

Lake Balkhash is the largest water body in Central Asia. More than three-quarters of its inflow comes from the Ili River, which is under increasing strain due to the diversion of water for energy and food production. Commercial fishing in Lake Balkhash began in 1929 and is currently in a state of crisis. The construction of the Balkhash dam and reservoir in the late 1960s reduced Ili River flows into the lake and upset the natural cycle of spring floods, which greatly reduced spawning and feeding areas for carp (*Cyprinus carpio*). Carp populations were consequently reduced by more than 90% during the filling of the reservoir and have not recovered, even though the lake's level subsequently rose. Catches of carp and freshwater bream (*Abramis brama orientalis*) have shown an inverse relationship since the 1960s, and the age structure of freshwater bream is changing. Historically, most captured fish of this species were 4- to 7-years-old, but smaller, 3- to 5-year-old fish have dominated recent catches. The total fish harvest from Lake Balkhash is currently at near historical lows, not just because of environmental factors, but also because of structural changes triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Poaching, government disinterest, lack of enforcement of fishing regulations, and the