



Dry spell: Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development officer Zulhisham Awang Kechik inspecting padi at the research centre in Kepala Batas.

5,100 padi farmers hit hard by El Nino phenomenon

KEPALA BATAS: The harvest of about 5,100 farmers in north Seberang Prai is in jeopardy because the El Nino phenomenon has caused some 8,500ha of padi fields to dry up.

To make matters worse, it is difficult to irrigate the fields from Sungai Muda because the heatwave is causing the water to evaporate quickly.

Pumping stations in Bumbung Lima and Pinang Tunggai are trying to channel water into the fields but the one in Pinang Tunggai is already suffering from low levels.

"The level in Sungai Muda has to be at least 2m for the pumps to work efficiently and the water level is now 1.8m," said state Agriculture and Agro-based Industry, Rural Development and Health Committee chairman Dr Afif Bahardin.

"We hope the Beris Dam in Sik, Kedah, will continue to release water into Sungai Muda, but that will not be sufficient by itself without rain," he said after inspecting the irrigation situation in Pinang Tunggai.

He said those padi fields were important

and 80ha of them were run by the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development for its work and to produce padi seeds.

There were plans to bring in portable pumps to help channel water from Sungai Muda into the fields, Dr Afif said.

"We are also looking into the possibility of cloud seeding over the water catchment areas in Kedah," he added.

On the effects of the hot spell on rice output, Dr Afif said it was hard to say for sure now, but a similar situation in 2014 saw rice output increase over that of the previous year.

"We got 150,000 metric tonnes of rice that year compared to 130,000 in 2013," he said.

He hoped that the rains would come in early April but the Meteorological Department said more likely by mid-April.

"Water is precious now, let's not waste any," he said.

Watch the video
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