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Starvation Likely Led to Mass Seal Deaths, Siberian Vets Say

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Siberian veterinarians say the more than one hundred seals that washed up on the shores of Lake Baikal may have died from hunger, the state-run news agency TASS reports.

Roughly 132 seal carcasses were found at three locations near the lake, prompting environmental authorities to launch an investigation. The earless species native to Lake Baikal with a population of up to 130,000 is commonly referred to as the nerpa in Russian.

"There's the possibility that a lack of appetite in the animals may have led to [cardiac arrest]," Sergei Grokhotov, head of agriculture watchdog Rosselkhonadzor's veterinary department, told TASS.

"They have in effect died from exhaustion," Grokhotov said, pointing out that biopsies conducted on the corpses did not reveal any organ damage.

Veterinarians will now inspect the seals' food chain to find out why the mammals chose to go

without food.

The mass deaths follow recent reports that a tourist boom and pollution has led to the disappearance of local fish species and a growth of putrid algae in Lake Baikal, the world's largest freshwater lake.

After President Vladimir Putin ordered government agencies to crack down on Lake Baikal polluters on Oct. 25, prosecutors have opened dozens of criminal cases connected to the violation of environmental protection rules.

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