

Eastern Aral Sea has shrunk by 80% since 2006: ESA

July 10 2009



Satellite image shows the dramatic retreat of the Aral Sea's shoreline. The eastern lobe of the disaster-struck Aral Sea seems to have shrunk by four-fifths in just three years, according to the European Space Agency (ESA).

The eastern lobe of the disaster-struck Aral Sea seems to have shrunk by four-fifths in just three years, the European Space Agency (ESA) said on Friday.

It released an overlay of photographs taken by one of its [Earth](#) observation satellites, Envisat, on July 1 2006 and July 6 2009.

Once the world's fourth-largest inland body of water but now a byword for ecological calamity, the Aral Sea has been retreating over the last half-century after rivers that fed it were diverted for Soviet cotton

irrigation projects.

Around two decades ago, it split into the Small Aral Sea in the north, located in Kazakhstan, and the Large Aral Sea, shared by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The horseshoe-shaped Large Aral Sea began to split into eastern and western lobes, in 2000.

"The eastern lobe retreated substantially between 2006 and 2009," ESA said in a press release.

"It appears to have lost about 80 percent of its water since the 2006 (image) acquisition, at which time the eastern lobe had a length of about 150 kilometres (93 miles) and a width of about 70 kms (43 miles)."

The Large Aral Sea is expected to dry out completely by 2020, it added.

Efforts are under way to save the far smaller northern part, thanks to the Kok-Aral dike, a project of the World Bank and Kazakhstan government.

Since the barrier was completed in 2005, water level in the northern section has risen by four metres (13 feet).

The desiccation of the Aral [Sea](#) is considered by some experts to be the worst man-made ecological catastrophe ever, but one that also has had huge implications for human well-being.

Fishing and other [shoreline](#) industries that once thrived have been destroyed. Each year, tens of thousands of tons of salt-laced dust blow from the dried-up seabed, much of it contaminated by [pesticides](#), affecting health.

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