

The Living Planet

Pacific Swimmer to be Message in a Bottle



Nick Galvin
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Richard Pain, 45, a Sydney film-maker and environmentalist, is planning to swim 9000 kilometres across the Pacific Ocean.

As if swimming 9000 kilometers from Japan to the US is not enough of a challenge, Richard Pain is also planning to plough through the middle of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a floating mass of plastic junk almost the size of the Northern Territory.

"I realize it's completely mad," said the filmmaker, 45, who is selling his Randwick home to raise some of the money needed for the project.

"But I'm aware there is a lot of green fatigue in the broader population. This is a way to try and raise awareness by doing something more compelling. It's like trying to do an environmental version of *Super Size Me*."

Mr Pain, a keen ocean swimmer and environmentalist, said he was unfazed by the fact no one had ever managed to swim across the Pacific.

He said he had inherited his athletic build and determination from his father, a bronze medal-winning rower at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games.

Mr Pain is planning to swim inside a six-metre-long bottle made from thousands of used water bottles, which will act as a shark cage and a reminder of the plastic waste that is threatening the Pacific Ocean.

The bottle will be towed by a boat with his fiancée, Natasha, pregnant with their first child, on board.

"I want to create that iconic media image that everybody picks up and says, 'Oh my God, there's a man in the middle of the ocean in a gigantic water bottle,'" he said.

He is also making a documentary about the attempt.

Mr Pain has been obsessed for years with the massive garbage patch that is trapped by currents in the North Pacific. "You look down into it and it's nightmarish," he said. "All these birds are eating it and dying, and now it's entering the food chain."

He is training daily but expects it will be up to 18 months before he is strong enough to set off on his record-breaking attempt, which will take up to 45 weeks. It will be critical for him to ride the Kuroshio current to have any hope of completing the task.

As well as increasing awareness about pollution, Mr Pain wants to raise \$1 million for research

into the North Pacific Gyre, the body of water filling with plastic rubbish.

"The ideal would be for me to walk in the water in Japan, the land of plastic, start swimming and emerge months later on Santa Monica Beach with Richard Branson handing me a check and looking at his watch and saying, "You made it with five minutes to spare."

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