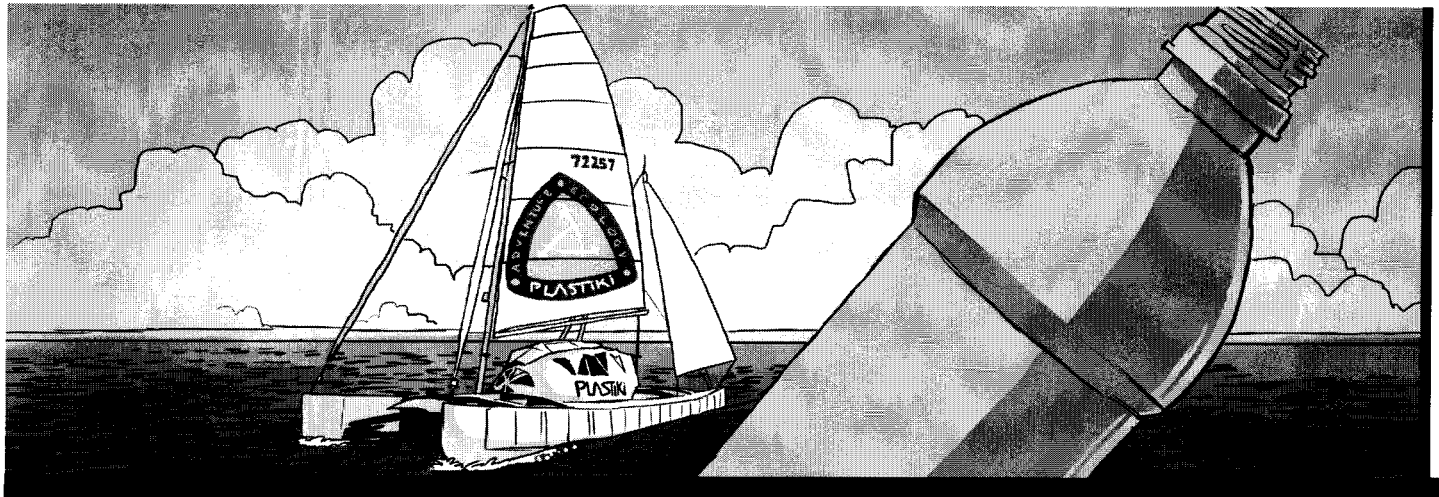




PLASTIKI: A BOAT WITH A MESSAGE



A catamaran made of 12,500 plastic bottles arrived in Australia's Sydney Harbour in late July. The *Plastiki*, held together with sugar cane and cashew glue, had just completed a four-month, 15,000-kilometre sail from San Francisco across the Pacific Ocean.

The boat's successful crossing proved not just that plastic trash can be turned into something useful. It also carried a message, highlighting the threat of plastic pollution in the world's oceans.

FROM US TO THE OCEAN

Each year, some 6.4 million tonnes of garbage – much of it plastic – makes its way into the ocean. Some of this trash is lost or thrown from boats and ships, but about 80 percent blows or flows from gutters, parking lots and roadsides into sewers, storm drains, rivers and waterways. From there, it is carried out to sea.

Once in the ocean, garbage does not magically disappear. Heavier items sink beneath the surface. Lighter items, usually made of plastic, collect in certain areas, forming massive floating dumps.

PLASTIC TRASH HEAP

Plastic debris is found in the greatest quantities in the eastern Pacific Garbage Patch, located about halfway between California and Hawaii. In this gyre – or circular, slow-moving, large-scale ocean current – floating plastic trash collects in an area up to the size of Quebec.

"It moves around like a big animal without a leash," said an oceanographer from Seattle. "When it gets close to an island, the garbage patch barfs, and you get a beach covered with this confetti of plastic."

This fluid trash heap has been growing, along with ocean debris worldwide, tenfold every decade since the 1950s. In parts of the eastern Pacific Garbage Patch, there are an estimated six kilograms of plastic for every kilogram of naturally occurring plankton. On average, 13,000 pieces of plastic litter the surface of each square kilometre of ocean.

THREAT TO SEA LIFE

All that plastic is ugly to look at – but a bigger problem, according to the United Nations Environment

THE AGE OF PLASTIC

Not so long ago, toys, clothes, diapers and most items we buy were made of natural, biodegradable materials such as wood, cotton, or glass. Packaging was paper or string, and there was less of it. Fishing nets and ropes were made of natural fibres such as hemp and cotton.

Plastics – durable, light, cheap and versatile – started becoming popular in the 1960s. The 1970s saw the introduction of plastic bottles and supermarket plastic bags. In the 1980s, most dairy products such as yoghurt and margarine started appearing in plastic tubs. Ever since, we have been using – and discarding – plastic at an ever increasing rate.

Programme, is plastic's effect on marine life. The organization estimates that plastic litter kills 100,000 marine mammals each year.

Plastic rings that hold together six-packs of drink cans, and plastic fishing nets and lines, entrap sea creatures of all sizes. Other plastic products,

DEFINITIONS

CATAMARAN: a sailboat with two parallel hulls held together by a single deck