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Mass Fish Die-Off in Southern Russia Sparks Probe

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Regional prosecutors said they believe the mass die-off was the result of a critical drop in water level and oxygen deficiency. **Sanchir Goryayev / TASS**

Thousands of dead fish washed up on the shores of a reservoir in southern Russia's republic of Kalmykia this weekend, prompting fears of an environmental disaster.

Witnesses filmed the fish carcasses lining the Arshan-Zelmen reservoir, describing an "absolutely terrible" smell and pointing to emissions from factories in nearby regions as a possible cause.

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Investigators have launched an inquiry into the media reports of the mass fish deaths, the state-run TASS news agency reported Sunday.

Regional prosecutors said they believe the mass die-off was the result of a critical drop in water level and oxygen deficiency.

Both the Investigative Committee and the regional prosecutors' office said they will determine their next course of action based on their initial probes.

Built in the mid-1930s, the Arshan-Zelmen reservoir has until recent years been used for irrigation.

This is at least the second known mass die-off of aquatic creatures in Russia in the past

month. In early October, an unexplained phenomenon wiped out 95% of marine life, including octopuses, seals, sea urchins and crabs, off Russia's Pacific coast in the Kamchatka region.

It also comes amid a string of environmental disasters across Russia in 2020, including a massive diesel fuel spill in the Arctic and large-scale wildfires in Siberia.

Environmental issues have become a thorny topic for the Russian authorities in recent years, with a number of protests breaking out over unwanted landfills and plans to mine for limestone at a sacred site.

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