sea

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GEORGE TOWN: Sungai Mas literally means Golden River, but for tourists to Batu Ferringhi, it resembles an open sewer.

"The water is the type you see in the slums of India," remarked Luke Barry, a tourist from England.

A check by *The Star* yesterday showed that the river, blocked by a sand barrier some 15m from the shoreline, was causing the rubbish-filled waters to stagnate into a pool of dark, blackish liquid.

This cesspool is just a stone's throw from high-end hotels and eateries, emitting a strong stench.

Barry's friends Kyle Gordon, 20, Sam Gurney, 20, and Sean Pembroke, 26, also expressed their disappointment after stumbling upon the river during a beach walk.

"We were surprised to see a pool of black stagnant water here," said Gurney. "The authorities should locate the source of the pollution and tackle it," he said.

According to Pembroke, the dirty water would have polluted the sea if it wasn't for the sand barrier. "When that breaks, then the problem would

be on a wider scale."

State Drainage and Irrigation Department director Anuar Yahya said sand deposits shifted with the waves. "And, the sand barrier is a natural phenomenon," he said.

"During heavy rain, the river will rise and break through the sand barrier near the shoreline. However, the next course of action will be decided after a meeting with the relevant authorities," he added.

Penang River and Sea Pollution Task Force head Chow Kon Yeow and state Welfare, Caring Society and Environment Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh could not be reached for comments.

In a June 7 report, the task force listed the pollution in Sungai Mas, Sungai Batu Ferringhi, Sungai Satu, Sungai Kechil and Sungai Pinang on the island, as well as Sungai Kereh, Sungai Pertama and Sungai Jawi on the mainland, as "critical".



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Unsilently: The black, polluted water of Sungai Mas near the shoreline in Batu Ferringhi.