

# Aral sea

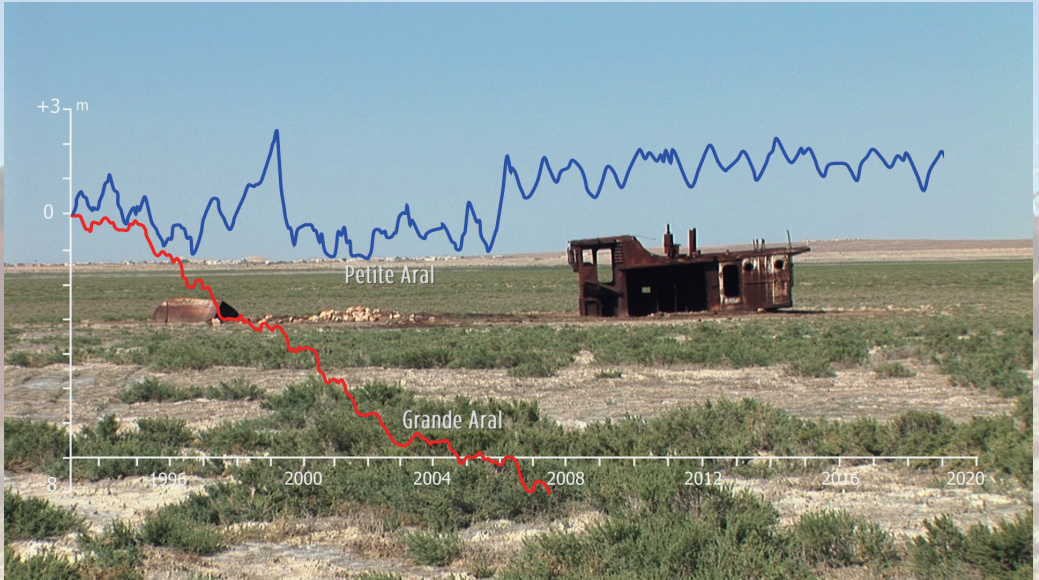


Fisherman, Small Aral Sea - © Jean-François Créteaux

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At the heart of Central Asia, straddling Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the Small Aral Sea is slowly coming back to life. As a result of excessive extraction to irrigate crops, this inland sea has shrunk 90% since the 1960s. Today, it is split into four separate lakes. As its waters have become too salty to support aquatic life, the future for the Greater Aral Sea in the south and the populations that depend on it looks bleak.



*Level of the Aral Sea monitored by satellites  
(TOPEX/Poseidon, Jason-1 and ERS/Envisat)*

Altimetry satellites have monitored variations in the level of the Aral Sea continuously since 1992. These data have enhanced our understanding of the water cycle in this region of Asia and helped to define a plan to save the Small Aral Sea, put in place in 2003 to preserve aquatic species.

A dam was thus built to channel upstream river flow. The results are conclusive. The level of the Small Aral rose immediately after the dam had been completed in August 2005. Six months later, it had reached over 42 metres. Since then, it has remained around this level, varying only for short periods when the dam's sluice gates are opened. The ecosystem has been stabilized and the local economy has been revived. Catches have multiplied tenfold in just a few years and fishermen's families have resettled along the sea's shores.