

You are going to read an article in which the writer looks at the harm done by plastic bags and ways of reducing this. Seven sentences have been removed from the article. Choose from the sentences A–H the one which fits each gap (9–15). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

Getting rid of plastic bags by Michael McCarthy

Plastic bags are one of the greatest problems of the consumer society – or to be more precise, of the throwaway society. First introduced in the United States in 1957, and into the rest of the world by the late 1960s, they have been found so convenient that they have come to be used in massive numbers. In the world as a whole, the annual total manufactured now probably exceeds a trillion – that is, one million billion, or 1,000,000,000,000,000.

According to a recent study, whereas plastic bags were rarely seen at sea in the late eighties and early nineties, they are now being found almost everywhere across the planet, from Spitsbergen in the Arctic to the South Atlantic close to Antarctica. They are among the 12 items of rubbish most often found in coastal clean-ups. **9** Windblown plastic bags are so common in Africa that a small industry has appeared: harvesting bags and using them to make hats and other items, with one group of people collecting 30,000 per month. In some developing countries they are a major nuisance in blocking the drainage systems of towns and villages.

What matters is what happens to them after use. Enormous numbers end up being buried or burnt, which is an enormous waste of the oil products which have gone into their manufacture. **10** Turtles mistake them for their jellyfish food and choke on them; birds mistake them for fish with similar consequences; dolphins have been found with plastic bags preventing them breathing properly.

The wildlife film-maker Rebecca Hosking was shocked by the effects of the bags on birds on the Pacific island of Midway. She found that two-fifths of the 500,000 albatross chicks born each year die, the vast majority from swallowing plastic that their parents have mistakenly brought back as food. **11** Many local residents and shopkeepers joined in, and the idea of getting rid of them completely soon spread to other towns and villages.

Although some people remain unconvinced, it does seem possible that the entire country could eventually become



plastic-bag free. Who could have imagined half-a-century ago that our public places would one day all become cigarette-smoke free? Or that we would all be using lead-free petrol? Who would have thought even a decade ago, come to that, that about two-thirds of us would by now be actively involved in recycling? **12**

What is needed is a general change in consumer attitudes, towards the habit of using re-usable shopping bags. Older people will remember how this used to be entirely normal as every household had a 'shopping bag', a strong bag which was used to carry items bought in the daily trip to the shops. **13** Today, many of us tend to drive to the supermarket once a week and fill up the car with seven days' worth of supplies, for which plastic bags, of course, are fantastically useful. It's a hard habit to break.

However, there has already been a big drop in plastic bag use, partly because the leading supermarkets and other shopkeepers are making a major effort to help us give up the habit, with a whole variety of new ideas. **14** It is clear that habits are starting to change; reusable bags are more visible than they were even two years ago.

Many believe there should be a tax on plastic bags, and the governments of a number of countries are considering the idea. What people have in mind is the example of Ireland, where a tax of €0.22 was introduced on all plastic bags, the first of its kind in the world. **15** In addition, all the money from the new tax is used for environmental clean-up projects.

- A** Major changes in public opinion and behaviour can certainly occur.
- B** On land they are everywhere, too.
- C** These range from cheap 'bags for life' offers to bag-free check-outs.
- D** Worse still, billions get into the environment, especially the ocean environment, where they become a terrible threat to wildlife.
- E** But there was a very different pattern of household shopping then: the purchase of a much smaller number of items, on a daily basis, after a walk to small, local shops.
- F** She realised then that it was too late to do anything about this man-made disaster.
- G** This quickly brought about a quite amazing reduction of 90 per cent, from 1.2 billion bags a year to fewer than 200,000 and an enormous increase in the use of cloth bags.
- H** As a result, she started a movement to turn her home town into the first community in the country to be free of plastic bags.