

# Rivers may get bigger buffer zones

## WATER SECURITY:

Ministry proposes increase of minimum area from 10m to 20m

**TASNIM LOKMAN**  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

**A**LL rivers in the country, including those at serious risk of being severely polluted, will have a minimum buffer zone of 20m on both sides of the riverbank.

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, concerned about the fate of rivers, is determined to make this happen, and the National Water Resources Council which will convene on Thursday, will hear why this is necessary.

Its minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, told the *New Straits Times* the woes plaguing the country's rivers were the result of not only failure to observe regulations but insufficient laws to protect water sources.

The proposals came as good news for environmentalists and rural communities pushing for the preservation of water sources, and will compel stakeholders, including state governments, to protect rivers in their states.

Expanding the river reserves, from the minimum 10m to 20m, Wan Junaidi said, would shield rivers from pollution due to human activities.

This, he added, would serve as a filter for mud, soil and solids washed down from hills, development and construction sites, and agricultural land.

"Mud, loose sand, soil and solids cause siltation in our rivers. The silt affects rivers in many ways. It reduces water volume and turns rivers murky, like *teh tarik*."

"We are trying to find the best ways to better protect our rivers in



**A minimum buffer zone will ensure the nation's water security, says the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.**

line with efforts to preserve the country's water security," he said.

Wan Junaidi said reports from his ministry indicated that the agriculture, plantation, logging and development sectors were adversely impacting rivers in the country.

"The effect of human activities on the rivers can be clearly seen.

"This issue is the responsibility of the respective states and we have no choice but to talk to them.

"I will talk to all the states and

once I have made my case, I will introduce a new set of rules."

It is believed that Wan Junaidi will propose that states adopt practical and long-term measures, besides rigid enforcement.

States will have to work with federal authorities in preserving the environment, he said.

Wan Junaidi had told the NST that one of the initiatives to facilitate better protection of water sources was through the establishment of a Central Water Management Agency.

This agency would address all cross-jurisdictional issues between the state and the federal governments.

Wan Junaidi also said his ministry was ready to table several papers on alternative water sources to the National Water Resources Council.

The council, which is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, is expected to look at underground water sources and rainfall harvesting as alternative options in ensuring the country's water security.

Wan Junaidi said based on studies by a local university, Malaysia harvested only 15 per cent of rainwater each year.

"We have nearly nine million centimetres of rainfall nationwide every year, and only that much is caught.

"The rest goes into the ocean and results in floods. The aim is to harvest more rain and stop flooding.

"We will find out how much the infrastructure to facilitate this will cost.

"This is a new area to explore. We have been suffering and this is a start," he said.

Wan Junaidi said his ministry would review the current distribution of water for domestic, industrial and agricultural use.

The council, he said, would explore the various options on how to best manage water resources.

