

New law to end water woes soon, says Wan Junaidi

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PETALING JAYA: A new law to solve Malaysia's perennial water woes is in the pipeline.

The law governing water resources will include recommendations for states to gazette all their water catchment and water sources, said Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar.

The Bill, which will standardise water management processes nationwide, would be tabled in Parliament when it was ready, he said.

"Water is my priority but it's governed by the states so we have to engage them first," he said.

Citing an example, he said de-gazetting of forest reserves come under the state and local authorities' jurisdiction.

"We want all states to have a water management template to follow. It makes things easier and more efficient. If there's a problem, you'll know where to go and how to deal with it.

"My deputy has gone from state to state to hold discussions. He has visited five states already and I've given him until July to cover the others," he told *Sunday Star*.

He was responding to calls by non-governmental organisations to gazette downstream water resources and increase protection for water catchments.

Malaysia's annual rainfall is equivalent to the volume of 390 million Olympic size pools yet the people do not have enough water to use.

One reason, experts say, is that the Malaysian water bodies are badly polluted.

The Institution of Engineers Malaysia (IEM) president Datuk Lim Chow Hock said water stressed states could not rely on dams alone as upper catchments can only trap between 10% and 15% of rainfall.

Gazetting water catchments must extend beyond just the upper stream forested areas, he said, adding that total catchment management must include downstream areas.

Dr Wan Junaidi said since taking over the ministry eight months ago, he had been studying the country's water problems.

"We have so much rain but no water. Why? We're collecting less than 20%."



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