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Residents of Lake Baikal Have Begun Feeding Dead Seals to Their Dogs

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Local residents have begun using the carcasses of more than one hundred dead seals who washed up on the shores of Lake Baikal to feed their dogs.

At least 132 dead seals have been found near the freshwater lake in Russia's Far East in recent weeks. The earless species native to Lake Baikal with a population of up to 130,000 is commonly referred to as the nerpa in Russian.

Veterinarians say the seals might have died from cardiac arrest after failing to feed themselves. Scientists have already ruled out some infections, including the disease that killed thousands of nerpas in the late 1980s. Environmental authorities have not yet ruled out a different infectious disease as the cause of the mass deaths.

Alexei Kalinin, an attorney at the West Baikal Environmental Prosecutor's Office, told the Interfax news agency that there had been several established cases of locals feeding the dead

seals to their dogs.

“Experts are explaining to the residents that the use of the animals’ meat, fat, and hide is prohibited,” he was quoted as saying.

The 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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