Reading
IELTS Reading Passage

READING PASSAGE

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1–13**, which are based on the reading passage below.

Why plastic is the scourge of sea life



A 'plastic soup' of waste floating in the Pacific Ocean is growing at an alarming rate, and now covers an area twice the size of the continental United States, scientists have said.

The vast expanse of debris – in effect the world's largest rubbish dump – is held in place by swirling underwater currents. This drifting 'soup' stretches from about 500 nautical miles off the Californian coast, across the northern Pacific, past Hawaii and almost as far as Japan.

Charles Moore, an American oceanographer who discovered the 'Great Pacific Garbage Patch', or 'trash vortex', believes that about 100 million tons of flotsam are circulating in the region. Marcus Eriksen, a research director of the US-based Algalita Marine Research Foundation, which Mr Moore founded, said yesterday: 'The original idea that people had was that it was an island of plastic garbage that you could almost walk on. It is not quite like that. It is almost like a plastic soup. It is endless for an area that is maybe twice the size as continental United States.'

The 'soup' is actually two linked areas, either side of the islands of Hawaii, known as the Western and Eastern Pacific Garbage Patches. About one-fifth of the debris – which includes everything from footballs and kayaks to Lego blocks and carrier bags – is thrown off ships or oil platforms. The rest comes from land.

Mr Moore, a former sailor, came across the sea of waste by chance in 1997, while taking a short cut home from a Los Angeles to Hawaii yacht race. He had steered his craft into the 'North Pacific gyre' – a vortex where the ocean circulates slowly because of little wind and extreme high pressure systems. Usually sailors avoid it.

He was astonished to find himself surrounded by rubbish, day after day, thousands of miles from land. 'Every time I came on deck, there was trash floating by,' he said in an interview. 'How could we have fouled such a huge area? How could this go on for a week?'

Mr Moore, the heir to a family fortune from the oil industry, subsequently sold his business interests and became an environmental activist. He warned yesterday that unless consumers cut back on their use of disposable plastics, the plastic stew would double in size over the next decade.

Professor David Karl, an oceanographer at the University of Hawaii, said more research was needed to establish the size and nature of the plastic soup, but that there was 'no reason to doubt' Algalita's findings.

'After all, the plastic trash is going somewhere and it is about time we got a full accounting of the distribution of plastic in the marine ecosystem and especially its fate and impact on marine ecosystems.'

Professor Karl is co-ordinating an expedition with Algalita in search of the garbage patch later this year and believes the expanse of debris actually represents a new habitat. Historically, rubbish that ends up in oceanic gyres has biodegraded. But modern plastics are so durable that objects half-a-century old have been found in the north Pacific dump. 'Every little piece of plastic manufactured in the past 50 years that made it into the ocean is still out there somewhere,' said Tony Andrady, a chemist with the US-based Research Triangle Institute.

Mr Moore said that because the sea of rubbish is translucent and lies just below the water's surface, it is not detectable in satellite photographs. 'You only see it from the bows of ships,' he said.

According to the UN Environment Programme, plastic debris causes the deaths of more than a million seabirds every year, as well as more than 100,000 marine mammals. Syringes, cigarette lighters and toothbrushes have been found inside the stomachs of dead seabirds, which mistake them for food.

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Plastic is believed to constitute 90 per cent of all rubbish floating in the oceans. The UN Environment Programme estimated in 2006 that every square mile of ocean contains 46,000 pieces of floating plastic.

Dr Eriksen said the slowly rotating mass of rubbish-laden water poses a risk to human health too. Hundreds of millions of tiny plastic pellets, or nurdles – the raw materials for the plastic industry – are lost or spilled every year, working their way into the sea. These pollutants act as chemical sponges attracting man-made chemicals such as hydrocarbons and the pesticide DDT. They then enter the food chain. 'What goes into the ocean goes into these animals and onto your dinner plate. It's that simple,' said Dr Eriksen.

How to go about it

For questions **1–9**:

- Decide whether the summary relates to one part or the whole of the passage. This summary relates to the whole passage and does not have a title, so look at the title of the passage and then skim the passage.
- Skim the summary without looking at the wordlist.
- Decide what type of word is needed for each space and think of your own word. The answers can be all nouns, or a mixture of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.
- Skim the wordlist and try to answer where you can, using grammar and collocation to help you.
- Check your answers with the passage. Sometimes the answers in the summary are in a different order from the passage.

For questions **10–13**:

- Yes/No/Not Given questions check the views or claims of the writer. Underline the words in the questions that will help you scan for the information in the passage.

Questions 1–9

Complete the summary using the list of words, **A–Q**, below.

Research has shown that the increase in the amount of **1** ..... in the Pacific Ocean is disturbing. According to one estimate, there are millions of tons of rubbish floating in the region. The plastic rubbish covers an area approximately **2** ..... that of the USA. Some of the garbage comes from ships and oil rigs, but the vast **3** ..... is not from the sea. The 'North Pacific gyre', which sailors tend to keep away from, was already **4** ..... in the late nineties with predictions of the size of the plastic soup **5** ..... twofold in the following ten years. An expedition is being arranged to find the sea junk which Professor Karl thinks is a new living **6** ..... . While in the past rubbish in the sea broke up, today's plastic is so **7** ..... that some pieces half a century old have been found. And the problems all this plastic junk causes? Thousands of sea **8** ..... are killed every year and the plastic is now a threat to human food **9** ..... .

A polluted	**B** junk	**C** short-lived
D majority	**E** increasing	**F** cleaner
G twice	**H** thrice	**I** consumption
J link	**K** creatures	**L** produce
M minority	**N** long-lasting	**O** decreasing
P environment	**Q** world	

Questions 10–13

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in the reading passage?

Write:

YES if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer

NO if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

10 The plastic soup is the biggest collection of waste on the planet.

11 The soup is made of three areas connected together.

12 The amount of plastic waste in the sea will remain roughly stable.

13 Most of the rubbish in the sea appears to be made up of plastic.

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