

Mass seal deaths in Russia's Lake Baikal

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The Baikal seal is the smallest in the world

Around 130 dead seals have washed up on the shores of Russia's Lake Baikal, authorities said Tuesday, as they launched a probe into the latest problem to hit the world's deepest lake.

The Baikal seal is the smallest in the world, and exactly how and when the species colonised the ancient Siberian [lake](#) is still a mystery.

"There were about 130 animals found dead" over the past few days, said environmental ministry spokesman Nikolai Gudkov.

"We took [water samples](#) to understand whether we can talk of [water pollution](#) as the reason," he told AFP, though results have not yet been processed.

Scientists have also taken biopsies of the animals, he said.

The animal is not endangered and Gudkov said the species' population has actually increased in recent years, growing to around 130,000.

Preliminary theories about the die-off did not suggest pollution is the reason, he added.

Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has thousands of endemic species, has been suffering from a string of detrimental phenomena over recent years.

These include depletion of fish stocks, death of endemic sponges and explosion of growth of Spirogyra algae unnatural to the lake which scientists say is caused by pollution.

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