Is plastic pollution a problem? (LONG VERSION - 395 WORDS)

Every day there seems to be a news article highlighting the evils of plastic pollution. Whether we are being told not to use plastic, cut down on it, or find alternatives, there is an urgency to this message the media are giving the general public. So is the problem really as severe as society is being led to believe, or is it just a storm in a broadcasting teacup?

Firstly, it is important to realise that not all plastics are the enemy. Products created from plastic are extremely useful, not only because of their relatively cheap costs, but also for their strength and longevity. Plastic will not rot. It will not rust. In fact, it seems to be a perfect material to mould into almost anything.

Furthermore, single-use plastics have proven to be invaluable to the food and drink industry. Their properties allow us, as critical consumers, to buy and store foods which might have a much shorter shelf-life without plastic wrapping. For example, research has shown that a wrapped cucumber lasts more than three times as long as an unwrapped one. It will also lose just 1.5% of its weight through evaporation after 14 days, compared with 3.5% in just three days for an exposed cucumber.

However, single-use plastics have been widely criticised for doing more harm to our Earth than good. David Attenborough highlighted the plight of nature at the hands of the consumer: his programme “Blue Planet 2”, which featured albatross parents feeding their young with plastic, has been widely heralded as a key moment sparking the war on plastics. Moreover, statistics, such as the fact that over 150 million tonnes of plastic end up in the sea every year, have added to the shared conscience of the nation. It is unacceptable that every year over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste; this is a huge problem that requires urgent attention.

In conclusion, it is clear that plastic still has a great many advantages when designing and making reusable products for everyday life, but as responsible citizens, we are able to do without the single-use items that make our lives that little bit easier. By making small sacrifices in our own routines, we can ensure a healthier and safer environment in which our wildlife is able to thrive.