

# Take the polluters to task



WATER disruptions due to rivers being polluted by high ammonia content are a recurring issue in Malaysia. Such disruptions usually affect hundreds of thousands of residents in the affected areas, not to mention the impact to the river ecosystem.

The people and the ecosystem should not bear the 'cost' of irresponsible or careless acts by any industrial operators. The latest incident of such ammonia pollution was reported to occur in Sungai Johor ('High ammonia levels cause water disruption', The Star July 14) and the source of the pollution was traced to a palm oil mill.

The irony is that Malaysia has regulated industrial effluents, including those of the palm oil industry since the 1970s. To protect our water sources, the Environmental Quality Act 1974

prohibits the discharge of wastes or effluents into water bodies in contravention of standards specified by the Act or its relevant regulations.

Such standards usually set the maximum concentration of specific parameters in effluents or waste for discharge into water bodies.

In addition to the legal provisions, with more than 80 percent of raw water sources for water supply coming from rivers, Malaysia has established a National Monitoring Network to monitor surface water quality since 1978.

The country has also adopted a National Water Quality Standards for Malaysia where rivers are designated into several classifications based on certain parameters.

All these legal and policy measures show Malaysia's commitment to ensure sustainable develop-

ment of the country.

While the palm oil or other industries play an important role for economic development of the country, every industry should be held responsible for managing the pollution it creates including facing any legal consequences. This is in line with the commonly accepted 'polluter pays' principle.

The environmental legislation should be strictly enforced against those who fail to comply with its standards without fear or favour to prevent damage to human health and the environment.

A strong message should be sent to all industrial plant operators that the Government is serious in implementing the environmental regulations passed by the legislature.

**MARIANI ARIFFIN**  
UPM Serdang