

## TOEFL Integrated Writing Practice Test 20

Sea otters are a small mammal that lives in the waters along North America's west coast from California to Alaska. A few years ago some of the sea otter populations off of the Alaskan coast started to decline rapidly and raised several concerns because of their important role in the coastal ecosystem. Experts began investigating and came up with two possible explanations. One explanation was environmental pollution and the second was attacks by predators.

At first it seemed as if the pollution was the most likely cause for the population decline. One reason pollution was more likely was because of the known pollution sources along the Alaskan coast such as oil rigs. Also water samples taken in the area showed increased levels of chemicals that could decrease the otters' immune systems and indirectly result in their deaths.

Another thing that pointed to pollution as the culprit was the decline of other sea mammals such as seals in the same areas. This indicated that whatever was affecting the otters was also affecting the other sea mammals. Environmental pollution usually affects an entire ecosystem instead of just one species. Only predators that occurred in a large area, such as orcas (a large predatory whale), could cause the same effect, but they usually hunt larger prey.

Finally, scientists believed the pollution hypothesis would also explain the uneven pattern of otter decline. In some Alaskan locations the otter population declined greatly while other populations remained stable. Some experts suggested this could be explained by ocean currents, or other environmental factor, might have created uneven concentrations of pollutants along the coast.

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**Question:** Summarize the point made in the lecture and explain how the speaker cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.