

# Russian Arctic warming leads to major ice loss

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Henrietta Island from southeast. Henrietta is the northernmost island of the De Long group, Russian Arctic. Credit: [Anton Dit](#)/Wikimedia Commons/CC 4.0

Glaciers and ice caps in two archipelagos in the Russian Arctic are losing enough meltwater to fill nearly five million Olympic-size swimming pools each year, research shows.

Satellite data suggests that the amount of ice lost between 2010 and 2018 would put an area the size of the Netherlands under seven feet of water.

Warming of the Arctic Ocean appears to play a key role in accelerating ice loss from two large groups of islands that border the Kara Sea, researchers say.

## **Satellite data**

The Edinburgh team mapped data collected by the European Space Agency's CryoSat-2 research satellite to monitor changes to the surface height and mass of ice caps and glaciers.

Comparing these with [climate data](#) for the same period revealed a clear link between rising atmospheric and ocean temperatures and increased ice loss from two archipelagos.

The team's analysis shows that the Novaya Zemlya and Severnaya Zemlya archipelagos—which cover a combined area of around 50,000 square miles—lost 11.4 billion tons of ice each year between 2010 and 2018.

## **Arctic warming**

Thinning of the ice has already had a major impact on the stability of some of the region's glaciers and ice caps, which could further increase ice loss in the future, the team says.

Compared to the relatively small size of glaciers, ice caps are large bodies of ice several hundred meters thick that cover areas of up to around 8,000 square miles in the region. Some of these store ice up to 12,000 years old, which provides scientists with valuable long-term records of the Arctic climate.

## Improved predictions

Findings from the study add to a body of research suggesting that conditions in the Arctic Ocean are becoming more like those in the North Atlantic, which is much warmer.

The study could help predict future ice loss in regions experiencing similar patterns of atmospheric and ocean temperature change, and improve global sea level predictions, the team says.

The research, published in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Earth Surface*, was supported by the European Space Agency.

An Open Access version of the paper is available here:

[www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/accelerating-ice-mass-loss-across-arctic-russia-in-response-to-atmospheric-warming-sea-ice-decline-and-atlantification-of-the-eurasian-arctic-shelf-seas](http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/accelerating-ice-mass-loss-across-arctic-russia-in-response-to-atmospheric-warming-sea-ice-decline-and-atlantification-of-the-eurasian-arctic-shelf-seas)

"The Russian Arctic is largely inaccessible, but [satellite data](#) has enabled us to monitor changes to its [ice caps](#) and [glaciers](#). As has been observed elsewhere in the world, ice loss in the region is accelerating. As the climate continues to warm, significant [ice loss](#) in the Russian Arctic will have clear impacts for sea level rise," says Dr. Paul Tepes, School of GeoSciences.

**More information:** Paul Tepes et al, Accelerating Ice Mass Loss Across Arctic Russia in Response to Atmospheric Warming, Sea Ice Decline, and Atlantification of the Eurasian Arctic Shelf Seas, *Journal of Geophysical Research: Earth Surface* (2021). [DOI](#):

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