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Caspian Sea Water Levels Drop to Historic Low, Scientists Say

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The Caspian Sea. **Yelena Afonina / TASS**

Water levels in the Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water, have dropped to historic lows, Russian state news agency TASS reported this week, citing an Astrakhan-based research institute.

Specialists at the Volga-Caspian Fisheries Research Institute said the Caspian's water level fell to more than 29 meters below the Baltic Sea, a standard reference point used in Russia and some post-Soviet states to measure the depths of landlocked bodies of water across the region.

The average Caspian Sea level over the past century has varied, but it typically hovers around 26 to 27 meters below the Baltic Sea.

"The decline in sea level is most evident in the shallow northern part, which borders Russia and Kazakhstan," the institute told TASS. "This is where the retreating sea is exposing large areas of the seabed. It is also where the most biologically rich and densely populated

ecosystems are located."

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The Caspian Sea has been receding at an alarming pace since 2015, with water levels falling by nearly 80 centimeters over the past five years, according to the institute.

Scientists blame the drop on a combination of climate change, which leads to more evaporation, and a reduced inflow of water from rivers that feed the sea, particularly the Volga and Ural.

The Volga River, which originates in Russia and supplies more than 80% of the Caspian's water, has been increasingly strained by dam construction and the expansion of irrigation systems to support agriculture along its banks, experts say.

The shrinking water levels pose a serious threat to the Caspian's fragile ecosystem, including endangered species such as the wild sturgeon and the Caspian seal.

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