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Aussie to swim as 'message in a bottle'

02:40 AEST Mon Dec 21 2009

An Australian filmmaker plans to swim across the Pacific Ocean from Japan to the United States in a giant plastic bottle, ploughing through a huge floating garbage dump to highlight marine pollution.

Richard Pain said he realised that swimming 9,000 kilometres from Japan to California was "completely mad" but said he hoped it inspired others to think more about the environment.

"If I can do something this crazy, everybody else can do something," he told AFP.

"Whether it's recycle, reuse, rethink, stop using single use plastics... just change their behaviour in some simple way."

Pain, 45, plans to swim in a giant recycled plastic water bottle made out of thousands of smaller plastic water bottles. The structure is intended to protect him from the hazards of the ocean.

"All the small bottles will be in the shape of one big bottle," he said.

"I'm trying to create the iconic media image... a man swimming in the middle of the Pacific Ocean inside a giant plastic water bottle."

Pain said his journey would take him through what is known as the North Pacific Gyre or the Great Pacific Garbage Patch - an area about the size of Texas full of plastic rubbish to a depth of about six metres.

Because of four competing ocean currents which operate in a clockwise direction, the garbage thrown off ships and blown off land has accumulated in a becalmed area in the centre, posing risks to birds and marine life.

The area is "choked" with plastic items, which can be sponges for toxins, varying in size from a kayak to the tiniest wisps of plastic, Pain said.

"To the eye as you look across it, it undulates like regular ocean, but when you look down into it, yeah, it's just plastic everywhere," he said.

"It's ocean, but it's kind of like soupy ocean."

Pain, who plans to embark on his trip in 2011, said he would swim up to 10 hours a day, five days a week and spend his weekends recovering onboard a ship following his course.

For his own protection, he will swim inside the bottle - which will function like a cage similar to those used by swimmers in shark-infested waters - and which will be open at both ends to allow water to float through.

He will also wear a full bodysuit for ocean swimming, flippers, earplugs, a cap and a snorkel to protect himself from toxins during the journey, which he expects will take about 45 weeks.

Pain has been shooting a documentary on his challenge since June and currently swims about five kilometres a day in the ocean.

He hopes to ramp that up to 30 kilometres five days a week over the year before taking it to 40 kilometres a day using flippers.

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Pain said he was determined to complete the unique challenge after becoming frustrated with politicians' efforts to combat dangerous environmental problems.

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